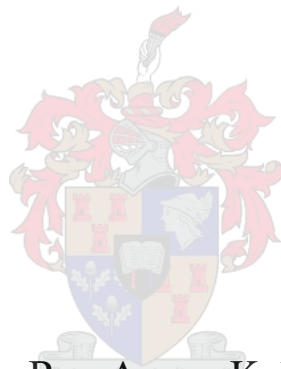


Is that your (real) child?
Adoption: The Sacrament of Belonging



By Rev Angus Kelly

Supervisor: Prof Dion Forster

Faculty of Theology

Department of Systematic Theology and Ecclesiology

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Declaration

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Abstract

Is it possible to call the relationship between adoptive parents and adopted children real in the sense that a sacrament is real? This study is a reflection on Kelley Nikondeha's book *Adopted: The Sacrament of Belonging in a Fractured World* (2017). Through qualitative analysis and reflection on available media and literature this study will explore: a) Some of the circumstances that lead to relinquishment through abortion, and abandonment, or to belonging through foster care and adoption in South Africa. b) Perceptions and ethical controversies related to the history and practice of transcultural and international adoptions. Through theological analysis and reflection on literature suited to the South African context it will explore the narrative aspects of Desmond Mpilo Tutu's *Ubuntu theology and practice* and *Methodist Theological Ethics* as described by Stanley Hauerwas and D Stephen Long (2011). Exploration of these theological frameworks will yield three connecting themes namely *blessing*, *belonging* and *progressing* outlining a theology characterised by a positive ontology, an inclusive ethic and imminent eschatology. This framework of blessing, belonging and progressing will be used as a lens through which to reflect on Kelley Nikondeha's narrative in order to understand the possibility of calling 'the relationship between adopted parents and adopted children real in the sense that a sacrament is real'.

Opsomming

Is dit moontlik om die verhouding tussen aanneem ouers en hulle aangenome kinders wesenlik te noem op dieselfde manier as wat 'n sakrament as wesenlik beskou word? Hierdie studie is 'n besinning oor Kelley Nikondeha's se boek, *Adopted: The Sacrament of Belonging in a Fractured World* (2017). Deur middel van kwalitatiewe ontleding en nadenke oor beskikbare media en literatuur wil hierdie studie die volgende verken: a) die omstandighede wat lei tot die afgee van kinders as gevolg van aborsie en verlating, sowel as pleegsorg en aanneming in Suid-Afrika; en b) die perspektiewe en etiese kontroversies in verband met die geskiedenis en praktyke van transkulturele en internasionale aannemings. Deur middel van teologiese analise en nadenke oor literatuur van toepassing op die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks, beoog die studie om die narratiewe aspekte van Desmond Mpilo Tutu's *Ubuntu theology and practice* en *Methodist Theological Ethics* soos beskryf deur Stanley Hauerwas en D Stephen Long (2011) te ondersoek. Die verkenning van hierdie teologiese raamwerke sal drie aansluitende temas oplewer, naamlik *seën*, *behoort* en *vordering* belyn met 'n teologie wat gekenmerk word deur 'n positiewe ontologie, 'n inklusiewe etiek en 'n immanente eskatologie. Hierdie raamwerk van *seën*, *behoort* en *vordering*, sal gebruik word as 'n lens om na te dink oor Kelley Nikondeha se narratief, om sodoende die verhouding tussen aanneem ouers en hulle aangenome kinders moontlik te verstaan as wesenlik, net soos wat 'n sakrament wesenlik is.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my family: First to my wife Heather and our children Zachari and Emily. They teach me daily what it means to be blessed with love and hope, to belong unconditionally in the easy times and the hard times and to progress determinedly along life's surprising journey. Second it is dedicated, to my mother, father, brother and sister you are the family that formed me, taught me to ask questions and instilled in me a passion for wisdom and knowledge. Our house was always filled with books and my parents have been very patient with me in my studies especially when I was younger and still discovering my vocation.

Which brings me to my larger church family in which I now minister, from my baptism at St Catherine's in Johannesburg to my teenage years at Vincent Methodist Church in East London, my student years at Rosebank Methodist, Coronation Avenue Methodist, Wynberg Methodist, Potchefstroom Methodist and John Wesley College in Pretoria. And then my years as a probationer minister in the Paarl Valley Circuit where Zachari and Emily were baptized by my colleagues Rev Anele Bonoyi and Rev Zamani Sikupela and my children were raised in the Sunday School. With my larger church family I also want to dedicate this to the celebration of our newly inducted woman bishops Rev Yvette Moses & Rev Purity Malinga.

As I write I am a minister in the Cape West Coast Circuit serving at the Table View Methodist Church. My colleagues in the circuit and my congregation at Table View Methodist and in the Wesley Guild have been very patient with me while I study.

This thesis is dedicated to all of the above and especially dedicated to adoptive and relinquishing mothers and fathers and adopted children. To those who mourn their loss through relinquishment, may you be comforted. To those who celebrate love and belonging in adoption goodness, may you be blessed.

And finally, as I pray every Sunday: "May the words of my mouth (or word processor), and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight O Lord."

- God is love -

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When I submitted my proposed topic for the Church of Sweden bursary application I really didn't expect to be accepted. When I received notification to say that I could begin my studies I thought it was an administrative error. I would like to thank the Church of Sweden for this visionary project. I hope that my academic work here and ministry to the church will honour your gift.

I'd like to thank my Professor Dion Forster for believing in me and guiding me patiently in my reading. Thank you too, to all the staff at the Stellenbosch University Theology faculty for the friendly way in which you serve all your students, your gifts of hospitality made me feel like I belong.

I feel I must also acknowledge Kelley Nikondeha, the author of *Adopted: The Sacrament of Belonging* for helping me to see adoption in a new way. Your book is an open window into your heart and your experience. My work in this paper is just a map, a two-dimensional exploration of the multi-dimensional landscape you have described.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

1.1 Is that your (real) child?

In writing this thesis I've chosen the title: "Is that your (real) child?" and I've wrestled with different subtitles to indicate the direction in which I am writing. I've written down the question: "How can adoption truly be a sacrament of belonging in South Africa" and also tried: "Can Adoption be a Sacrament of Belonging?" As it will become clear I write from my own perspective; and am grateful for the opportunity offered through the Church of Sweden to participate in the *Gender and Health* project ("MTh Gender Bursary Concept Note", n.d.). My journey through this course helped me to see with new eyes the extent of gender-based violence, gender discrimination and confusion not just in South Africa but in the world. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (2006) was my first reader in the course. It introduced the complex ways in which gender identity is imposed; and then used as a tool for exclusion, oppression and disempowerment and showed how this set of imposed identities perpetuates itself (Butler, 2006: 131–132)¹. The course drew towards exploration of intersectionalities² as they applied to shared experiences of oppression and 'imposition' and the possibility of shared liberation through shared protest and shared experience.

This concept of intersectionality and shared experience is of interest to me. I am a white South African male who is an adoptive father to a coloured³ child. I am at the apex of privilege and as a parent I seek to understand (as far as possible) my coloured son's

¹ I cannot be completely sure that I always understood all of Butler's philosophical points of reference; as I read I tended to have my own set of questions in mind.

² Among the articles that were helpful were these reflections on intersectionality: Carbado, 2013; Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 2008; McCall, 2005

³ 'Race' classifications in this thesis should not be understood 'in an essentialist manner' (Forster, 2019a: 77-78). Forster writes: "In reality there is no racial category that could adequately contain the complexity of human identities" (Forster, 2019a: 77–78). I agree with Forster's articulation of the problem of using race and refer to his footnote in the article: *A Social Imagination of Forgiveness* (Forster, 2019a: 70-88 [footnote 2 on page 77]).

experience of life and racial / cultural identity⁴. Van Wyngaard's (2012: 122) thesis expresses the necessity for people who speak, think or write from a white person's perspective to note the privileged position of power that white writers have. Cone in reflecting on Reinhold Niebuhr's inability to confront racism adequately in his ministry and teaching comments: "Niebuhr had 'eyes to see' black suffering, but I believe he lacked the 'heart to feel' it as his own" (Cone, 2013: 107). Despite the depth of love that I have for my child. As the white parent of a black child I need to remain aware of my own inability to 'feel' his identification with and experience of 'black suffering' as my own. Just as I will never fully understand my daughter's experience of the world's misogyny.

The question: "Is that your (real) child?" is deliberately not "Is this my real child?" As a person of power, I have access to the birth certificate that says he is 'my child' and as his father I even have a lot of control over the narrative of the story that he will hold as his birth story. I could tell him tales of how bravely he was rescued by two white heroes. Or I could be honest about our pain, vulnerability and need for a child, his birth mother's reluctant and risky relinquishment – her heroic triumph over the circumstances of his conception.⁵

As I think of the question "Is that your (real) child?" I think especially of being asked that question on the intersection of a busy taxi rank where, as a white man I am in the minority as black women check on the welfare of a child who looks out of place in a predominantly white suburb. The Jones-Baldwin family of North-Carolina, a black family who adopted a white child report that they have even been accused of kidnapping their white child twice (Abrahamson, 2019). As a white parent nobody has ever accused me of kidnapping my child, but when he was a toddler I decided to keep a picture of him in my wallet because he would

⁴ Botha (2009: 467) studies the self-imposed identity of a tri-lingual white man in the Eastern Cape, his ability to speak isiXhosa helps him to cross racial boundaries but his 'whiteness' makes it impossible for him to truly integrate and identify.

⁵ Lacher (2011: 30), Largen (2012: 285) and Siegel & Hartzell (2013: 67) point out the importance of narrative for the healthy development and attachment of young children; these identity forming stories are also a part of children's moral formation; as parents and as church the way we tell the stories of our origins have immense consequences.

scream blue murder when I pulled him off the coin-operated rides to go home. I worried that he might tell people I wasn't his father just so he could keep riding.

I bracket the word “real”⁶ to denote another problem. The ontological problem of the nature of our relationships. As the cliché goes: “It doesn't take much to father a child, but it takes character to be a dad.” This denotes a quality of the relationship that needs to be investigated in terms of understanding what it means to belong or to be real. As I explored this question I discovered Kelly Nikondeha's *Adopted: The Sacrament of Belonging in a Fractured World* (2017). Nikondeha introduced me to the idea of calling adoption a ‘Sacrament’ which immediately reminded me of something I remembered Bishop Desmond Tutu saying: ‘People are Sacraments of God's presence’ (Battle, 2009: Loc. 1160). The notion of Sacraments denoting something more ontologically significant than just the substance of their act or material appeals to me as a metaphor for the way in which a child might ‘really’ belong. This belonging is not something that is bestowed on the child by his or her self, nor is it because parents or the law determine that it is so. I speculate that it is as St Augustine would say: “the visible form of an invisible grace” or a “sign of a sacred thing.” So through an ‘invisible grace’ – or as St Augustine famously said: ‘An outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace’ (Grenz, Guretzki & Nordling, 1999: 606).

This thesis will explore some of the implications of calling adoption a sacrament as inferred in Kelley Nikondeha's 2017 book. *Adopted: the sacrament of belonging in a fractured world* (2017). Nikondeha does not claim that adoption is a sacrament, but she helpfully uses the sacrament of Baptism as a window into understanding adoption and adoption as a window into understanding the sacrament:

“A priest sprinkled holy water on my forehead, and the church embraced me. I slipped into God's family almost unnoticed. This was my first adoption.”
(Nikondeha, 2017: 87)

Through baptism Christians claim their place in the church family. Sacrament may thus be a helpful lens or metaphor through which to understand and describe how adopted children and

⁶ In this I am following Dion Forster in the way he titled his book *The (im)possibility of forgiveness* (2017).

their families are connected. St Augustine's description and Luther's articulation of transubstantiation and consubstantiation as the real way in which the body and blood of Christ is present, in Luther's consubstantiation "'in, with and under' the actual bread and wine" (Livingstone & Cross, F. L., 2005: 237); point to ways in which the term 'sacrament' as applied to adoption might expand our understanding of the way in which the relationship between adopted child and adoptive family may be described as 'real' in a similar sense to what someone might call the relationship between parents and a 'natural' child. Aquinas' doctrine of *transubstantiation* interpreted and applied with enlightenment-based tendencies might be a more problematic metaphor for the way in which the appearance of children might be understood as 'accidents' even though by form they may belong. Catholic Theologian Roger Nutt comments on the problem of perception of sacraments since the time of Aquinas with Aquinas standing on the precipice of a new age of perception that sowed the seeds of the modernist era and rational enquiry that was not able to hold as mystery, but rather sought to define in philosophical terms those concepts that are beyond human understanding and may more safely dwell in the art of philosophical human imagination (Nutt, 2017: 12–19). His work attempts to invite theologians to be more aware of the metaphysical mystery of their claims and the importance of mystery for humility. Nutt quotes Joseph Ratzinger: "If an interior opening-up does not occur in man that enables him to see more than what can be measured and weighed, to perceive the reflection of divine glory in creation, then God remains excluded from our field of vision" (Ratzinger, 2000: 122). I find the United Methodist understanding as developed and described by Felton who emphasises our understanding of the sacrament through 'temporal and relational terms' most helpful (Felton, 2005: 13).

Finally, this method of description and reflection does not promise to yield concrete answers to questions like: "Is adoption good?"; "Is trans-racial adoption good?" I seek here to describe a way in which 'adoption' or 'baptism' may be described as 'real'. This 'way' is based on values or circumstances; just as we might ask if someone was baptised "in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

1.2 Limitations of Metaphors, Helpfulness of Sacraments

Metaphors are always inadequate and there are obviously many problems with calling adoption a 'sacrament.' One key problem would be the question of whether it is 'ordained' by

God or ‘of Divine appointment’. The Methodist Church of Southern Africa along with other similar protestant denominations “recognises and observes two Sacraments, namely Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, as of Divine appointment and perpetual obligation.” (MCSA, 2016, para. 1.6). to be of divine appointment. This is a way of saying: “A sacrament is a sacrament because God has made it so.” To call adoption a ‘sacrament’ is a metaphor. This thesis is not arguing that we should add a third sacrament to the list – or an eighth for the Catholic Church. The purpose is to explore the ‘sacramentality’ of adoption and understand ways in which adoption and sacrament might be mutually illuminating.

Catholic and Orthodox Christians recognize a wider variety of sacraments including baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, anointing of the sick, marriage and holy orders. These sacraments thus weave themselves deeply into the lives of the faithful; ordering according to God’s presence and blessing nearly every important aspect of human life. Shutte writes “Members of religious communities try to make their whole lives, all the actual hum-drum details, sacramental ...they too are giving a sacramental character to their lives” (Shutte, 1993a: 118).

1.2.1 A Faith-filled / Methodist / Sacramental / Ubuntu Ontology

My hypothesis is that a Methodist / Ubuntu ethic which I will describe below (following the work of Stanley Hauerwas⁷ and the Ubuntu practice and theology of Desmond Tutu) could help to shed light on what it might mean to rightly call adoption a ‘sacrament’ of belonging and to offer an attempt to shed some light on the answer to the question “Is that your (real) child?”

The goal, following Ratzinger’s description is to ‘perceive the reflection of divine glory’ (Ratzinger, 2000: 122) in adoption. Hauerwas and Tutu explicitly ground their reflections in a faith filled ontology. Hauerwas critiques self-justifying ‘modernist’ ethics as exemplified in Kant and in enlightenment thinking: “‘Ethics’ becomes that quest to secure a rational basis for

⁷ Bafinamane (2017: 2) writes of Hauerwas’ ecclesial ethics “As a whole, his ecclesial ethic is made of some aspects of virtue or character ethics, narrative ethics and community ethics as well as social ethics.” In his appraisal of Hauerwas’ ethics Bafinamane suggests: “Its community and narrative orientation is congruent with African culture...” (2017: 9)

morality so we can be confident that our moral convictions are not arbitrary” (Hauerwas, 2001a: 44). To consider adoption in the light of Baptism and Baptism in the light of adoption and formulate ‘values’ inspired by conscious sacramental relationship woven into the complex networks of human existence is to work within ‘rationality’ of a different order; a rationality that submits to the possibility of being as *being in God*⁸. One of the reasons *Methodist theology* is helpful in this is that Wesley developed his theology in a time when Kant was just getting started. Wesley was born in 1703 and Kant in 1724. Wesley’s theology is primarily presented in sermons rather than doctrinal treatises; and Wesley himself described theology as the ‘handmaid of piety’ which points to Wesley’s unapologetically adopted and perhaps ‘simplistic’ or in Wesley’s words ‘plain’ ontology (Heitzenrater, 2003: 141). In short – Tutu and Wesley’s ‘faith-filled’ paradigms describe a certain ‘rationality’ quite different to the ‘rational basis for morality’ that Hauerwas describes as the problem with enlightenment rationality.

Grounded in *ubuntu* theology Catholic theologian Augustine Shutte (1993a: 117) writes of the eucharist:

“In the eucharist we enact symbolically the communion between ourselves and Jesus and the community between each other that is the ultimate goal of all our real activity... ..the expression of the meaning itself is the bearer of the transcendent power that effects what the symbolic act declares.” (Shutte, 1993a: 117)

Sacraments bear transcendent power because of the complex network of relationships that imbue them with meaning. Ontology and relationship are inseparable⁹. Relational ontologies sustain the sacredness of the sacraments. A minister or priest declares: “This is my body...”, “I baptize you...” and “Husband and Wife...”. These words are true; and in a sense ‘sacramental’ because the gathered community gladly agrees, sometimes responding with a

⁸ I’ve found Zizioulas’ *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood* (Zizioulas, 1997) and Zizioulas and Williams *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood* (Zizioulas & Williams, 2007) helpful in describing this ‘relational ontology’ in which theology and Ethics is performed; I’m not sure I could point only to one statement / chapter / verse in either volume because of the thickness of their descriptions and meaning.

⁹ “the relations between entities are ontologically more fundamental than the entities themselves” (Wildman, 2006: 1)

loud “Amen!” And by implication the extended community represented by the pastoral or priestly office also says “Amen!” Moreover, the pastoral or priestly office only exists because the Church in obedience to God (as per the church’s reception of revelation) has ordained that it should. *Ubuntu* theology and African thought makes an important contribution to this sense of identity formed through relationality (Forster, 2010a: 244, b: 4).

Although adoptive and relinquishing parents, the church, the child, the community, the state and other role players might declare that this child is the adoptive family’s real child, from an enlightenment informed rationalistic perspective, for it to be a sacrament we would have to recognize that God has also made it so. To presume that God has ‘made it so’ we need to discern whether it is ‘real’ in the eyes of God and if it could be called ‘real’ in the eyes of God it has the potential to be ‘good’.

1.2.2 A Life of Beatitude and Ngumuntu Lowo

Hauerwas and Long’s description of ‘Methodist Theological Ethics’ (Hauerwas, 2011: 255) combined with Arch-Bishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu’s practice of Ubuntu ethics offer a helpful path towards an understanding of the way in which adoption could be seen as compatible with a life of ‘beatitude’ / ‘virtue’ (ibid. 257) or ‘Ngumuntu Lowo’ (Hulley, Kretzschmar & Pato, 1996: 71). This path does not insist on a simple understanding of good; but rather emphasises a path, or a way of ‘goodness’ that is foundationally relational and transformative.

1.2.2.1 Life of Beatitude

A ‘life of beatitude’ is more than just a moment or a deed; but rather a continuous and relational process. Hauerwas and Long argue that Methodist theology and Ethics are inseparable¹⁰, even one and the same - in Methodism: “theology is never an end in itself but

¹⁰ In his article Reframing Theological Ethics Hauerwas describes Augustines’ Summa as “concerned to place the Christian’s journey to God squarely within the doctrine of God” (Hauerwas, 2001: 41). This inseparability is not confined to Methodist Theological Ethics; but Methodism’s emphasis on “practical divinity”, Methodism’s insistence on Wesley’s Sermons as Doctrinal Treatises locates Methodist theology in firm practical concepts of a constantly dynamic and transforming relationship with the divine. Methodist theology is explicitly expressed in worship and prayer.

should serve the interest of transformed living... ..theology is first and foremost to be preached, sung and lived.” The Methodist emphasis on Holiness is woven into its understanding of living in relationship with the Trinity and with the community; it is thus a theology of relational identity that implies a certain virtue ethic. Hauerwas identifies and outlines three Methodist Theological values or practices (Hauerwas & Long, 2011: 257):

First: The Methodist emphasis on ‘A life of Beatitude’ or ‘Religion of the Heart’. (Which I will call ‘Blessedness’.)

Second: The Methodist emphasis on ‘Social Holiness’ and robust ‘Ecclesiological Relationships.’ (Which I will call ‘Belonging’.)

Third: The inevitability of transformation to ‘perfect love’. (Which I will call ‘Progressing’.)

In short: Blessedness. Belonging. Progressing.

1.2.2.2 Ngumunto Lowo

This is very similar to Arch-Bishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu’s practice and theology of Ubuntu as described in a collection of essays: *Archbishop Tutu: prophetic witness in Southern Africa* (Hulley *et al.*, 1996). Ndungane, in this collection (Hulley *et al.*, 1996: 71) describes Bp. Tutu as “Ngumnto lowo” and offers the translation: “The one in whom full personhood is manifested”. This “full personhood” is articulated by Ndungane as realized in the way that Tutu joyfully affirms the human dignity and value of all people (Blessing). It is also articulated in Tutu’s community inclusiveness and rainbow ideology (Belonging) and in his desire to include all people in a life of transformation and renewal (Progressing) (Hulley *et al.*, 1996: 75). True personhood (Ngumntu lowo) or virtuous authenticity, according to Ndungane, is expressed in Tutu’s participation in a community of blessing, belonging and progressing. Battle quotes Tutu: “A person is human precisely in being enveloped in the community of other human beings, in being caught up in the bundle of life. To be is to participate...” (Hulley *et al.*, 1996: 100).

1.2.3 Conclusion

This dynamic, relational, ethical, framework forms a helpful lens through which to reflect on adoption as a sacrament of belonging. It is helpful in that it is able not only to inform the ethical question ‘Is it good?’ - but also - in that in its dealing with relationality is able to

inform an understanding of sacrament being ‘real’ in terms of the community of sacred presence that surrounds it, affirms it and pertains to identity.

1.3 Primary Research Question:

With reference to Kelly Nikondeha’s 2017 Work: *Adopted: The Sacrament of Belonging in a Fractured World* what does it mean to describe adoption as a sacrament of belonging in South Africa today?

1.3.1 Secondary Themes

To answer this primary research question I will need to explore several secondary themes:

1. What are the fractures that result in relinquishment and hamper belonging? (Ch. 2)
2. Is there a Sacramental theology suited to the exploration of baptism and belonging? (Ch. 3)
3. How does Nikondeha’s narrative and this Sacramental theology interact? (Ch. 4)

1.4 Methodology

This research will be a qualitative literature study that seeks to engage theological and philosophical concepts and ideas. We shall specifically reflect on the concept of adoption as a sacrament of belonging. The first conversation partner in this exploration will be Kelley Nikondeha’s narrative: *Adopted: The Sacrament of Belonging in a Fractured World*. As this research explores what it might mean to call adoption a ‘sacrament’ one of the chief obstacles will be the complex and conflicted ethics of adoption. An important question is to ask whether it by Divine Sanction?

The second conversation partner is Methodist Theological Ethics. Among other sources, we shall focus on Hauerwas and Long’s essay entitled ‘A Methodist Theological Ethic’. This essay describes a complex and dynamic way of thinking of ethics in community that has some apparent coherences with what could be described as Arch-Bishop Emeritus Tutu’s practice, philosophy and theology of Ubuntu. In Tutu’s practice, and in Hauerwas’ thinking on Methodist Ethics, I believe that we find a helpful relational model that sheds light on what it might mean to rightly use sacrament as a metaphor for the way in which adopted children and families ‘belong’ or are ‘really’ connected.

Hauerwas' Theological Ethics and Tutus' Ubuntu emphasis on relationality link blessing, belonging, and progressing, in a sort of perichoretic and perpetual dance. Lacugna (1993: 243) describes the perichoresis of the trinity as an "ontology of relation." This Ethic is more than an evaluation of the virtue of adoption but a spirituality of adoption that could be central to developing a theology of adoption as a sacrament of belonging. Therefore this 'Ubuntu / Methodist' framework might be the underpinning theology that would be grounds for understanding how an adoptive parent can say: "This is my (real) child." It shows how adoption is part and parcel of a life of beatitude characterised by blessing, belonging and progressing. Moreover, it has the power to gracefully incorporate, rather than ignore, the complex and dynamic nuances of the ethics of adoption.

1.5 Conversation Partners

To develop this framework I will engage in conversation with the following conversation partners combined with a qualitative analysis of the situation with regard to adoption, fostering and relinquishment in South Africa.

1.5.1 Methodist / Ubuntu Theological Ethics

Hauerwas and Long's essay *Methodist Theological Ethics* (2011: 255) helpfully articulates an ethical perspective that is mystical and practical - stressing a dynamic life of prayerful worship and relationship expressed in practical action. 'Methodist Ethics' does not see itself as 'Methodist Ethics' but rather as 'Christian Ethics'; Hauerwas and Wells Essay "How the Church Managed Before There was Ethics" in the *Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (2004: 39) is a broader picture of the theological, narrative, virtue, community and social ethics that Hauerwas recognizes in the practice of the worship of the earliest Church. This conversation partner is important to me because as a Methodist Minister of Word and Sacrament I cannot divorce myself from my own Methodist point of view. Ubuntu ethics founded in relationality and narrative as embodied in the theology and practice of Desmond Tutu lends itself to this discussion because of the relationality that is essential to Ubuntu.

Ubuntu relationality is essential to understanding the way in which adoption as a sacrament signifies belonging that could be called ‘real’¹¹.

1.5.2 Kelly Nikondeha Adopted: The Sacrament of Belonging in a Fractured World

Nikondeha introduces the word ‘Sacrament’ as a metaphor for the way in which adoptive children and families belong together in relationship. In her narrative about her own adoption and the adoption of her two children she articulates her understanding of the goodness of God that permeates a painful and conflicted process (Blessing). She articulates the way in which her adoption transformed her, and on the way in which her adoption of her children has transformed her relationships with the world she lives in (Belonging). Beyond this - Nikondeha narrates a life of continued mission and engagement through which the world is transformed (Progressing).

1.6 Outline of the Study

My study will investigate the South African situation with regard to adoption, fostering and relinquishment and highlight some of the ethical challenges around the issue. I will then develop a theological framework through reflection on Desmond Tutu’s *ubuntu* theology and *Methodist Theological Ethics* as described by Hauerwas and Long (2011).

1.6.1 Chapter 1 - Introduction

In this chapter I outline my aims and hypothesis. Kelly Nikondeha’s title *Adopted: A Sacrament of Belonging in a Fractured World* forms much of the basis for the structure of this Thesis. My hypothesis is that ‘sacrament’ is an excellent metaphor for the way in which ‘adoption’ denotes belonging. It is excellent because it has ethical complexity; Methodists

¹¹ Forster’s (2010a,b) explorations of relational ontology shed light on this question. Identity in his papers is a function of what he terms ‘relational ontology’; more specifically ‘African relational ontology’, or ‘Identity as a process of intersubjective discovery’. Forster draws on African ontological ubuntu philosophy as opposed to Western cartesian, individualistic ontologies as a way of discerning true identity. I believe that an integrated, relational ontology of identity is an essential description of the terms under which adoptional relationships can be understood to be ‘real’.

often refer to the sacraments as a ‘means of grace’ - a mysterious way in which God comes to bring help to a ‘fractured’ world.

1.6.2 Chapter 2 – Fracturing and Relinquishment

In my first exploration of this topic, and according to my own experience, I thought that ‘cross-cultural’ adoption would be the most significant starting point. But, according to Mokomane & Rochat (2012: 348–349) of 14,803 children adopted in South Africa from 1 April 2004 to 31 March 2009 approximately 8,500 were adopted within their own culture and 6,300 cross-culturally. The number of children adopted pales in comparison to the number of children in foster care: For every 3 children adopted about 97 are in foster care¹². This figure does not include those who are unofficially fostered by extended family who have not applied for foster care grants or registered their guardianship of these children. Cross-culturally adopted children are a very small portion of the community of children who ‘belong’ to different families in different ways.

Adoption is sometimes proposed as a solution to the problem of child abandonment; an alternative to abortion; a virtuous and heroic thing that people do. It is important to look at it more carefully in order to understand it more deeply.

In this chapter I will explore the phenomenon of relinquishment in South Africa. I believe that this this will expose some of the complexity of adoption as an ethical problem that cannot be dealt with using simple constructs of good or bad. To reflect on the ethics of adoption and belonging a more complex ethical model is needed; in the next chapter I will explore the connections between *Methodist Theological Ethics* and Tutu’s theology and Practice of *Ubuntu* as helpful paradigms through which to develop a ‘Sacramental Theology’ of Adoption.

¹² Mokomane & Rochat (2012: 348–349) point out that although 14,803 children were adopted in South Africa in the period 1 April 2004 to 31 March 2009; in 2009 474,459 families were receiving foster care grants.

1.6.3 Chapter 3 – A Methodist / Ubuntu Sacramental Theology

In this chapter I will use Hauerwas and Long's Essay: *Methodist Theological Ethics* (2011: 255) and Desmond Tutu's practice of Ubuntu as described in *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (Battle, 1997) as conversation partners in describing a dynamic ethic of belonging that is blessed, incarnational and transforming; and lends itself to describing adoption as a sacrament.

1.6.4 Chapter 4 - Reflection on Nikondeha's Narrative - Adopted: The Sacrament of Belonging in a Fractured World.

In this chapter I will bring the theology explored in chapter 3 and the problems discussed in chapter 2 into conversation with Kelley Nikondeha's narrative. I hope that I will be able to show how Nikondeha's narrative exemplifies a way in which adoption can function as a sacrament of belonging. Nikondeha's narrative describes the blessing of being adopted and adopting without ignoring the pain of relinquishment. It also illustrates the ways in which belonging changes not only the child's identity but also the parents' identity. Finally, it describes the inevitability of this new identity leading to transformational activism and mission.

1.6.5 Chapter 5 - Conclusions

My hypothesis is that a Methodist / Ubuntu ethic will be a helpful way of exploring the concept of adoption as a sacrament. In this chapter I will summarise some of the strengths and weaknesses of this model and attempt to suggest ways in which the concept could be more fully explored. I will also point out some of the areas where further conversation and exploration is needed.

1.7 Conclusion

My aim in this thesis is to explore the concept of adoption from the perspective of a sacramental theology. I will first outline some of the circumstances and difficulties around relinquishment in South Africa in an attempt to better understand the context in which I am writing. I want to know how many children are relinquished in South Africa and how they are relinquished – I also want to explore some of the reasons behind their relinquishment. In my

second chapter I will try to unpack the Sacramental, Theological, Ethical model that I will be using to unpack theological themes in Kelley Nikondeha's *Adopted: The Sacrament of Belonging in a Fractured World* (Nikondeha, 2017) and interpret or make a theological contribution to the circumstances described in chapter 2. In my fourth chapter I will read Nikondeha's book through the lens of the theological framework described in chapter three and I will comment on some of the data and narrative of the current circumstances of adoption described in chapter 2. In my fifth and final chapter I will ask whether I have found a way to answer the question: "Is that your (real) child?" and attempt to describe ways in which it might be possible to answer or understand that question. to the best of our ability. I will also suggest further avenues of exploration that will hopefully shed more light on the idea.

Chapter 2: Abortion, Fostering, Abandonment & Adoption

2.1 The Rainbow in Tension

South Africa's Rainbow Nation dreams were not realised as easily as we had hoped. We forget that the rainbow of the Bible was something that appeared after the flood and the children's stories seldom mention the detritus left behind after a natural disaster. Also – bows are held in tension; it is not easy to bend light – it takes special heroes like Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela to help people to see differently. In this chapter I explore some of the statistics, circumstances and attitudes around child relinquishment in South Africa.

2.1.1 *Do not Lie*

Stanley Hauerwas would famously tell his students that the most important thing Christian ethicists would have to do is live by the maxim: “Do not lie.” In his address to the university of Aberdeen Hauerwas says:

“‘Do not lie’ turns out, therefore, to be a more complex demand than is usually assumed. That is particularly the case if not lying requires that we be at home in the truth. To be at home in the truth is a demanding business because so often we lie because we are trying to be good. As a result it is often the case we end up not sure we know what we are talking about when claim we want to be truthful.”
(Hauerwas, 2017)

In this chapter I will attempt to sketch out the circumstances of adoption in South Africa. The adoption triad consists of child, birth family, and adopting family. In attempting to briefly write about the circumstances of adoption and relinquishment in South Africa and to speak the truth I must explain that my wife and I together are the adoptive parents of a coloured child. Perhaps the way I see and describe the truth about adoption will be prejudiced by this experience. Attwell (2004) examines the motivation of parents who adopt transracially. In her study she discovered that some people adopted transracially because white babies were not available and she cites the case of one couple who claimed that they adopted transracially for Biblical reasons (Attwell, 2004: 63).

Heather and I had always spoken about wanting to adopt a child as part of our way of building a family. My work with the church had made me aware of many children in need of adoption and we had never thought that we would adopt a white child because the children that we had met who were in need of care were mostly black. Mosikatsana, writing in 1995 warns against

a naïve attitude toward trans-cultural adoption: “Some prospective adoptive parents may seek to adopt transracially in order to resolve a personal or social problem, or to make a political statement consistent with the current political reforms in the new South Africa or out of a deep religious conviction...” (Mosikatsana 1995: 614). He argued that white parents might not be able to cope with the cultural implications of adopting a black child.

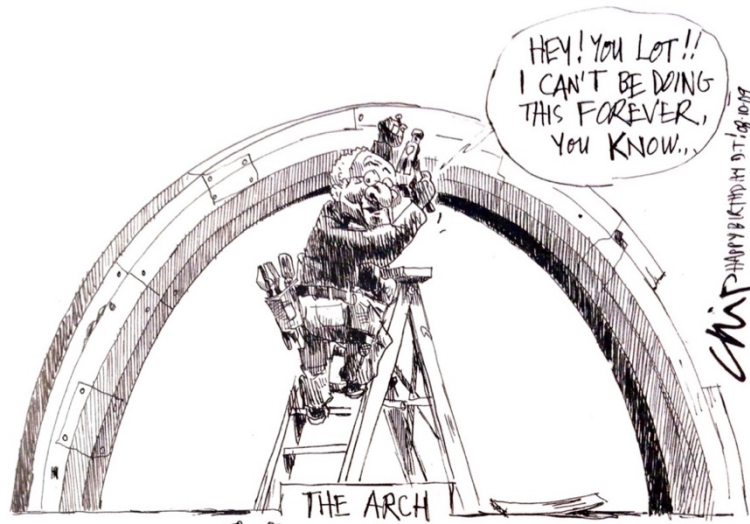
When we were ‘diagnosed’ with unexplained infertility with the explanation that we’d probably eventually conceive we decided to go ahead and adopt first.¹³ I’m not sure we thought very much about the complexities of adopting transracially. My experience of life in ministry in multicultural contexts in South Africa has broadened my understanding of race and the difficulty of reconciliation and relationship. Adoption adopted me into a new sense of understanding.

The mood of the first decade of the 21st century in South Africa still echoed the politics of hope and rainbow of possibility embodied in Nelson Mandela and Bishop Desmond Tutu. South Africa was preparing to host the 2010 World Cup and the soundtrack was the music of Freshly Ground with narration from Thabo Mbeki’s famous 1996 speech: “I am an African.” Desmond Tutu would famously ask everyone in a church service to hold up their hands and admire the different rainbow colours of people’s hands when they were gathered together (Tutu, 2005: 47). Transracially adoptive families are able to hold up their hands and admire their own small rainbows. But, in the words of Briggs, it’s not ‘an uncomplicated, good thing’ (Briggs, 2012: 2). The image of the rainbow spoke of a celebration of differences rather than their being ignored. The beauty of rainbows depends on the tension of light refracted as it passes through dense water instead of light air. Tension forms rainbows. But tension has recently threatened to fracture South Africa’s rainbow.

As Stanley Hauerwas advises ethicists to ‘tell the truth’ it has to be acknowledged that the truth is not all about a beautiful ark with the animals marching on two by two. The ark is accompanied by a flood and its detritus. A Chip Snaddon cartoon from the Cape Argus of 8

¹³ On a personal note: One of the myths about adoption is that once you’ve adopted you will probably conceive, there is a false perceived correlation between adoption and eventual conception that doesn’t take the passage of time into account.

October 2009 hangs next to my front door to remind me to live hopefully. It depicts Desmond Tutu repairing a wooden rainbow arch exclaiming: “Hey! You Lot!! I can’t be doing this forever you know...”



Chip Snaddon, Cape
Argus, 8 October 2009

In South Africa Tutu and Mandela spoke out strongly for hopeful reconciliation. Perhaps the *New South Africa Project* depended too much on *ubuntu* good will, good character and not enough on legislative changes. In Snaddon’s cartoon Tutu, getting older, recently diagnosed with cancer is busy with a hammer mending a very fragile looking ‘shack’ of a rainbow, reminding South Africans that at some point they will need to take over the work of keeping the rainbow together.

Sisonke Msimang writes about challenging the myth of the hopeful rainbow with robust protest and debate in her New York Times Op-Ed entitled *The end of the Rainbow Nation Myth*:

This may not feel good, or even comfortable. And it does not offer the peace many black South Africans imagined 20 years ago. Nonetheless our impatience for justice is a new kind of hope; a sign that green shoots may yet emerge from the ruins of the rainbow nation. (Msimang, 2015, para. 17)

2.1.2 The Patchwork of Belonging

Nikondeha speaks of Adoption as a sacrament of belonging in a “fractured” world. I believe her words are carefully chosen. To choose belonging as an antidote to fracture is to acknowledge that this is not a process of repair or restoration but rather a way in which the broken pieces are able to fit together again in a way that is good and right but not necessarily

the way they should be. Since the adoption of our child our family has learnt a lot about race and identity and so as I explore this phenomenon I bear in mind the advice of Cobus van Wyngaard (2015: 479) who calls on white theologians to “take a particular responsibility for focusing on those issues of injustice from which they are deriving privilege”. I have to confess that I am greatly and strangely privileged to be the father of an amazing son; but I am not unaware that this privilege is only mine because of the bravery of the mother who relinquished him.

“A child born to another woman calls me Mommy. The magnitude of that tragedy and the depth of that privilege is not lost on me.”
(Jodi Landers quoted in Jackson 2018: 2)

Adoption is not “an uncomplicated, good thing” (Briggs, 2012: 2). Adoption is at once a tragedy and a privilege: the tragedy of circumstances that cause a mother to relinquish her child and the privilege of a family whose dreams are fulfilled in receiving a child. The mixed blessing of the different way in which an adopted child belongs to a new family and lives with the varying depths of anxiety that come with having a different sense of belonging and the pervasive memory of relinquishment.

Attempting to follow Stanley Hauerwas’ command: “Do not lie” (Hauerwas, 2017, para. 4) and pay attention to Wyngaard’s advice that I focus “on those issues of injustice from which” I am “deriving privilege” (van Wyngaard, 2015: 479), I will briefly survey some of the literature around the plight of new-born children in South Africa and the mothers who birth them.

2.2 Relinquishment

In South Africa it is clear that women, especially black and coloured women suffer at the pinnacle of multiple intersections of oppression. At the time of writing just after the rape and murder of UCT student Uyinene Mrwetyana (Thamm, 2019, para. 4). Of all the women in the world South African women are amongst those most vulnerable to rape and abuse. If women exist at one of the pinnacle points of oppression in South Africa then the children conceived

under duress; often as the result of rape¹⁴ or coercive and sometimes transactional sexual encounters exist at the pinnacle of that pinnacle of oppressions. South Africa's foster care initiatives in response to the plight of orphaned and abandoned children due to poverty, HIV and AIDS bear the brunt of children born into families or to mothers who are simply unable to care for their children. As I explore these phenomena I attempt to sketch out where adoption fits into the various options into which these mothers are pressed from the phenomenon of child abandonment to the possibility of keeping the children that are born to them.

The South African Medical Research Council estimates that as many as 205 new-born babies die as a result of abandonment in South Africa every year (Abrahams et al. 2016: 8). The options available to new mothers or pregnant women in South Africa are often reduced to abortion, foster care, abandonment, or relinquishment for adoption. Surveying these phenomena and the statistics available and cited below, it appears that about 1,000,000 children are born in South Africa in a year and of these about 100,000 are aborted; approximately and approximately 40,000 children are added to the formal foster care system, receiving foster grants, (SAHRC, 2011: 24 & 52; StatsSA, 2017, paras 2–4) hundreds if not thousands are abandoned¹⁵ and about 1,000 adoptions take place (SAHRC, 2011: 53). Amid these statistics about 300,000 children are added to South Africa's Child Support Grant System which contributes R380 per month towards the care of children whose parents earn less than R3800 per month (Hall, 2017: para 2 & 4).

¹⁴ According to SAPS about 40,000 rapes were reported to the police in 2017/2018 and there is no guessing how many rapes go unreported or even unrecognized as rape by their victims (SAPS, 2018).

¹⁵ Vorster (2015) indicates that in 2010 3,500 children were abandoned, but this number is reflective only of the children that survive abandonment. Some suggest that the rate of survival is about 60%. It is not clear how many of these abandoned children are returned to their families or placed for adoption. Abrahams et al (2016: 8) indicated that the number might be as low as 205. I have not been able to determine a definite number.

2.2.1 100,000 Relinquished to Abortion¹⁶

South Africa's law affirms the rights of women to safe abortions; according to statistics from the South African department of health about 105,000 abortions were performed in the year 2016/2017 (Makou, 2018: Table). This does not include illegal and backstreet abortions advertisements for which line taxi ranks and bus stops in South Africa. The rates of violence against women, rape, poverty and informal prostitution mean that young South African women have very little control over their pregnancy and their bodies; the fact that so many abortions take place despite the difficulties women have in accessing abortions and information about them provided by the Department of Health points to a very high level of desperation among pregnant women, who if given the choice would have chosen not to have their children (Postman, 2018: Para 5). Despite the availability of contraception through government clinics and family planning centres the Department of Health still struggles to encourage sexually active people to use contraception. But many of the young women who conceive, conceive through rape or sex under coercion and cannot reasonably be expected to consider contraceptive measures, thus many pregnancies among young women in impoverished and vulnerable conditions are not planned and simply add to their burden of responsibility when they already struggle to provide for themselves. The men who impregnate these women often deny paternity and refuse to take responsibility. It seems ironic that although women under the age of 18 may get an abortion without parental consent they may not relinquish their children for adoption (Blackie, 2014: 42). One headline, from the *Newcastle Advertiser* reads: "Illegal abortionists are the support system for pregnant girls in South Africa" (Blackie, 2014: 43).

Many Christian organisations whose primary focus is against abortion, promote adoption as an alternative to abortion. Briggs points out that some Christians have an "intense affection for foetuses" and a "profound mistrust of the women who carry them" (Briggs, 2012: 4) – the complexity of issues like abortion and adoption are possibly miscalculated in this sometimes simplistic suggestion; Bauerschmidt suggests that Christians who advocate for adoption as an

¹⁶ I've inserted these approximate numbers in these section titles to illustrate the magnitude and the proportions of these problems. You will notice that adoption falls right down at the bottom of the list – it is nevertheless important.

alternative to abortion “need to reflect more deeply on what it is that makes a pregnant woman’s circumstances ‘difficult,’ what societal structures and cultural patterns make childbearing a liability” (Bauerschmidt, 2011: 302). Aside from the fact that there are not 100,000 families ready to adopt 100,000 children there is the stigma attached to being pregnant in cultures and churches that condemn sexual activity and pregnancy out of marriage, the complex and often violent circumstances of conception and a variety of societal structures and cultural norms too vast and complex for this thesis to properly consider.

2.2.2 40,000 Relinquished to Foster Care

South Africa’s Social Development systems actively anticipated the huge number of children who would be orphaned as a result of HIV and AIDS and dealt with the problem in a creative and natural way by taking into account prevailing cultural systems and relying heavily on the Spirit of Ubuntu.

The South African Children’s Act “promotes family and kinship care whenever possible and residential care as a last resort” (Rochat, Mokomane & Mitchell, 2016: 121). The number of children receiving foster support grants is quite staggering with about 500,000 children in South Africa receiving these grants in 2017 and about 40,000 children being added every year ; PMG, 2017: para. 20). Although the Foster Care Grants system was initially designed and implemented to deal with the pending crisis of children orphaned by HIV and AIDS (Hearle & Ruwanpura, 2009: 424) it is also used to care for children relinquished by their parents and ordered into care by the courts. Foster parents receive a subsidy of R1,000 per month to help support children in their care (www.gov.za, 2019: para. 3). Because of the Children’s Act’s preference for family and kinship foster care and the grant is only available to fostered but not adopted children adoption might be an option that is not properly considered by those families with foster children (Rochat *et al.*, 2016: 122), and whether this is in the best interest of the children.

2.2.2.1 Ancestral Identities

Although economic incentives are probably the major reason that children are not adopted in to their foster families Blackie points out that adoption could “possibly be a problem in terms of traditional African ancestral beliefs” (Blackie, 2014: 26). Jabulani Maphalala KZN Commissioner for Traditional Leadership Disputes and Claims says: “Ancestral spirits look

after their relatives and no-one else. In our religion, in our culture, this thing is ring-fenced” (Maphalala quoted by Dardagan, 2014: para. 13). Southern African customs tend to emphasize the importance of ancestral identity in the lives of children. Rochat quotes some of the interviews in her research:

There is an ancestral family that one must consider before adopting a child. How will I conduct the necessary ceremonies without knowing this child’s ancestral roots? If I don’t do this, then I will bring problems to this child and to my own family.
- Biological parent, female, Gauteng, 30-40 years
(Rochat 2016: 124)

In this case the person interviewed stresses the important part that ancestors play in forming not just the child’s identity but also their sense of belonging. This map of lineage is a set of reminders of ‘whose’ child you are and thus ‘who’ you are. Lineage maps out a history of relationships and historical social contracts. In Zakes Mda’s historical fiction, *Little Suns*, (2015: Loc. 510) he recounts how a chief introduces himself at a gathering recounting a long genealogy of ancestors; after the genealogy the narrator comments:

“Each name connected to a story of heroism or villainy, once told by bards at the fireside or at special ceremonies. Indeed, some of the people on the ground found some of the names linking snugly in the chain of their own ancestries. That’s how history was preserved and transmitted to the next generations – through the recitation of genealogies and of panegyrics.”

These ancestries set up the possibilities for relationships in the present. Tribes and families remember stories of help and of harm – and even of unlikely failures that make room for grace in the current generation. This intricate web of relationships and histories which include geographical details of place and journey are intrinsic to a deeply formed sense of belonging and identity that is not necessarily taken into account and sometimes positively rejected in Western Christian thought. One of Rochat’s subjects speaks:

Just imagine if you adopt a Biyela child and join the child to the Mthembu’s. There will be war between the Biyela and Mthembu ancestors, both ancestors will fight over who owns the child (Biological parent, male, Gauteng, 40–50 years).

Fostering in these cases seems to be seen as more legitimate than adoption because fostering does not break the important sense of belonging that comes from being a member of a clan with a history of relationships that has spiritual and temporal implications. This invisible world of history and of spiritual ancestral connectedness is too easily overlooked and ignored. It becomes a major blind spot for me in my thinking about identity. As a second generation

South African I know very little about how or why my grandfather and his family moved from Scotland although my mother has traced my matrilineal ancestors and recorded their story in a book she has authored (Kelly, 2019). I also don't know why I have an Irish surname although I am sure there is a story to tell. When I talk about 'home' with my black South African colleagues the contrast is quite stark: my home is wherever my current pastoral assignment is but my colleagues tend to describe home as the place where their extended family lives and where their ancestors are buried. Until my mother had undertaken her research I had no idea.

2.2.2.2 Fostering Families

Through appropriate foster care systems that pay attention to community systems and values children can belong to their communities in meaningful ways that leave them with a strong sense of identity. Another of Mokomane & Rochat's subjects speaks of their sense of belonging growing up in alternative care systems:

We have been doing this for a long time you know, taking care of our children. All through the struggle we did what we had to, we moved our children around, even as a child I lived with very little but I was loved and felt I belonged. We shared it out and we did the best we could. Now I must do the same for my community and for the price we paid for freedom we should not have to do it alone anymore (Community Advisory Board member, female, KwaZulu-Natal, 40–50 years).
(Mokomane & Rochat, 2012: 123)

Examining these attitudes, traditions and practices it seems that the South African strategy for the care of children that places an emphasis on foster care in an extended family is an excellent, innovative and 'indigenous' way to deal with a huge South African problem.

But the foster care system does have some major problems. Hearle and Ruwanpura (2009: 434) report on the ways in which Foster Care Grants have upset the usual system of ubuntu and mutual care in small communities. Children who have largely grown up in the cities and lost their parents to HIV and AIDS find themselves in the care of their rural grandparents or aunts and have some trouble adapting to a more 'traditional' way of life; this way of life might be described as 'traditional' but it is not traditional – villages and farmsteads that were once the home of culture and tradition are bereft of young adults and middle aged men and women who have gone to work in the cities; they are dominated by the elderly who care for young children. The foster care grant is paid out until the children turn 18 or graduate from high school. Older children are shrewd enough to know that they can take advantage of their

vulnerable carers in that the grant that they receive might be a very large portion of the income of rural households.

2.2.2.3 Baptismal Sponsors

In recognition of the growing and changing understanding of the ways in which children may belong to their families – and in response to the prevalence of children in foster care situations the Methodist Church of Southern Africa has changed the wording in its rules for Baptism.

Where the 11th edition of the *Law and Discipline of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa* read:

1.12 The Sacrament of Baptism shall, in general, be administered:

1.12.3 to those children only whose parents, one or both, are members of our Church or congregation...

(MCSA, 2007)

In The 12th edition of the *Law and Discipline*, now named *The Methodist Book of Order* paragraph 1.12.3 now reads:

1.12.3 to a child who is in the care of parents, significant care givers or guardians, among whom one or more are members of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa...

(MCSA, 2016)

This change in wording reflects an understanding of the reality that children belong to their families and extended care groups in more ways than just through the traditional nuclear / natural family consisting simply of ‘parents’ so that it is now expanded to include ‘significant care givers and guardians.’

The popularity of fostering and its acceptability in South African Culture and its recognition in this rule for the sacrament of Baptism as expressed in the Order of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa implies fostering must also be considered in this thesis – especially as it pertains to adoption and baptism as sacraments of belonging. Belonging and identity is not necessarily dependent on western models of familial relationship and kinship – there are different ways of seeing these phenomena (Mbiti, 1969: 145).

In recognising the importance of fostering in South Africa – and in recognising some of the many unofficial ways in which children are included and cared for in communities our understanding of belonging and the sacraments that might affirm this belonging need to be constantly reviewed.

2.2.3 2,000 Relinquished to Abandonment

In her Anthropology Master's Thesis at The University of the Witwatersrand Deirdre Blackie (2014) explores the phenomenon of child abandonment in South Africa. The statistics that she presents are astounding: in 2012 as many as 200 children were abandoned in Gauteng every month; of these 200 abandoned on average only 60 are found alive and those that are found alive are usually in an extremely fragile condition suffering from insect and animal bites as well as malnourishment and often hypothermia (Blackie, 2014: 47). According to Child Welfare South Africa in 2010 more than 2000 children are “abandoned annually in South Africa because of AIDS, poverty, drug abuse and teenage pregnancies” (Sowetan quoted in Blackie 2014: 45). According to the South African Medical Research Council (Abrahams *et al.* 2016: 6) most of these babies are abandoned in urban settings; half of them in the open veld or public spaces; 1/3rd on garbage dumps and the remainder in toilets, rivers and shallow graves. It is estimated that of those children abandoned roughly 60% are discovered in time to save their lives.

2.2.3.1 Rooted in Poverty and Unemployment

An unnamed social worker states: “The problem of child abandonment is rooted in poverty and unemployment. Women living in squalid conditions do not consider the consequences or the effect of a child they cannot afford or want” (Khanyile, 2019, para. Last). “They look dead on the other side of their eyes,” says a social worker describing her experience of dealing with parents who come to her to offer their children for adoption (Blackie, 2014: 53). In all the telling of the stories of abandonment women are held almost solely responsible; absent fathers are hardly ever mentioned. In hospitals, in the media and in other environments of social care mothers who abandon their babies or want to relinquish them for adoption are dehumanized and defined as callous and unloving (Blackie 2014: 59). Even if they do consider adoption as an option, they are not able to bring it up in conversation with hospital staff for fear of being reprimanded. Blackie reports on a conversation with a nurse at Baragwaneth hospital who

about a reduction in abandonments at the hospital; the nurse's response: "Abandonments are down at the hospital since security has been improved, so they can't just leave them in a toilet, someone will see them. Now they just take them outside and dump them there" (Blackie, 2014: 61).

2.2.3.2 Airtime Babies

Unfortunately, these abandoned babies continue to be named and regarded in ways that dehumanize them. One headline from the Daily Sun reads: "Airtime babies dumped!" the attached article goes on to quote a member of the community: "these babies are not conceived in love... The women are coerced into sex by promises of airtime and beautiful clothes" (Blackie, 2014: 47). Where children have not been abandoned and society is able to identify a place for them in an extended carer network in which they may be fostered, these abandoned children seldom fit into the extended family care paradigm. The multiple stigmas associated with unwanted children; teen pregnancy and the shame of abandonment might mean that no relatives in the child's natural care network would be likely to be found. Where police and social workers are not able to find the family of these abandoned children it is hoped that they would be taken into temporary care and adopted into loving families. But adoption is not a very popular choice in South Africa.

2.2.4 1,000 Relinquished to New Family Adoption¹⁷

In South Africa and other countries affected by HIV and AIDS adoption seemed like a logical part of the solution to the problem of children who would be orphaned (Dube, 2002: 31, 37 & 39). Adoption brings together parents who want to have children with children in need of families; the arrangement seems simple and easy. But the above narrative of how many hundreds of thousands of children are in foster care, how many babies are abandoned and how many are aborted helps us to realize that children in need of adoption tend to come from the most vulnerable and impoverished amongst us. Speculatively one could try to describe the various oppressive and liberative powers at play in the process of choice for those who choose

¹⁷ Although on average 6,000 children are adopted in South Africa per year; only 1,000 of these represent children relinquished to new families.

abortion, abandonment, foster care or adoption; ultimately all of them are in crisis and are quite disempowered. Abandonment seems to be a choice that only the most downtrodden would make; the narrative suggests that those who abandon might have sought other remedies like adoption, foster care or abortion – but been denied them. Abortion implies access and transport to a clinic that will provide a safe abortion; or the resources to contact and pay a ‘back street’ practitioner. With all of this the woman seeking abortion will need to successfully navigate the complex and demeaning procedures that stand in their way.¹⁸ Foster care implies knowing of a family network that is willing to accept the child and finding the necessary help from social workers to facilitate the legal process. Although agencies exist to help with the process of adoption there are many prejudices that the relinquishing mother would have to negotiate. Because adoptions involve a social worker in the process of bringing those with the resources to care for and adopt a child with a mother who is relinquishing her child; and if those who adopt insist on proper and fair practice the relinquishing mother receives a lot more support than those who abort or abandon their children. To be able to choose to relinquish a child for fostering or adoption implies a degree of privilege quite far removed from the lack of choices available to those who choose¹⁹ to abort or abandon their children.

There is concern that not enough adoptions are taking place in South Africa due to the department of social welfare’s policy that prefers foster care in extended families to adoption (Vorster, 2018, para. 16). In my discussion of the foster care system above I have highlighted some of the advantages that have to do with identity and South African traditions around fostering that imply a closeness and sense of belonging that might be different to fostering in other countries. One of the major concerns about insistence on foster care over adoption has been the amount of time children might spend in institutional care as the search for foster care options are exhausted.

¹⁸ Silekwa (2018) in her article *Inside Durban’s Abortion Abyss, Shocking Experiences* Silekwa describes some of the experiences of those who seek abortions and the circumstances they have to endure to go through the process.

¹⁹ I’m not sure that ‘privilege’ or ‘choose’ are fair words in this sentence; I’m not sure how much choice these women can be said to truly have in making their decision at this point.

Adoptions in South Africa where they occur; tend to occur across cultures (Mokomane & Rochat, 2012: 48). Black or coloured children are generally adopted by white families. The black parents who relinquish their children for adoption or abandon them are usually subject to situations of extreme poverty, vulnerability and oppressive societal circumstances. The children relinquished or abandoned are at the deepest intersection of disadvantage. Looking at the 2013 statistics on adoption and race that Blackie (2014: 8) quotes 80% of the parents looking to adopt are white and of the children available for adoption 92% are black.²⁰

Adopting Parents	297
Black	14
White	190
Indian	43

Adoptable Children	428
Black	398
White	3
Indian	
Mixed Race	9

²⁰ Adopting Parents	297
Black	14
White	190
Indian	43

Adoptable Children	428
Black	398
White	3
Indian	
Mixed Race	9

(Blackie, 2014: 8)

2.3 Transracial Adoption and International Adoption

South Africa's residual apartheid economy means that white people tend to be in a better financial position to adopt children than black and it is mainly black children who are available for adoption. A contribution to the lack of black families looking to adopt may also be certain cultural reservations. As adoption mostly occurs from black to white in South Africa – South African trans-cultural adoptions may in some ways be compared to international adoptions. The vast differences of culture, power and privilege sometimes mean that people living in the same city might as well be living in different worlds.

2.3.1.1 Somebodies Children or Nobodies Children

The title of Brigg's book *Somebodies Children: The Politics of Transracial and Transnational Adoptions* (2012) deliberately contradicts Bartholet's book *Nobodies Children* (2000). Bartholet argues for a system (in America) that gives more rights to adoptive families and argues against laws that emphasize the importance of looking for alternatives to adoption that would prioritize family preservation, domestic adoption and foster care arrangements. On the other hand, Briggs highlights the stories of those from whom children were adopted – taking seriously these children's identity as embodied bodies; in relationship. South Africa's legacy of apartheid and the worlds of difference between black and white mean that it is as easy for white South Africans to see their adopted children as 'Nobodies Children' and to see adoption as a way to rescue these children from the hopelessness of township poverty into the hopefulness of suburban South African privilege. This subtle and not so subtle ability to dehumanize can be attributed to the dynamics of in-group / out-group perceptions that subtly rob humans of their natural ability to recognize each other's full humanity (Yang, Jin, He, Fan & Zhu, 2015: 16).

In Time Magazine Graff (2009: Title) refers to the myth of children who are truly orphaned or abandoned that sustains the practice of international adoption as "The Lie We Love". We are only able to sustain this lie if we effectively deafen ourselves to the voices of those who would say otherwise; who would remind us that adopted children are not always orphans. Some celebrity examples of international adoptions illustrate the worst that can happen if we too eagerly embrace adoption as a simple solution to the complex problem of needing to relinquish children. Briggs quotes a question asked by *Time* magazine: "Did Madonna Save a Life or Buy a Baby?" (Briggs 2012: 3). This glamorization of adoption through Madonna and

Angelina Jolie illustrates the way in which the identity stories of anonymous children by foreign rock stars with unlimited access to cash can begin to eliminate the identity of the adopted children. It was only these children's inherited fame that drove the media to further explore the legitimacy of their adoptions and the processes and agencies that made these adoptions possible.

Briggs also shares the story of a group from Pittsburgh USA who in the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake "...airlifted a planeload of orphans out of Haiti from the BRESMA orphanage" and how this "was understood in the press to be involved in a child rescue." (Briggs, 2012: 3). A member of this group who had friends in the office of then president Barack Obama was able to "ease visa problems" (Briggs, 2012: 3). Briggs describes the way in which one of the women running the BRESMA orphanage would recruit children to the orphanage convincing their (usually single) mothers to send them there and then allow them to be adopted to a well-resourced home even though these children had parents and were not necessarily available for adoption (Briggs, 2012: 3). Bartholet (2010: 787) argues that children like these *need* to be rescued from their impoverished situations even if they are not full orphans and it would benefit them greatly to be removed to places like the USA where they will have better care situations.

The power to adopt and to convince mothers to relinquish their children is quite scandalous; the situations described above are hard to comprehend. Briggs continues to write:

"In this book I argue that if we want to understand adoption, especially intercountry and interracial adoption, we need to see that its practices do not resolve neatly into categories of coercive and innocent, good and bad. Adoption may sometimes be the best outcome in a bad situation, but it is always layered with pain, coercion, and lack of access to necessary resources, with relatives (usually single mothers) who are vulnerable." (Briggs, 2012: 3).

Bartholet firmly believes that international adoption is in the best interests of the children who are to be adopted arguing that "Those attacking such adoption as in conflict with children's heritage rights are speaking a language of a past in which it was common to see people as essentially defined by their race and national origin" (Bartholet, 2010: 783). It seems that she would prefer to pretend that there was no such thing as race and nationality; unfortunately this ideology rather than being a point of progress and fairness is blind to the reality that 'not seeing colour' is simply to see everybody as 'white' or the same as the one 'seeing' and ignore the personhood of the one being seen (DiAngelo & Dyson, 2018: 109). Bartholet's

firm belief that international adoption without much consideration of the origins or extended family networks of the child being adopted is able to see adoption as an undeniable virtue because of the philosophy that it is ‘in the best interests of the child’ who in this observation is seen as being without any identity or morality except for that of the adult in power who is making decisions about what is good.

On one side Bartholet and Brigg’s titles in dialogue ask whether these children are somebody’s children or nobody’s children. The side which is much more difficult to explore and to see is the story of the relinquishing parent and the relinquished child. In our thinking about adoption there has been in the past a worrying blindness to the existence of the child’s relinquishing family, networks and culture. And as Briggs points out adoption is always ‘layered with pain, coercion and a lack of access to necessary resources’ (Briggs 2012: 3). Even in the cases where relinquishing parents are empowered by being able to choose adoptive families for their children by looking at portfolios or having a say in whether they be adopted internationally one can imagine that from the perspective of poverty the prospect of a middle-class life for their children would be an overwhelming opportunity. As an adoptive white parent in South Africa I know that I am not Madonna; but the stories about Madonna and Angelina Jolie’s celebrity adoptions cause me to reflect. As a privileged white South African family with a house, three dogs and two cars; a room for each person in the house, a bathroom (inside the house) for the children and one (inside their bedroom) for the adults. It is important to reflect on how this excess of privilege may weigh on the mother who under extreme duress makes the decision to relinquish her child.²¹

2.4 Racial and Cultural Fractures

The National Association of Black Social Workers issued a statement resisting cross cultural adoptions in the United States in 1972. They declared:

²¹ Yang et al. (2015) explore the ways in which powerlessness dehumanizes those who are disempowered; not only in the eyes of those who abuse their power over those who are powerless; but also in their own eyes. For the disempowered relinquishing parent; the adoptive parents who have the power to choose to adopt a child and raise it might be seen as super-human from the perspective of one who is disempowered.

“We affirm the inviolable position of Black children in Black families where they belong physically, psychologically and culturally in order that they receive the total sense of themselves and develop a sound projection of their future.”
(NABSW, 1972)

Tanga & Nyasha (2017) explored perceptions of cross-racial adoption (CRA) in East London, South Africa found that “all of the Black community members interviewed perceived the practice of CRA as a social taboo that needs to be abolished at all costs” (ibid. 233). The concern in this case is expressed as a fear of “cultural genocide.” Zeenat Bhikhoo, a coloured woman with Indian adoptive parents says: “People are always telling me I should go find my roots, but my roots are with my family. I mean the ones who raised me” (Brown, 2014). The adoption process in South Africa seeks to match race and religion in families; and where the relinquishing mothers are involved in the process social workers try to honour their wishes but adopted children will usually be raised according to the culture of their adoptive family. The NABSW statement affirms and honours the value of the ethnicity of Black children: “We now proclaim our truth, substance, beauty and value as ourselves without apology or compromise.” (NABSW, 1972: 1)

The South African situation is in many ways very different to that faced by the NABSW in 1972 America. In South Africa black people are an oppressed majority, whereas in America black people were and are an oppressed minority. In 2019 many racist attitudes remain; but many have also shifted – from the content of the position statement on trans-racial adoptions it is easy to see the concern that adopted black children will be raised in a world that pretends they are white. They express concern with how neighbours will have to be alerted to the fact that these white families have black children and that some white families will have to sever ties with their extended families because they have adopted a black child. Living in a fairly mixed community, taking my child to a mixed school and ministering to a diverse community I haven’t experienced this need to warn anyone of my family’s diversity. Much has changed since 1972.

As mentioned in the discussion above of some of the advantages of the Department of Social Development’s preference for extended family foster care (2.2.2.1), African culture emphasises the importance of Ancestry as not just an historical phenomenon but a practical and contemporaneous relationship with those who have died (3.2.1.4). The ancestors are a vital part of the ubuntu community (Breed & Semanya, 2015: 3). In white South African culture ancestry is seen as something of historical interest but is not considered very

significant in terms of the conscious contemporaneous formation of white identity. Thembela Ntongana writes in GroundUp “In many black cultures when a child is born that child belongs and is guided by the ancestors that carry the clan name. In the case of adoption that order is disturbed” (Ntongana, 2014: Para. 17).

These issues threaten to make it difficult for a black child to ‘belong’ to a white family – but the emphasis is on how these children belong. The NABSW document seems to fear a world where whiteness is seen as a normative identity and blackness as something to be eradicated. Healthy trans-racially adoptive families in South Africa should inevitably have to raise their black or coloured children to know and love their heritage. Trans-racially adoptive families in South Africa will have to engage with questions about the racialisation of poverty and adoption because the detritus of South Africa’s past is evident everywhere.

2.5 Conclusion & Proposed Way Forward

In this chapter I set out to explore the nature of some of the fracturing around adoption and relinquishment in South Africa at this time. Poverty and misogyny are major contributing factors to the sheer number of children who are relinquished through abortion and abandonment (2.2.3). Many children are also relinquished into foster care (2.2.2) and a few are relinquished to be adopted (2.2.4). Of those children adopted the majority are black or coloured children adopted by white families.

The number of children relinquished is an indicator of the desperate situation in which relinquishing mothers and fathers find themselves. Their circumstances are dehumanizing. It is clear that relinquishment is most often a choice born out of necessity and not a mere ‘convenience’. Writing about relinquishment in America in the decades before *Roe vs Wade* Ann Fessler records the testimony of some of the mothers who relinquished their children; here is an example of one women’s testimony:

“I am shocked at how much it has impacted my life. I really tried to move on and forget, I tried to do what they said, but it didn’t work. I was convinced that there was something wrong with me. There must be something wrong with me”
(Fessler, 2006: 36)

With regard to belonging there are two major ways in which children live in relationship with their families: some as adopted and most as fostered. Children who are fostered are generally fostered within their extended family networks and thus have a sense of belonging in their

own culture and according to African family traditions might experience belonging in a sense similar to that of children who are adopted. Some children are fostered in institutional care. Children who are adopted are generally adopted cross culturally. Cross cultural adoption raises some concerns with regard to racial identity and the ability of white families to help black children to navigate the experience of being black. It is hard to describe the way in which adoption fits into the matrix of possibilities available to relinquishing mothers but what is clear is the reality that adoption is not simply “an uncomplicated, good thing” (Briggs 2012: 3). In the paragraphs below I will attempt to highlight some of the issues that link the context described above with the theology that I will articulate in the next chapter.

2.5.1 Hospitality & Identity

In his 1991 essay *Abortion, Theologically Understood* (Hauerwas, 2001a: 603) Stanley Hauerwas argues that the issue of abortion is more about a lack of Christian hospitality than it is about when life begins or the inconvenience of having children (Hauerwas, 2001: 611-612). In his essay Hauerwas quotes a sermon preached by Rev Terry Hamilton-Poor in which she holds up as an example a church where “if a teenager has a baby that she cannot care for, the church baptizes the baby and gives him or her to an older couple in the church that has the time and wisdom to raise the child” (Hamilton-Poor in Hauerwas, 2001: 606). A church that is committed to Christian hospitality can make room for children especially to help mothers in raising these children and helping them to belong. The circumstances of unwanted pregnancy are circumstances of inhospitality (Bauerschmidt, 2011: 302).

Women who are coerced into sex in order to provide ‘safe’ accommodation for themselves and their children. The inhospitality of communities who reject pregnant women and their babies but do nothing to curb or condemn male promiscuity. Relinquished children need hospitality and belonging, whether this is in foster care or in adoptive relationships baptism reminds us of God’s will that we belong.

Associated with hospitality is the concept of identity. One of the concerns about trans-racial adoption is the question of identity and culture. African *ubuntu* recognizes the essence of being as not just being in relationship with the visible community but also with the ancestors, the land and ecology (Mbiti, 1969: 56–57, 2015: 43–44). Hospitality that has the power to help form identity grounded not only in the present but also in culture and physical or ecological belonging is important especially with regard to trans-racial adoption. This

hospitality also needs to be considered with regard to the valid objections and position of the NABSW (1972: 3).

In exploring the reasons for abandonment rather than abortion or relinquishment for adoption one of the issues seems to be concern about ancestral or divine retribution for nurses or community workers who participate in the performance of abortions or in the facilitation of adoptions which might be seen as robbing a certain family of their lineage or causing imbalance and confusion in society (Blackie, 2014: 81–82). Modern Christianity often seems too heavily influenced by a kind of cartesian dualism of spiritual understanding and needs to find its grounding in true physicality that is willing to learn from the embodied and ecological nature of African Spirituality (Orobator, 2008: 133; Shutte, 1993a: 21, 1993b: 61–63; Willard, 1999: 84).

A properly developed Sacramental Theology with its willingness to embody theology that accepts transcendence as normative rather than occasional should be more capable of dealing with these dilemmas of detachment. This should help community workers to see ways in which cultural, spiritual and physical integrity can be maintained even when children are relinquished to be adopted, even across cultures.

2.5.2 Hope and Repair

In his book of meditations on the seven words of Christ on the cross Stanley Hauerwas quotes the poet John F Deane:

Unholy we sang this morning, and prayed
as if we were not broken; crooked
the Christ-figure hung, splayed
on bloodied beams above us;
devious God, dweller in shadows,
mercy on us;
immortal, cross-shattered Christ—
your gentling grace down upon us.
(John F Deane in Hauerwas, 2005: Loc. 47)

The sacraments of baptism and communion incorporate death and resurrection simultaneously as if they were meant to remind us that the brokenness of the moment is not all that there is. Although we remember Jesus death and resurrection while we eat the bread and drink the wine – we are re-enacting the meal that Jesus had before he was crucified and anticipating the feast of community prepared in heaven. This all happens with a deep awareness of the ‘cross

shattered-ness' of Christ. Communion that just remembered how Jesus died would be very depressing; but communion that celebrates the possibility of the heavenly banquet takes suffering and injustice and turns it in to the hope of justice. The circumstances of birth and death outlined above are devastating. Adoption is not always ideal but it is often the only viable option given the current circumstances of society. Sacraments are signs of grace; grace is desperately needed for repair in a fractured world and the evidence of this grace is the gradual repair, the sown together patchwork of belonging that promises wholeness in the fulness of time.

2.5.3 Faith, Hope and Love

These two characteristics:

Belonging as an antidote to inhospitality
and

Progressing as an acknowledgment of the fact that this is not how it ought to be but it is a move in the right direction.

Are part of an ontological framework of 'Blessedness'.

They are only possible or sensible if a good and redeeming God is central to their sensibility. It is thus a 'theology' and not an 'ethic'. As a theology of sacrament this framework should help us to understand what it means to truly belong and to be comforted by the hope of God's hand at work in restoring the world to wholeness.

In chapter 3 I will examine ways in which this theology of blessedness, belonging and progressing is evident in the *ubuntu* theology of Desmond Tutu and in *Methodist Theological Ethics* as described by Stanley Hauerwas and D Stephen Long (2011).

Chapter 3: An Ubuntu / Methodist Sacramental Theology of Hospitality and Grace

3.1 Introduction

Nikondeha compares adoption to a sacrament, calling adoption “The Sacrament of Belonging” (2017). In this chapter I will explore the helpfulness of the use of the word ‘sacrament’ to describe the adoption of children. It is not only a helpful descriptor of what happens in adoption but also a word that might be used to help describe or evaluate a good / whole or healthy approach to adoption.

Nikondeha suggests that she is Catholic (Nikondeha, 2017: Loc. 1438) although she also describes herself as ecclesiastically promiscuous (4.2.2). I will be approaching her work and the idea of sacrament from my perspective as a Methodist Minister in South Africa so I will attempt to “brew this theology in an African Pot” (Orobator, 2008: 8) by using Desmond Tutu’s Theology and practice of *ubuntu* combined with Methodist theology, hopefully I will benefit from the way in which Tutu’s theology takes cognisance of his ‘africanness’ in an attempt in a small way to ‘decolonise’ my theology. Dube argues strongly for *Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation* (Shomanah & Dube, 2012: 20–21) and with the Circle of Concerned African Woman Theologians for finding frameworks that “move away from subscribing to oppressive and exploitative paradigms,” and “... that do not embrace gender discrimination or eurocentrism” (Njoroge & Dube, 2001: 15).

My primary source for understanding Tutu’s theology will be Michael Battle’s *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (1997). In terms of African philosophy and theology I will draw from the writings of JS Mbiti and Augustine Shutte, especially from Augustine Shutte’s book *The Mystery of Humanity* (1993a) in which he develops theological concepts in Catholic theology within an African philosophical framework especially focused on an *ubuntu* understanding of personhood (Ehlers, 2017: 26; Shutte, 1993a: 27).

With regard to the Methodist perspective the Methodist Church is a fairly broad church and so it is almost impossible to claim that my perspective is ‘the Methodist perspective.’ Among Methodist perspectives I have found myself most comfortable with those of Stanley Hauerwas who incidentally describes himself as a “Methodist with a doubtful theological background”

(Hauerwas, 2010: 33). The approach to worship and ethics outlined in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (Hauerwas & Wells, 2004) and Hauerwas and Long's Essay "Methodist Theological Ethics" (Hauerwas, 2011: 255–269) will form the basis for my discussion of what I understand to be a healthy reflection of a Methodist Theological Ethic as the title of Hauerwas and Long's essay suggests. Bruce Birch's description of the importance of Biblical ethics being a "*koinonia* ethic, a community-creating ethic rooted in a compelling experience of God" (Birch, 1988: Loc. 2483) is also firmly rooted in the Methodist idiom.

In this chapter I will first give my reasons for choosing this particular framework (3.2) then I will unpack my proposed theological framework under three major headings: Blessedness (3.3), Belonging (3.4) and Progressing (3.5). Under each of these headings I will briefly unpack the concept I am seeking to describe; I will then discuss what the implications of this concept in Methodist Theological Ethics and Tutu's theology and practice of *Ubuntu*. In the next chapter I will apply this framework to Kelley Nikondeha's *Adopted: The Sacrament of Belonging in a Fracture World*.

3.2 Choosing a Theological Framework

In my previous chapter I explained and described some of the complexities that are associated with adoption and especially transracial adoption throughout the world and in South Africa in particular. Briggs puts the phenomenon of adoption in plain perspective as she writes that adoption is not "an uncomplicated, good thing" (2012: 3). One of the major criticisms of the popular Christian approaches to adoption is the idea that adoptive families are 'saving' or 'rescuing' children (Nikondeha, 2017: Loc. 1014); Briggs (2012: 5) emphasises the reality that adopted children are 'somebodies' and not 'nobodies'. On the other hand Bartholet wrote a book entitled *Nobody's Children* (2000) and speaks of the crisis of "unparented children" in the world as she argues for more adoptions from the USA and less regulations restricting adoption (Bartholet, 2010: 783).

As a minister I seek to do theology in a way that I am able to relate it to the lives of people in my congregation. In Section 3.1 I will briefly discuss two popular approaches to Christian ethics that I don't think are able to deal with the complexity of a sacramental approach to adoption and the ethical complexities highlighted above. I will do this for the sake of illustrating the strength of the model explained in 3.2 and therefore am very aware that my explanation of those modes mentioned in 3.1 will be very inadequate. The two models I will

use for illustration are a conservative evangelical model (3.1.1) and a liberal protestant approach (3.1.2) in my conclusion I will show why I think a Methodist / Ubuntu approach will be more useful.

3.2.1 A Conservative Evangelical Model²²

As a minister I've found that church members tend to look for a spiritual and 'Bible based' approach (Hauerwas & Wells, 2004: 4). Their first stop would generally be the Christian bookshop in a mall where they will be exposed to the most liberally marketed versions of Christianity (Hendershot, 2010: 20, 124). This is usually a caricature of popular conservative protestant evangelicalism.

Speaking of children Jesus says: "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs" (Matthew 19:4). In the book of James we read: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world" (James 1:27). From these simple statements we find reason to care for orphans and welcome children it seems plain and obvious.

In the Old Testament story of Moses we hear of a more interestingly textured situation; Pharaoh has promised to kill all Hebrew male children. Moses' mother floats him down the river in a basket to be rescued by Pharaoh's daughter who employs Moses' mother to care for him until he is weaned at which point he is 'adopted' into Pharaoh's family. To cut a long story short Hebrews 11:24-25 goes on to tell Moses' story of faithful rebellion later in life:

²⁴By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter,
²⁵choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.
 (Hebrews 11:24-25)

Orphans are to be cared for, children are to be valued, but the situation where Pharaoh's daughter takes Moses in is clearly condemned because of the context in which his mother is forced to abandon him and become his nursemaid. She is robbed of her identity as his mother

²² I am aware that the 'Conservative Evangelical Model' is much more complicated than this.

and he receives his identity as a Hebrew through what Dube describes as the activity of a “trickster character” (2015: 901).

A quick review of some of the more Conservative Evangelical guides that are readily available in Christian bookshops emphasises a more straight forward ‘Biblical Approach’ which tends to be very two dimensional, positing adoption as a virtuous and admirable act through which children might be saved. Grudem cites several passages from scripture in that are favour of adoption, even speaking of the way in which God adopts the faithful, but he omits Hebrews 11: 24-25 (Grudem, 2018: 1026). A book recommended by Grudem *The Gospel and Adoption* (Moore & Walker, 2017) is a collection of essays by Conservative Evangelical teachers and preachers about adoption. In the book some of the problems with adoption are raised but these are mostly about the behaviour of adopted children and the challenges of caring for them with little reference to their identity as persons. The book has an overwhelmingly positive approach to adoption and works towards building up ‘Adoption Culture’ in churches (Moore & Walker, 2017: 21, 45, 82). Adoption is extolled as a virtue and the numbers of children adopted in various regions are celebrated (Moore & Walker, 2017: 91). But the disturbing words of Hebrews 11:24-25 are never mentioned. These words stand as a reminder to me as an adoptive parent to consider carefully what it means to be the white adoptive parents of a coloured South African child.

A Conservative Evangelical reading has appeal on an existential level in that it emphasizes the supernatural activity of God in revealing scripture and giving positive and inspiring answers to difficult questions. But the approach seems to lack the ability to grasp the nuanced complexity of the issue.

3.2.2 Universal Realism and Social Gospel Approaches

The next approach is perhaps on the other extreme. The protestant liberal attempt to develop universal ethical models like those of Kant with his “categorical imperative” (Hauerwas, 2001a: 44). These ethical theories of C19 protestant liberalism stress the “social importance of Jesus teachings, but reduce them to principles barely different from Kant’s” (Wells & Quash, 2010: 91). The liberal Protestant approach of the 19th and 20th centuries seems too eager to produce an ethical model that would be acceptable in a secular world. Lovin describes describes Hauerwas’ approach as aiming towards ‘Integrity’ (Lovin, 2011: 69). Hauerwas’ criticism of liberal Protestantism in the 19th and 20th centuries is helpful:

Protestant theologians, no longer sure of the metaphysical status of Christian claims, sought to secure the ongoing meaningfulness of Christian convictions by anchoring them in anthropological generalizations and/or turning them into ethics. (Hauerwas, 2001a: 45)

Liberal Protestantism is able to suggest very reasonable principles by which decisions ought to be made. But these principles do not adequately deal with the ‘metaphysical’ side of Christian decision making. The belief that God being God might speak and act in ways that are counterintuitive.

3.2.3 Way Forward

The appeal of the Conservative, Evangelical, Biblical approach probably has to do with its ‘metaphysical’ claims. People believe that God has something to say to *them* about how they should live their lives. The theologies of people like Grudem, Moore and Walker (3.1.1) are able to inspire hopeful action in their followers. Through their advocacy thousands of children are adopted and conservative Christians are inspired to engage in significant mission and efforts toward transformation.

John Webster describes Karl Barth’s ethics represented in *Church Dogmatics* as “a moral ontology” (Webster, 1995: 1). In response to the secularisation of 19th century Protestantism Barth refused to be separated from his ‘faithfulness,’ Webster writes of Barth’s “theological concern not to drift away from hard-won conviction about the true nature of the Christian confession” (Webster, 2006: 2) but at the same time Barth is able to incorporate scientific reason. NT Wright gives an example of Barth’s ability to emphasise the narrative nature of scripture and focus on its meaning: “On being asked by a woman whether the serpent in Genesis actually spoke, he replied, ‘Madam, it doesn’t matter whether the serpent spoke. What matters is *what the serpent said*.’” (Wright, 2010: 183).

Liberal Protestantism didn’t necessarily do away with faith but in my opinion it tried too hard to be relevant without the embarrassment of believing impossible doctrines in a time of significant scientific enlightenment. This does not mean the universal principles that might be deduced from philosophical reasoning about ethical problems are irrelevant, they are very important. But ‘faith based’ insights are also important. This leads me to a framework based

in Narrative Theology drawn from insights in Hauerwas's Methodist and Tutu's *ubuntu* theology²³.

3.3 Methodist Theological Ethics and Tutu's Ubuntu Theology

In section 3.2 I've highlighted the need for a theological framework that is able to affirm the evangelical authority and power of scripture as a record of divine revelation breathed through with the Holy Spirit. A mode of interpretation that is able to deal with nuance and complexity. And a framework that is able to honour what I have highlighted in And a faith that is able to take on difficult and challenging calls to action.

3.3.1 A Methodist middle way?

A Methodist model of discernment shows promise In John Wesley's Sermon 32/44 "The Nature of Enthusiasm" Wesley strongly cautions against 'Enthusiasm' which in his time had a different meaning to the modern use of the word; he describes it as:

"...a religious madness arising from some falsely imagined influence or inspiration of God; at least, from imputing something to God which ought not to be imputed to Him, or expecting something from God which ought not to be expected from Him."
(Wesley, 1787: 204)

Although Wesley cautions against 'falsely imagined influence or inspiration' he does not dismiss the activity of God in decision making; instead he invites the use of Scripture:

"...by consulting the oracles of God. "To the law and to the testimony!" This is the general method of knowing what is "the holy and acceptable will of God.""
(Wesley, 1787: 205)

²³ I speculate that an analysis of the influences that make up Hauerwas' and Tutu's theology will probably reveal important intersections of black theology, liberation theology, Bonhoeffer, Barth, John Wesley, Thomas Aquinas, Augustine and the church of antiquity combined with a protestant openness to the influence of Eastern Orthodox theologies without the same commitment to differences of opinion that would hold sway in Catholic circles. Tutu's commitment to the sacraments as an Anglican bishop and Hauerwas' emphasis on the importance of the sacraments are also important signs that they would probably share a lot in common.

He holds it in the highest regard but he does demand that it be read ‘reasonably’ (Jones, 2016: 65). In the case of his sermon on “The Nature of Enthusiasm” he invites his decision maker to consider the scriptures and combine that reading with lived experience and reason:

“Experience tells him what advantages he has in his present state, either for being or doing good; and reason is to show, what he certainly or probably will have in the state proposed.”
(Wesley, 1787: 206)

The decision maker should first consider their current experience and see – through reason – if they would be able to serve God better according to the decision made. To this Wesley adds the work of the Holy Spirit:

Meantime, the assistance of His Spirit is supposed, during the whole process of the inquiry. Indeed it is not easy to say, in how many ways that assistance is conveyed. He may bring many circumstances to our remembrance; may place others in a stronger and clearer light; may insensibly open our mind to receive conviction, and fix that conviction upon our heart. And to a concurrence of many circumstances of this kind, in favour of what is acceptable in His sight, He may super add such an unutterable peace of mind, and so uncommon a measure of His love, as will leave us no possibility of doubting, that this, even this, is His will concerning us.
(Wesley, 1787: 206)

Outler (1985: 9) describes Wesley’s primary sources of authority in theological thinking and decision making as: Scripture ‘...interfaced with tradition’ to these he adds ‘reason’ which combines what is described as ‘experience and reason’ above; and finally ‘experience’ which is the experience and the assurance of God at work in the Holy Spirit “as assurance of one’s sins forgiven” (Outler, 1985: 9). Outler praises Wesley’s method saying:

It preserves the primacy of Scripture, it profits from the wisdom of tradition, it accepts the disciplines of critical reason, and its stress on the Christian experience of grace gives it existential force. (Outler, 1985: 10)

Jones (Jones, 2016: 81-94) modifies Outler’s quadrilateral by defining Wesley’s concept of Tradition as specifically based in the tradition of the Church of England and the Earliest Church. Wesley thus emphasizes the activity of the Holy Spirit in the Christian process of ‘doing theology’; his emphasis on reason (which is a form of experimental knowledge) means that the Methodist Theologian needs to bring an experience or evaluation of the real world into their process of discernment.

This Methodist approach reveals an ontological / metaphysical awareness of God’s activity in decision making. It incorporates reflection on the scripture narrative in a search for guidance.

It encourages reasonable evaluation of the ‘pros and cons’. Within this framework a degree of faithful mission is implied.

Hauerwas and Long’s essay “Methodist Theological Ethics” (Hauerwas & Long, 2011: 255). Articulates the notions of what I will call ‘blessedness, belonging and progressing’ as they describe the way in which their essay will unfold.

A life of beatitude – **Blessing**

First we will display Wesley’s understanding of the content of a good life—that is, the relation between happiness and holiness—by directing attention to what the Methodist tradition calls this life of beatitude.
(Hauerwas & Long, 2011: 257)

Social holiness – **Belonging**

Secondly, we will spell out the ecclesial presumption necessarily implied by the refusal to separate happiness and holiness.
(Hauerwas & Long, 2011: 257)

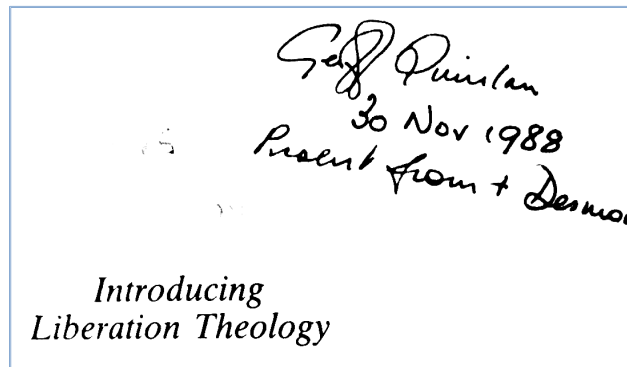
Perfect love – **Progressing**

Finally, we will explore why Methodists have rightly refused to turn holiness into an ideal never to be realized.
(Hauerwas & Long, 2011: 257)

The Methodist emphasis on “a life of beatitude” or “religion of the heart” which I will call ‘*blessedness*’. The Methodist emphasis on “social holiness” which I will call ‘*belonging*’ and third, the inevitability of transformation to “perfect love” which I will call ‘*progressing*’. In short: blessedness, belonging and progressing (Hauerwas & Long, 2011: 257) are the framework that I will use to hold Tutu’s *ubuntu theology* and *Methodist theology* together.

3.3.2 Tutu’s Ubuntu Theology

In chapter 2 I have attempted to outline some of the material issues around adoption in South Africa which should hopefully contribute to the ‘reason’ side of my thesis as per section 3.1.2 above. One characteristic of the various situations described in chapter 2 is a theme of oppression and deprivation; those who are oppressed and deprived are largely without a voice. My copy of *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Boff & Boff, 1987) has a note on its first page:



It reads “Geoff Quinlan, 30 Nov 1988, Present from + Desmond” I picked my copy up at a second hand book shop in Cape Town more than twenty years ago and it was only while I was working on this thesis that I noticed this inscription and realised that “+ Desmond” meant “Bishop Desmond.” Boff & Boff write:

Once they have understood the real situation of the oppressed, Theologians have to ask:
What has the word of God to say about this? (Boff & Boff, 1987: 32)

That this book was a gift from Bishop Desmond to Bishop Geoff indicates that it definitely featured in Tutu’s thinking and it reiterates the importance of lifting up the voices of those in situations of oppression through ‘understanding.’ Tutu’s theology is a theology of liberation that works to lift up the voices of the oppressed. But relinquished children are literally voiceless. A robust liberation hermeneutic is necessary and this is part and parcel of Tutu’s theology and practice.

In Hulley’s collection of essays: *Archbishop Tutu: prophetic witness in Southern Africa* (1996) Ndungane, describes Tutu as “Ngumnto lowo” and offers the translation: “The one in whom full personhood is manifested” (Hulley *et al.*, 1996: 71). This “full personhood” is articulated by Ndungane as realized in the way that Tutu joyfully affirms the human dignity and value of all people, his community inclusiveness and rainbow ideology and in his deep desire to include all people in a life of transformation and renewal (Hulley *et al.*, 1996: 72-75). Battle quotes Tutu: “A person is human precisely in being enveloped in the community of other human beings, in being caught up in the bundle of life. To be is to participate...” (Hulley *et al.*, 1996: 100). Within this brief description I see the same themes of *blessing*, an ontological awareness of the sacredness of existence. *Belonging*, and inclusive desire to include all people; and *progressing* – the optimistic belief in the inevitability of transformation and renewal.

3.3.3 Conclusion: A Proposed Theological Framework

As a Methodist minister in South Africa “Methodist Theological Ethics” as described by Hauerwas and Long (Hauerwas, 2011: 255) and Tutu’s theology and practice of *ubuntu* offer ethical models suited to the ethical complexity of a phenomenon like adoption. They offer a suitable framework because they are able to deal with the metaphysical idea of God being active and at work in the universe. They are able to incorporate the scriptures as valid authority for ethical reflection and they are able to take into account the nuanced ethical complexities of subjects like adoption, identity and belonging. I believe that what I describe below as “A Methodist / Ubuntu Theology of Sacramental Blessedness” will help to deal with these complexities.

3.4 A Methodist / Ubuntu Theology of Sacramental Blessedness

The themes of blessedness, belonging and progression are almost interchangeable with the virtues of faith, love and hope. I don’t want to use faith, love and hope because I want to emphasise the dynamic and positive quality of the manifestation of these virtues. Tutu’s *ubuntu* theology and Methodist theology anticipates and embraces the intentional activity of the Trinity in creation and in people; I want to emphasize this activity because I believe it points towards an ‘ontologized ethic’ which is robust enough to hold the complexity of a subject like adoption. I believe it also has the potential to do what Njoroge and Dube (2001: 15) hope a theological framework will do:

- 1 – Move away from subscribing to oppressive and exploitative paradigms.
- 2 – Propose liberating frameworks.
- 3 – Reject Gender Discrimination.
- 4 – Reject Eurocentrism.

(Njoroge and Dube, 2001: 15)

3.4.1 Blessing / Blessedness / Life of Beatitude

What Hauerwas and Long describe as the Methodist “Life of beatitude” (2011: 257) I will refer to as an ‘ontology of blessedness.’ I will discuss this in section 3.5. The ontology of blessedness is a narrative theological framework whose narrative is joy filled, hope filled, imminent, grounded in Christ’s passion and love, dynamic, beautiful, a love song of the beloved with themes of blessedness, belonging and progression (Section 3.5). In Tutu’s

ubuntu theology I see this expressed in Tutu's notion of "being caught up in the bundle of life" (Hulley *et al.*, 1996: 100). Or in Tutu's words: "There is a movement, not easily discernible, at the heart of things to reverse the awful centrifugal force of ... disharmony" (Tutu 2000: 201).

3.4.2 Belonging / Inclusivity / Social Holiness / Church

What Hauerwas and Long describe as the Methodist call the "ecclesial presumption necessarily implied by the refusal to separate happiness and holiness" (Hauerwas & Long, 2011:257) I will call an ontology of belonging. This is characterised by a deep sense of belovedness, social holiness, inclusivity and mutual transformation or progression (Section 3.6). In Tutu's theology this becomes clear in his 'rainbow' inclusivity and in his concern for the marginalised and oppressed.

3.4.3 Progressing / Perfection / Eschatology

What Hauerwas and Long describe as the Methodist refusal "to turn holiness into an ideal never to be realized" (Hauerwas & Long, 2011: 257) I will describe as progressing. Methodists believe that all people can be saved to the point of living in perfect love. Whether this is possible or not, Methodists hold this deeply optimistic view of the nature of human possibility. In Tutu's *ubuntu* theology we see this in his optimism for the possibility of redemption in all people and in the world.

3.4.4 Conclusion

These three themes of blessing, belonging and progressing are common to Methodist theology and Tutu's *ubuntu* theology. In the next 3 sections I will discuss each of these concepts at length. Section 3.5 is the most important of the three as the other two concepts, 'belonging' (3.6) and progressing (3.7) are dependent on an ontology of blessedness and the ontology of blessedness (3.5) has for its chief characteristics belonging and progressing.

3.5 Ontological Blessedness, Belonging & Progressing

3.5.1 Ontological Blessedness

Tutu preaches about Jesus (and you have to imagine Tutu's voice and cadence to hear this):

He [Jesus] came to say ‘Hey you don’t have to earn God’s love. It is not a matter for human achievement.
 Man you are,
you exist at all because God loves you already.
 You are a child of divine love.
 (Tutu 1983: 90) [emphasis mine]

If you are a child of ‘divine love’ it follows that you must be somehow ‘blessed’; if the ‘divine’ who loves is good. This is the nature of an ontology of blessedness. The conviction that everything only exists because of the love of God. *Perichōrēsis* is the right metaphor for the work of the Trinity in this ontology. This active dance of the trinity draws creation into loving, liberated and lively transforming communion as ‘all creation groans in anticipation’ (Romans 8:22-24) and as creation is drawn in to the love between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This ontology of blessedness recognizes the metaphysical quality of the vital ‘force’ or ‘power’ of this faith fulfilled relationship and existence. As I describe this framework below there are many themes that intersect and entangle but I will try to keep the conversation organized.

3.5.1.1 The Blessedness of the Happy-are-they-s

This theology of blessedness is expressed most explicitly in the Beatitudes of Jesus. I don’t think the various words that we use in our English Bibles for the beatitudes are adequate to describe what they mean. I grew up with the Good News use of the word ‘happy are they’ but the more mature Bible’s seemed to prefer ‘blessed’ – thinking about the concept of *eudemonia* it seems that Christian tradition has tended to understand these beatitudes as an expression of *eudemonia* categories of happiness and fulfilment / human flourishing.

Of the 44 Sermons which the MCSA holds as central to its doctrine 13 are based on Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Wesley, 1787: Sermons 16-28) – for Wesley these sermons were the cornerstone of Christian Theology (Wesley, 1787: 95, Hauerwas & Long, 2011: 258). They describe what Wesley called the ‘religion of the heart’ or ‘life of beatitude.’ Hauerwas and Long show that this tradition of ‘religion of the heart’ is not exclusively Methodist.

Augustine’s *Summa Theologiae* is also described by Pinckaers, a Catholic moral theologian as a “listening to the Lord teaching on the mountain” (Hauerwas & Long, 2011: 258, Pinckaers, 1995: 24, 28).

The central theme of the beatitudes is the word ‘blessed’ In Jesus sermon on the mount the beatitudes, blessings, macarisms or happy-are-they-s are a revelation of the true and joyful purpose of human existence (Hauerwas & Long, 2011: 258; Collins, 1992: 630). Yet they point out the unconventional emphasis which Wesley perceived in the Sermon on the Mount. For Aristotle this happiness could be ‘achieved’ but in Wesleyan thought and in the spirit of the scriptural promise of blessing this ‘happiness’ is received through “friendship with God” (Hauerwas & Long, 2011: 259). This happiness is thus ontologically imparted, it is a by-product of existing in love.

3.5.1.2 An Ontology of Joy and Hope

Joy

Existence in love produces the possibility of hope filled joy even in the most oppressive circumstances. In Moltmann’s *Theology and Joy* he quotes the Dutch biologist and philosopher Buytendijk who says: “...the birds are singing much more than Darwin permits” (Moltmann, 1971: 43). The beauty of birds singing reminds the world that our existence creates room for celebration and intrinsic joy. When blessedness produces belonging and progressing joy just can’t help being there too. Joy is a chief characteristic of this ontology of blessedness. Tutu embodies a childlike joyful ability to tease out the beauty even in the most hopeless circumstances. He takes seriously the call to receive the Kingdom of God like a child and writes of children in his acknowledgments at the end of his *Children of God: Storybook Bible* (2010) “Through their eyes I have seen the Bible stories anew and it is in their future that I see God’s dream fulfilled” (Tutu, 2010: 127). Mandela would say of Tutu:

“Desmond Tutu has often spoken about the God in which he believes as a being with a great sense of humour. What he himself brought to our national life is that uplifting touch of lightness and humour amid the most serious messages and teachings.”
(Mandela quoted in Tutu, 2011b: 226)

John Wesley would describe an “altogether Christian” as opposed to an “Almost Christian” as someone who had such love in his heart and soul that “his spirit continually ‘rejoiceth in God his Saviour’” a test of the fullness of being an “altogether Christian” was the question: “Are you happy in God? Is he your glory, your delight, your crown of rejoicing?” (Wesley, 1787: 13 and 15). For Wesley; and in Methodist theology this deep joyful exuberance is only possible through faith; and as Wesley qualifies this faith: “It is a sure trust and confidence

which a man hath in God, that, by the merits of Christ, his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God; whereof doth follow a loving heart, to obey his commandments” (Wesley, 1787: 14). Those who live in this faith paradigm have no choice but to be ‘happy in God’; to find ‘delight’ in God, to experience God as a ‘crown of rejoicing’.

Tutu’s humour was not a way of avoiding the devastation of apartheid and injustice. Instead joy was a counterweight worthy to lift and expose oppression (Moltmann, 1971: 40). One illustration he was fond of using was a chance encounter with a child during the time of forced removals, he asked what she does when there is no food to eat, her reply: “We borrow food.” His next question, making what my children would classify as a ‘Dad Joke’:

“And have you ever returned any of the food you borrowed?”

“No” (Tutu, 2011b: 236, Tutu, 2005: 67).

Tutu is able to use comedic timing to remind us of the humanity of this child reflected in the cheekiness of a ‘dad joke’ and remind us of the potential for joy in the sadness of her experience. This is not in order to make light of a serious situation it is a call to action to people to change this situation and to himself to do something – to keep working towards the realised humanity of all God’s people and creation.

Hope

The potential for joy elicits hope.

Hannah and Mary living as the oppressed of the oppressed are able to rejoice and sing songs of joy at the hope of the birth of Samuel and Jesus respectively. In his 1991 essay *Abortion, Theologically Understood* after a fairly negative assessment of the purpose of having children in a fallen world; which he points out should not be a selfish act, Hauerwas writes:

We are able to have children because our hope is in God, who makes it possible to do the absurd thing of having children. In a world of such terrible injustice, in a world of such terrible misery, in a world that may well be about the killing of our children, having children is an extraordinary act of faith and hope... But as Christians we can have hope in the God who urges us to welcome children. When that happens, it is an extraordinary testimony of faith.
(Hauerwas, 1991: 615)

This ontology of blessedness is able to reframe our understanding of life and being itself and bring it into a hope-filled paradigm of joyfulness. This is not a theology that produces an ethic of duteous ethical observance and it is not a motivating *telos*. Instead it produces an imminent and dynamic *way* that is not about the future or the past – but rather grounded in the present in the light of the meaning of past and future (Smith, 2009: 204). This ‘telos’ is further explored and described in section 3.7. But the notion of this ontology having a beginning – the sense that we are created in love and for love and having a *telos* points to its *narrative* nature. This has implications for the way scripture is received and for ethical discernment and practice.

3.5.1.3 Telosontological²⁴ ethics (See also 3.5.3)

Scripture Narrative

Scott McKnight claims that “Going back to the Bible teaches us to read the Bible as God’s story” (McKnight, 2010: 58). Narrative recognizes the *storiedness* of creation and of scripture. Everything is held within this story and ethics must be worked out within the thrust of that story. Tutu writes that “there is a movement, not easily discernible, at the heart of things to reverse the awful centrifugal force of alienation...” (Tutu, 2000: 201) in reading this we might be inclined to believe that ‘*there is a power at work in the universe that is working towards God’s telos*’. A narrative ontology says rather *there is a universe at work in the power that is God’s telos*.’

Eucharist Narrative

Hauerwas and Wells’ *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* is structured around the service of Eucharist. This means that each essay on each diverse subject is written mindful of the context of worship. For the writers to write for a book centred in the service of Eucharist is for them to work out their ethics within a specific ontological framework. As Banner argues

²⁴ Telosontological is my own word and I’ll just use it here. It is a play on teleological ethics; the notion of working towards a purpose (ends justify means). And deontological ethics (duteous behavior) which is similar but different. Telosontological ethics is ethics whose ontology is defined by an end that is God’s own *telos* which is a mystery. A mystery which we can know something of because: A – (God is love) & B – (God is good)

the “ethical arguments are familiar” (Banner, 2007: 109), probably proving that many ‘modern’ theologians, or those chosen by the editors tend to work in this framework in any case.

I’m not sure that the structure of the book is as central to the work of the writers as it should be to the readers, the book wasn’t there when the writers wrote it. The structure of the book is received by the reader because in reading and interpreting these essays on ethics the reader is invited to be caught up in the liturgical movement of the service of worship. As Schmemmann points out “...the whole liturgy is sacramental” (Schmemmann, 1982: 42) and this liturgy links the world of now, beyond the walls of the church, to the world to come. “And the very goal of this movement of ascension is to take us out of ‘this world’ and to make us partakers if the *world to come*” (Schmemmann, 1982: 42).

This location of existence in God’s narrative means that everything and everyone has a certain sacramentality. This eucharistic narrative is an ontological framework that creates the possibility of new meanings, horizons of understanding and assimilates all of this into the formation of character through an embodied spiritual experience (Ward, 2006: 440). And thus it has the power to form and interpret our Christian identity described by Gascoigne as “... a praxis based in and inspired by a particular narrative” (Hauerwas and Wells, 2004: 37, Ward, 2006: 443).

It is within this ontological narrative linked as Schmemmann described with the world beyond the church and with the *world to come* – the *telos* of God. In the unfolding of *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* ethicists may see the importance of an ontological narrative for the development and structuring of ethics that are able to handle the metaphysical nature of human experience and crisis.

Imafidon & Bewaji’s *Ontologized Ethics: New Essays in African Meta-Ethics* (2013) points to the importance in African ethical models of a meta-ethic that is able to link the “is” to the “ought” asking:

...to what extent is ethics, or our idea of what is permissible or impermissible, grounded on ideas of what fundamentally exists or what it means to be? (Imafidon & Bewaji, 2013: xi)

They go on to point out that the problem with ‘secular’ / ‘western’ ethics as opposed to African ethics is in their severing the link between ontological metaphysics and ethics in an

attempt to establish universal norms that seem in some way ashamed of incorporating the mystery of a spiritual reality (Imafidon & Bewaji, 2013: ix); this criticism is obviously very similar to Hauerwas's critique of Protestant Liberalism (3.2.2; Hauerwas). It still speaks to the importance of a sophisticated meta-ethic capable of seeing beyond the surface, able to incorporate culture and spirit into its field of understanding.

3.5.1.4 African Relational Ontology

The 'realness' of sonship, motherhood and fatherhood is dependent on a relationality. The African idiom of *ubuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* or "a person is a person through persons" (Shutte, 1993b: 46) describes a way in which the fullness of our humanity is realized in the quality of our reception of and interaction with others (Battle, 1997: 45). This *ubuntu* relationality informs and reflects an understanding of Trinitarian *perichōrēsis* through which and in which the persons of the Trinity exist "mutually permeating one another" (LaCugna 1993: 72). Zizioulas reflects on the relational ontology of the Trinity:

Being is not static and beings are not self-explicable but *emerge* from a constant movement of relationality. On the other hand, it gives to being a quality of *love* and to love an *ontological* character: to be *is to exist for the other*, not for the self and to love is not to "feel" something about the other, but to *let the other be and be other*.
(Zizioulas in Polkinghorne, 2010: 150)

In this dynamic movement through which beings are realized in relationship and in love all reality is dependent on the generosity and grace of God who gives existence as a manifestation of his love. As a generous and life giving God this God needs nothing in return because as a Trinity of love it is in God's nature to exist for the other. In God's being the fullness of human 'being' is able to be realised.

Part of the beauty of this *ubuntu* and *perichoretic* relationality is that it disrupts traditional cartesian dualism. Tutu compares Descartes' "I think therefore I am," to *ubuntu*'s "I am because I belong" (Battle, 2011a: 22). Being in relationality knows its source and its purpose because God is. And if God is truly revealed in the loving frame of Jesus then God is love. And if God is love then people are created for love, which is a synthesis of faith, hope and delight.

Moltmann outlines the legacy of a split between Western and Eastern Christianity over the nature of the persons of the Trinity (Moltmann, 1981: 190). LaCugna argues that the best way

to do away with the complex controversy over some of the steps of this divine dance is to remember to see its importance as a metaphor for the realisation of “divine life as all creatures partake and literally exist in it”²⁵ (LaCugna, 1993: 274, Duck & Wilson-Kastner, 1999: 20, 39) and describing “God and humanity as beloved partners in the dance” (LaCugna, 1993: 274, Duck & Wilson-Kastner 37). To remember the ultimate goal of this doctrine is more than anything to describe the way in which human beings can find themselves in a redemptive relationship with God who loves and redeems. McDougal (2003: 182-189) responds to some of the common objections to Moltmann’s Trinitarian thought but an important point she makes is about the importance of the way in which Moltmann conceptualizes the *imago Dei* realised “as the human being’s eschatological destiny instead of its lost origin” (McDougall, 2003: 190). *Perichōrēsis* emphasizes divine / human partnership in sanctification and renovation of the *imago Dei* as every human being’s ultimate destiny.

Moltmann writes of the transfiguration of Jesus and the transformation of people in terms of the mutual glorification of the persons of the trinity: “They glow into perfect form through one another and awake to perfected beauty in one another ... And it is only this doctrine that corresponds doxologically to ‘the glorification of the Spirit’ in the experience of salvation” (Moltmann, 1981: 176). This ontology of blessedness is dynamic. This perichoretic energy translates from the persons of the Trinity and incorporates humanity into an uplifting and transformative dance. LaCugna celebrates the potential of this derived ontology as the source of an important and clear “break away from the extreme individualism of the Cartesian framework” because “persons-in-relation are the building block of every society” (LaCugna, 1993: 266,). In some sense this equal and mutually uplifting partnership of the persons of the

²⁵ LaCugna explains how the notion of *perichōrēsis* is different to Aquinas’ preferred word “*circuminsessio*, from *circum-in-sedere*, to sit around.” *Circum-in-sedere* does not adequately account for the dynamic activity of the Trinity; or the joy and goodness that Trinitarian love produces; *Perichōrēsis* allows more space for an incarnational / missional Theology of the work of the Trinity (LaCugna 1993: 272–273).

Trinity models a possibility for human community that seeks to imitate Jesus and be perfected in love (Tanner, 2018: 381)²⁶.

Mbiti describes an African concept of God that does away with arguments that fixate on the nature of God's substance by simply explaining: "God is not created, he is not begotten, he is not born, he is not made: he exists of his own, and from his own existence all things received their own existence" (Mbiti, 2015: 58). This is not the only 'African ontology' but given its lack of need to deal with the questions of the concepts that have caused the most conflict in the debate between the Eastern and Western Christians an 'African' systematic theology may offer helpful solutions. I believe that the *perichōrēsis* of the persons of the trinity is a helpful metaphor for a way in which the concept of trinity may complement African traditional thought in the *ubuntu* idiom (Mbiti, 1986: 229).

This understanding of the activity of the Trinity which incorporates, and uplifts humanity is accompanied in African philosophy by the concept of *seriti* (Shutte 1993b:52-53). *Seriti* is described as the binding substance of *ubuntu* which passes from person to person as a shared life force which is built up in personal relationship and mutual caring (Shutte 1993b: 52-53). In the search for describing the hypostatic substance of the Trinity Lacugna notes Boff's identification of this divine substance *perichōrēsis* itself (Lacugna, 1993: 277, Boff, 2005: 133–134). Shutte describes *seriti* as a kind of metaphysical energy or force that makes the metaphysical connections of being through relationship possible (Shutte 1993b: 46-47). Tempels writes: "Force is even more than a necessary attribute of beings: force is the nature of beings, force is being, being is force" (Tempels in Shutte, 1993b: 52). According to Coetzee and Roux More argues that *seriti* is not a 'force' but rather "a moral and social concept that has to do with observable behaviour patterns and human relationships" (Coetzee & Roux, 2015: 198). A synthesis of More's description and Shutte's description might be well suited to Boff's idea of the *perichōrēsis* as the divine substance. For the sake of

²⁶ Tanner is appropriately critical of "Inflated Claims for the Trinity" (Tanner 2018: 365) noting the way in which ideas of the equality or intra-Trinitarian *oikos* is not necessarily a good illustration to use in theologies of liberation because of the foundational differentness of each member of the Trinity which might lead to notions of complementarity. Metaphors are always limited, I think the strength of the metaphor is found in the mutual and uplifting *intra-kenosis* of the Trinity.

metaphors that are always inadequate to describe God I will have to say that whether it travels in particles or waves it is still light. Love is the essential energy of God's nature and being and love is sometimes a noun and sometimes a verb.

In Shutte's description of *ubuntu* ontology *seriti* is the way in which this force is active through all of creation seeking and maintaining the balance of justice. Shutte writes:

“...the moral life in all its individual, social and political ramifications is understood as the struggle to increase the power of this force ...Anything that diminishes this force is evil, anything that increases it is good.”
(Shutte, 1993b: 57)

This helps one to see how the concept of *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* is not only ontological in and of itself but is also grounded in meta-ethics. An ontology of *ubuntu* that implies real existence is marked by a tendency toward goodness and vital activity. He goes on to say:

“...being and force are synonymous in this system of thought. So the force that comes to me to increase my vital force can't be seen as being merely added to me. Although it *comes* to me, it becomes my own vital activity. In receiving it I become more myself. To put it in a somewhat “European” idiom: it is a transformation from *within*.”
(Shutte, 1993b: 57)

Following the theme of Hauerwas and Wells' *Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* and inspired by Vanhoozer's essay “Beauty and the Arts” the analogy of music in worship is a helpful way to understand this metaphor for understanding the trinity. If the *perichōrēsis* is a dance and as Boff suggests the very movement of the dance is the essence of God I would suggest that *seriti* is a metaphor for its music. As Vanhoozer writes “music always conveys some sense of being-in-the world” (Hauerwas, Wells & Vanhoozer, 2011: 116).

Someone has said that painting or drawing decorates surfaces, sculpture decorates space, but music decorates time. Music, art and dance is a combination of all three; an embodiment of human soul expression directed towards communion with God. In this self-emptying movement of worship humans make room in their dance for the transfiguring presence of the Trinity. Eugene Petersen writes of the first song of Revelation 5:

The three-lined hymn ... limns the wholeness of the godhead. All being is included in God. All reality is here ... The living creatures form a quartet to sing it:

Holy, holy, holy
Is Lord God Almighty
The is, the was, the cometh.

(Peterson, 1991: 66)

In my imagination the music of Revelation exists to remind us of the abstraction of time and space through music to pass on the ontological message that all of creation is pervaded with this one song of a Holy God engaged in the redemption and restoration of creation. Music is a deeply sensual experience in which members of a choir or orchestra literally manifest the existence of music in harmony with and to one another. I think *ubuntu* is vigorously expressed in the passion and vigour of hymns sung in four-part harmony in the *Umbedesho* and hymn book services of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa of which I am a part. The vibrations of harmonies that resonate from person to person and hymnbook to hymnbook might well be described as *seriti*.

3.5.1.5 Ontological Knowing & Decision Making

On discerning the will of God Archbishop Tutu, Quoted by Villa-Vicencio declares:

“It is extremely difficult to know and discern the will of God. It involves thoughtfulness, a willingness to search the scriptures, an ability to plumb the depths of the Christian tradition, and consultation. God’s will has to do with what is right, just, decent and healing of the wounds of society. To know what this means we need to cleanse ourselves of ourselves – of our fears, greed, ambitions and personal desires. This is where prayer, fasting, meditation and the sacraments play such an important role. Honest prayer and disciplined living is an incredibly illuminating and revealing thing.”
(Hulley, Kretzschmar & Pato, 1996: 44)

This process of discernment is based on reason (thoughtfulness), scripture, tradition and consultation. It is also based on carefully considering which path is the most effective path toward peace and healing, as such it is practical.

But in common with Methodism to know the will of God you should be in ‘friendship’ with God through ‘honest prayer.’ In this whole process Tutu embodies *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* subjecting his sense of *ubuntu* to participation in the life of the Trinity and consideration of the circumstances of the community around him.

Similarities in Tutu’s and Wesley’s theological framework should not be surprising; Wesley, like Tutu was a good Anglican. Anglican theology emphasizes its ‘three legged stool,’ of Scripture, Tradition and Reason (Thatcher, 2011: 33). To these three legs Outler discerned the addition of Experience as a hallmark of Methodist Theology saying that by adding “‘experience’ to the traditional Anglican triad,” Wesley was “adding vitality without altering

the substance” (Outler, 1985: 10). Tutu’s description of illuminating prayer is a way of describing the experience of the witness of the Spirit that Outler defines as the fourth leg of Wesley’s quadrilateral (Hulley, Kretzschmar & Pato, 1996: 44, Tutu, 2005: 112).

In the theology and practice of the Methodists Hauerwas and Long argue that Methodist Ethics is ‘*preached, sung and lived*’ (Hauerwas & Long, 2011: 255). Preached in that Methodist preachers are to preach the possibility and the inevitability of the work of the saving love of God. This love is partnered with belief in the possibility of ‘Christian perfection’ defined by John Wesley as:

“...the love of God shed abroad in our heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us”; producing love to all mankind, and more especially to the children of God; expelling the love of the world, the love of pleasure, of ease, of honour, of money, together with pride, anger, self-will, and every other evil temper; in a word, changing the earthly, sensual, devilish mind, into “the mind which was in Christ Jesus.”
(Wesley, 1999: Sermon 43)

Methodist ethics is thus based in transformational and dynamic ontology of blessedness described above in Wesley’s words as ‘the love of God shed abroad in our heart’ this love is the product of Holy Spirit at work in dynamic relationship with human beings.

Hauerwas and Long point out that Methodist Theological Ethics is embodied in the life of living people ontologically living in the presence and under the gaze of the living God. In a passage that sounds like it belongs in a Transfiguration Sunday Sermon Hauerwas and Long describe the way in which the worshipping community encounters God in order to be shaped ethically and Theologically for life:

“First, the law is given to Moses on Mount Sinai as he gazes upon the glory of God. Then, without abrogating that law, Jesus looks down from the mountain and pronounces blessedness upon all who embody its meaning. In so doing, he radiates the glory of God (a glory he also demonstrated on a mountain in his transfiguration). These two mountains merge into one as Jesus’ beatitudes “fulfil,” that is complete or perfect, the law. The law is not an end in itself,²⁷ but rather the law points forward to its figural fulfilment in Christ who alone recognizes its meaning and offers the eschatological judgment: “blessed are you when” Gazing upon the vision directs our will and intellect to the knowledge and

²⁷ “Nor was it to be this in Judaism as midrash itself demonstrates.” (Hauerwas, 2011: 269)

desires of God. Theology and morality are united. This is the religion of the heart.”
(Hauerwas & Long, 2011: 261)²⁸

Blessedness produces hopefulness and joy; it is linked to hopefulness and joy; it is given or imparted to people by God. It also produces (as per Wesley’s sermon above) “love to all mankind” (Wesley, 1999: Sermon 43). This emphasis on love is expressed in a theology of ‘belonging’ and in Tutu’s intentional inclusivity.

3.5.1.6 Ontological Blessedness Conclusion

This blessedness or human flourishing exists in love. Christians believe that God is love because Jesus has proved this foundational aspect of the creator’s existence by emptying himself in order to welcome humanity and redeem creation (3.6 & 3.7). This ‘blessedness’ is not the kind of ‘blessedness’ that the world looks for. It is not an ‘achievable’ blessedness, it is blessedness that is surrendered to or imparted by the very nature of God through the Holy Spirit and Trinity who in the model of the *perichōrēsis* lifts humanity up in its ‘dance’. This dance is a decidedly African dance an *ubuntu* manifestation of community and in this dance is the realisation is a modified *ubuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*.

I am a person because of other persons and the ultimate person that I am because of is God the Holy Trinity.

The next two sections describing an Ontology of Belonging and of Progressing are much shorter because the basis for these concepts is in the section above (3.5.1) ‘Ontological Blessedness.’

²⁸ Shutte’s reflection on the nature of *ubuntu* he speaks of the experience of lovers gazing into each other’s eyes. This experience produces a reaction in the people who are looking at each other. One person has an effect on the other (Shutte, 1993b: 78). Hauerwas and Long’s description of the transfiguration of Jesus and the face of people confronted with the face of God is a beautiful summary metaphor for what a worship filled ontology might signify.

3.5.2 Ontology of Belonging

Simply put, this ontology of belonging is testimony to the notion that everyone is invited because everyone is beloved by God. This theological ontological framework is inevitably inclusive because nothing that exists exists beyond God's capacity for love and redemption.

This faith-filled ontology of blessedness is also an ontology of belonging and belovedness. Marcus Borg's descriptions of the notions of faith and believing has formed and described my own understanding of what it means to have faith:

... to believe in God is to believe God. Faith is about believing God and all that God believes. The Christian life is about believing God and all that God believes. Faith is our love for God. Faith is the way of the heart.
(Borg, 2004: 41)

This idea of 'belovedness' implies a sense of living a foundational ontological awareness of all being as being in God who is loving and thus as beloved and so it follows, naturally that in love we can belong.

Belongingness is integral to both Methodist and Ubuntu theology and practice. Methodist inclusivity is described in the Methodist Book of Order:

Membership is not conditional upon the profession of theological tenets, or dependent upon traditional authority or ecclesiastical ritual. It is based upon a personal experience of the Lord Jesus Christ, brought about by the Spirit, ranging from the earliest signs of Divine Grace in the soul to its crowning blessedness in the joy of 'perfect love', and upon a sharing of such gifts of grace with others seeking or enjoying a similar experience.
(MCSA, 2016, para. 3.1)

In theory; membership of the Methodist Church is not determined by confirmation, or any other ritual – but by the Spirit who draws people into belonging / fellowship or communion. Unfortunately, this high ideal is often lost in practice. Membership of the Methodist Church, which denotes responsible relationship; is attached to progressive transformation to holiness (the joy of 'perfect love') in partnership; or sharing with others on the same journey. In this partnership Methodists intentionally seek to grow towards holiness. "We cultivate virtues within the context of communities that form our character." (Hauerwas & Long, 2011: 259) It is in this community that individuals are invited to participate in the perichoretic activity of the Trinity; a constant and sociable conversation of review, redemption and renewal. "The result is a holiness that bears witness to God's renewal of creation." (ibid.) This movement to

holiness or Christian perfection is “...dependent on both personal and social holiness” (Forster, 2008: 2). This Social holiness is not only in terms of being transformed by interacting with others; but by reaching out to others in all situations to be a blessing, to be “salt and light”.

The late Rev Ross Olivier wrote, in reflection on John Wesley’s theology and practice of church community expressed in the formation of bands and class meetings that “Mr Wesley never knew the word Ubuntu but he embraced and taught the concept clearly” (Olivier, 2006: 9). These bands and class meetings are able to transcend race, class and culture in uniting people in their lived worship of Christ.

Ubuntu and Methodist Theological Ethics both place maximum impetus on this relationality that. This emphasis on belonging is not just about relationality but also about inclusivity. Recent and continued controversy in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and in the United Methodist Church about the acceptance of same-sex marriage and the ordination of LGBTiQ clergy is testament to the impetus toward inclusivity in Methodist Theology (or Spirituality) even though Methodist Praxis might not yet have caught up²⁹. This DNA of inclusivity has meant that the Methodist Church will always pay attention to the voices of outsiders and under compulsion of love move toward inclusivity. Belonging, in the tradition of Ubuntu refuses to see individuals; it sees only communities, and these communities extend in time to ancestors and in space to extended families and relationships. It might be argued that these communities don’t just extend to the past – but they extend into the future as rites like marriage anticipate nurturing children and ‘till death do us part.’

Discussing the *perichōrēsis* of the Trinity Lacugna (1993: 272-273) points out three foundations for ethics according to the feminist theologian Wilson-Kastner; these foundations are:

‘Inclusiveness’; which Lacugna describes as “accepting a person in the light of our own common humanity” (LaCugna, 1993: 273);

‘Community’ which she describes as “interrelatedness at every level of reality” (LaCugna, 1993: 273); and

²⁹ Mtshiselwa (2010: 770–777) traces some of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa’s

‘Freedom’ the capacity to exercise “personhood under the conditions of genuine community” (LaCugna, 1993: 273). This sense of belongingness which is at once about being inclusive and explicitly ontological in relationality should gravitate towards the values of God’s own Trinitarian economy.

Tutu’s Ubuntu philosophy does not discriminate in its ideology of who is *umuntu*, everyone is the other through which our humanity is realized. Tutu was able to recognize soldiers from the apartheid forces as *umuntu*, as people with the innate potential for good, calling out to them to “join the winning side” (Tutu, 2000: 69). In his optimism about the potential for holiness in all people he was even able to vouch for former Nationalist President FW DeKlerk receiving a Nobel Peace Prize together with Nelson Mandela³⁰. As an intentional peace maker his “central concern is the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships, a seeking to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator” (Tutu, 2000: 46).

In South Africa which was divided by race specifically with the implementation of Apartheid in 1948 the Methodist Church was able to maintain general unity despite points of failure and a vast diversity within its own unity. In a bold response to pressure from the Apartheid government and conservative members within the ranks of the Methodist Church who advocated that the church should split along racial lines; in 1958 the Conference of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa declared that the church across racial lines should be “one and undivided, trusting the lead of God to bring this ideal to ultimate fruition” (Forster, 2008: 8).

Methodist Social Holiness would not allow the church to be divided up by outside pressures and would open the church to listen to diverse voices and even to create channels to amplify them. One of these channels of social consciousness was the Black Methodist Caucus³¹. Those take the bold step of forming an organisation like the BMC trust that their raised voice

³⁰ Mr. de Klerk in fact made a very handsome apology for apartheid when he appeared before the commission in 1996, and then spoiled it all when he qualified it virtually out of existence (Tutu, 2000: 192).

³¹ BMC

has the potential to be heard; because those who need to hear that raised voice and don't know it are Methodist and in their "DNA" of Spirituality is the knowledge of the need to love and listen; to pay attention to marginalized voices. Forster (2008: 12) notes that the BMC:

"...helped to re-appropriate the values, traditions and religion of Africa in the Methodist Church.
...the BMC has significantly helped the MCSA to reinvent itself as an African Christian denomination through education, publication, and the presentation of the value and necessity of black and African theologies."

Social holiness meant that the church would pay attention to this voice and recognize that listening and responding was a practical act of worship.

This is essentially a social religion, I mean not only that it cannot subsist so well, but that it cannot subsist at all, without society, -- without living and conversing with other men.
(Wesley, 1787: Sermon 19)

The voice of the BMC would shape the activities of the church; just as Methodism from its inception was shaped and formed by its recognition of the importance of visiting those who were otherwise excluded; widows and the poor and even prisoners (Heitzenrater, 2003: 225). The church is actively formed and transformed through the belonging of its members in their diversity; and not only in their mutual belonging but in the importance of their being in conversation as Wesley highlights above.

The Methodist Church continues to shape its Theology by listening to the voices of its members lay and ordained who participate in its governance and formation. For Wesley ethics was practically lived and was inseparable from Theology and practical love of God and neighbour; in anticipation of the rise of the secularizing arguments of Rousseau, Voltaire and Hume Wesley wrote, late in his life:

Men hereby wilfully and designedly put asunder what God has joined, ...It is separating the love of our neighbour from the love of God
(Hauerwas, 2011: 260).

Loving people is not always as easy as loving God. There were and still are huge divisions in the Methodist Church around race, tribe, culture and theology. It is in this difficulty of loving each other that Tutu offers a challenge. Battle (2009: Loc. 1124) notes that *ubuntu* thinking could also be very problematic in the case of prejudiced communities; if people are people because of other people what happens if a community identifies some of these people as sub-

human and rejects them because of their differences. In South Africa this situation is not hypothetical; it was in the nature of apartheid. Tutu with his trademark ‘rainbow’ ideology advocated for tolerance:

We must help cultivate tolerance which is the hallmark of the mature, of the secure or the self-confident who are not threatened by the autonomy of others and who don't have to assert themselves by an aggressive abrasiveness.
(Battle, 2009: 1107)

Tutu encourages the celebration of differences; he invites reconciliation and healing and does not allow anyone to go ‘unnamed’. He is careful to acknowledge and celebrate the *imago Dei* in every human being no matter how distorted that *imago Dei* might have become; or different that *imago Dei* might be. In celebration of her ordination as one of the first female priests in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa Wilma Jacobsen writes: “We wondered if it could have happened without him” (Crawford-Browne, 2006: 134) Tutu sensitively held the deeply divided CPSA³² through its deliberations over the ordination of women in 1992; gently guiding and pastorally caring for a diverse church. He didn’t let his own frustration and passion for the ordination of female clergy overwhelm his respect for the community which he led.

In celebrating uniqueness and diversity Tutu makes an important point that is essential to the topic of trans-racial adoption:

The worst crime that can be laid at the door of the white man ... is not our economic, social, and political exploitation, however reprehensible that might be; no, it is that his policy succeeding in filling most of us with a self-disgust and self-hatred.
(Tutu, quoted in Battle, 1997: 166)

Steve Biko boldly identified and spoke out against the glorification of whiteness and the subjugation of blackness in South Africa. Writing about a desire to be included he remarked that he did not want to be included on ‘white’ terms; according to white culture, but looked forward to being received with his black identity, on black terms within a transformed and renewed / Africanised white culture (Biko, 1987: 23). Belonging in terms of Tutu’s practice

³² Church of the Province of South Africa (Anglican)

of *Ubuntu* allows everyone to belong on their terms; and is especially conscious of those who may in any way be marginalized because of the power of dominant identities.

Wesley emphasized the importance of experiencing God in community and believed according to the commandment of Jesus that love of God was just like love of neighbour. Wesley's willingness to love meant that he would travel to wherever he was needed to preach the gospel and he would gladly share the love of God with prisoners and the poor as well as the well to do. For Tutu all people are sacred signs of the living presence of God.

“When we pass in front of an altar we normally reverence the altar with a bow, but before the reserved sacrament we usually genuflect ...
 “It is not fanciful to say that if we took our theology seriously, we should genuflect to one another” (Battle, 2009: Loc. 1158-1164).

Tutu's practice of graceful love; his emphasis on the *imago Dei* shining through the faces of diverse people point to an optimism for human beings that recognizes the potential in individuals and in communities for reconciliation and redemption. Tutu writes:

Ubuntu teaches us that our worth is intrinsic to who we are. We matter because we are made in the image of God. *Ubuntu* reminds us that we belong in one family – God's family.
 (Tutu, 2011a: 24)

Belonging is central to Methodist and *ubuntu* theology. Both recognize that our spiritual journey is dependent on a partnership / a fellowship with those who surround us. This fellowship must intentionally be diverse in its nature because it is only in conversation and sharing of blessing that we truly grow. This growth is towards holiness and the joy of perfect love.

3.5.3 Ontology of Progressing (See also 3.5.1.1)

In section 3.5.1 I emphasised the importance of the idea that the narrative has a beginning and an end. I think it is important to hold in our imaginations the reality that end and beginning disappear if God truly is *Alpha* and *Omega* / Beginning and End. The beginning of time and the end of time in God are all at once, all possibilities exist simultaneously in one moment, but that moment is always full of God. In whom time and space exists. As I have stated in 3.5.1.3:

“...we might be inclined to believe that ‘*there is a power at work in the universe* that is working towards God’s telos’. A narrative ontology says rather *there is a universe at work in the power* that is God’s telos.’
(Section 3.5.1.3)

For the context of our existence and understanding this is imaginary. To live and move we need time and in time we have narrative. The narrative is characterised by its beginning – created in love by God, this beginning must pervade all of existence, and its end, redeemed in love by God, . We live in the between time so we have to use words like ‘progressing’ to describe something that always is. So progressing is all at once and from the past into the future immediately³³.

...we are made for something different. We know we are made for freedom, and even when you stamp on us almost forever, as a tyrant you have had it and freedom will come, human beings will strive after something better. For we know inside us that we are made for the transcendent. (Tutu, 2005: 116)

All over this magnificent world God calls us to extend His kingdom of shalom – peace and wholeness – of justice, of goodness, of compassion, of caring, of sharing, of laughter, of joy, and of reconciliation. God is transfiguring the world right this very moment *through us* because God *believes in us* and because God *loves us*. (Tutu, 2005: 128)

Progressing implies the existence of a time frame with a beginning and an end – the idea of progressing toward something. Tutu’s hopefulness expressed in *God has a Dream* vouches for God’s ultimate end. A day when the world will be put right; The Day of the Lord, when love will reign. The Judeo-Christian tradition with its vast recorded history and gathered creation and origin stories that express an ideal beginning (Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden) towards which creation is doomed to struggle with stories of fallenness and unfolding new possibilities is quite different to the Xhosa origin story that tells of the chameleon with a message of eternal life and the lizard with a message about death. The Christian story begins with a paradise; this paradise is lost with the fall of Adam and Eve, and the world is cursed with the possibility of a return contingent on Jesus’ sacrifice, resurrection and return.

³³ In my section on the Eucharist I will expand on this in reflecting on the ideas of Zizioulas who speaks of a tree that “...has its roots in the future and its branches in the present.” (Zizioulas, 1997: 59)

In the Xhosa tradition the chameleon carries the creator's original idea of eternal life but on second thoughts, fearing overpopulation the creator sends the skittering lizard to announce the entry of death (Belcher, 2006: Loc. 3681). The lizard arrives first and the fate of humanity is sealed. Although ancestors continue to exist after death their existence is dependent on the capacity of the living to remember their identity. Time is accepted in the cycles of life, death and decay – even memory must decay; but time is not bent towards a great day of justice. Mbiti comments about the difference between African Traditional Religions and the religions of the Ancient Near East: “Without the concept of a distant future, these religions would have remained, like African religions, only tribal or national” (Mbiti, 1969: 99).

This does not mean that there is no sense of progress in traditional African *Ubuntu* thought. In African Traditional Religion the ancestors are a contemporary reality; heritage is not something in the past; but something present – the ancestors and the living need each other in order to be *ubuntu* here and now. Progress in *ubuntu* is to be realised in this life right now in restoring balance in creation as if there was no tomorrow. The ultimate goal is always peace, reconciliation and harmony. The pursuit of this goal is never abandoned; the living are able to make peace and amends with ancestors and even receive guidance through ritual practices that promise a continuing awareness of belonging and progressing together as long as memory survives³⁴ (Coetzee & Roux, 2015: 200; Mbiti, 1969: 163; Orobator, 2008: 130). The implication of this notion is important, somehow Western thought and philosophy manages through its belief in heaven as a future reality to ‘plan ahead’ and imagine a ‘telos’. African thought as described above can help us to think more concretely of an imminent ‘telos.’ (“Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring” - Proverbs 27:1)

Mosala (Battle, 1997: 61) sees the African and Christian concepts of the universe as incompatible. In African tradition there is no breakdown of the relationship between people and God; the world is good; all evil enters through the mischief of people and ancestors as a result of imbalance. As much as Tutu stresses the *imago-dei* he sympathises with the fallen

³⁴ “Blood and seriti are connected in such a way that human virtue is passed on from generation to generation. Therefore, African rituals need to be conducted to restore the constant damage done to persons' seriti so that injured individuals do not pass weakened seriti onto the whole community, which includes children, cattle, crops and possessions.” (Battle, 1997: 50)

nature of our humanity; reminding us that we can do better and are made for better. The incorporation of Eucharist, crucifixion, resurrection and the promise of redemption are deeply significant in Tutu's theology and practice of *ubuntu*. This is coupled with the promise of a day of justice; a day of God's deliberate lifting of the lowly and lowering of the lifted; to the point that *seriti* finds its proper balance.

As Tutu reflects on the horrors of what he has seen and heard in the testimonies of those given in the TRC he is able to perceive hope; recognizing against the existence and experience of evil – the potential for the goodness of God to triumph in all things:

“After the gruelling work of the commission I came away with a deep sense – indeed an exhilarating realization – that, although there is undoubtedly much evil about, we human beings have a wonderful capacity for good. We can be very good. That is what fills me with hope for even the most intractable situations.” (Tutu, 2000: 194)

This hope is the potential for people to reach the fullness of their humanity Ndungane (Hulley *et al.*, 1996: 71) calls Arch Bishop Tutu: “*UTutu: Ngumntu lowo*.” The accompanying footnote explains:

Ngumntu lowo means “Tutu, the one in whom full personhood is manifested”

This is the kind of person an ethic and ontology of *ubuntu* is working toward. Similar to the kind of person realised in the ethic espoused by Hauerwas and Long – described by Wesley as a participant in the “religion of the heart.” As Hauerwas and Long use the notion of the transfigured and transfiguring gaze of Jesus; Tutu also reminds us of the love is lifting us up and will lift us up to our true and realized nature:

...we are each the consequence of the divine love created because we were wanted and not because we were needed, the object of a love that lacked nothing, that lacks nothing, that will lack nothing to be truly and fully God. (Tutu in Battle, 1997: 57)

Tutu's hope filled eschatology is clearly something that helps him to maintain an attitude of grace and hope in the face of the evils and injustices of this world. To see the potential for redemption and healing in every life. Tutu is also critical of his own optimism; and yet he remains cheerful – as he comments about corruption and injustice in South Africa in a sermon from 2009; after all the progress that had been made in the journey out of apartheid and through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in the context of scandals around the presidency of Jacob Zuma:

We are at a bad place just now in our country. We imagined that the idealism, the altruism, the being concerned about others more than ourselves, all of those things would carry over automatically into the post-apartheid era. We let our guard down, and we were surprised how quickly we seemed to forget.
(Tutu, 2011a: 216)

Tutu's theology and practice of ubuntu and in Methodist theological ethics there is a thread of eschatological hopefulness or optimism. Wesley writes:

We expect to be "made perfect in love;" in that love which casts out all painful fear, and all desire but that of glorifying him we love, and of loving and serving him more and more
(Wesley, 1787: 239).

This perfect love describes an essential connectedness to God in becoming loving and learning to serve God more and more. This is the promise of restoration toward our original intended purpose. *The Forty-Four Sermons*³⁵ is described in its preface as "...constituting with Mr Wesley's notes on the New Testament, the standard doctrines of the Methodist Connexion." In these sermons Wesley claimed in 1746 to do his best to "describe the true, the scriptural, experimental religion" (Wesley, 1787: ix). Wesley's sermons stress the possibility of an experience of God that transforms the believer and enables them to enter into an intimate and lasting transforming relationship with the Trinity. Rev Peter Storey notes "For Wesley holiness is *imparted*, that means, by grace God *makes* us holy, where once we were not" (Richardson & Malinga, 2006: 15). This journey to holiness is a journey of constant progression defined by an ontological awareness of the presence of God in whom we live and move and have our being; in community that recognizes the importance of fellowship and mutual social service. This progress toward perfection in love is inevitable in Methodist understanding and one of the ways Wesley describes this perfection that God has prepared for his people:

We trust in his promise who cannot lie, that the time will surely come, when, in every word and work, we shall do his blessed will on earth, as it is done in heaven; when all our conversation shall be seasoned with salt, all meet to minister grace to the hearers; when, whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, it shall be done to the glory of God; when all our words and deeds shall be "in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God, even

³⁵ A collection of sermons which along with Wesley's notes on the New Testament form the basis for the doctrine of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa.

the Father, through him."
(Wesley, 1787: 239)

This final perfection is described as a time in which the way we speak and live will ‘minister grace to the hearers.’ Grace in Wesley’s language is not just a sense of sweet kindness but a sense of powerful transforming presence. Grace in Wesley’s language is essentially transformative, to speak of language ‘seasoned with salt’ refers to language whose kind intentions benefit its hearers and has cleansing or healing properties as in 2 Kings 2:21 where Elisha uses salt to purify the waters of Jericho. Communication in the Christian idiom can be a preservative (seasoned with salt) or it can cause festering decay. Evoking 1 Corinthians 10:30-31 the ontological measure of all ethics to ask the question of whether this act or word can be done or said with ‘thankfulness’ or a sense that this thing being done or received is received as something which God may give or assent to. Whether it can be done ‘in God’. Life that glorifies God uplifts others in the way that *ubuntu* personhood uplifts persons.

The communal life of hearing preaching, singing together presses the congregation toward the goal of Christian perfection: the attainment of perfect love in the hope of learning to live a life which Wesley might describe as a life of ‘practical divinity’ or “the practice of Christian discipleship, ‘having the mind of Christ and walking as he walked’” (Heitzenrater, 1995: 322). The Ethical Methodist doesn’t just ask “What would Jesus do?” but would like to know: “How can I have the mind of Christ?” This life with the mind of Christ is, following The Sermon on the Mount described by Hauerwas and Long as a ‘life of beatitude’ (Hauerwas, 2011: 257).

This possibility of personhood uplifting persons and the inevitability of finally attaining perfection is in some ways reflected in *ubuntu*. In Wesleyan thought it is possible to become ‘perfect in love’ in this life but it is inevitable in the resurrection and in heaven. “Finish then thy new creation, pure and spotless let us be ... changed from glory into glory, ‘til in heav’n we take our place” (Wesley, 1747: Verse 4). Battle (2009: Loc 1328) points to rites of passage in African tradition that continue after life and into death as those who die move into a “deeper state of being” to become ancestors and ancestors have virtue, they are good. This concept is different to and yet a part of the hopeful eschatology that is part and parcel of an ontology of ‘blessedness’ in that it acknowledges the possibility of participation in the progression towards ‘perfection’ or towards becoming an ‘ancestor’. Ubuntu means that we

consciously work towards the betterment of ourselves and others in partnership with the Spirit, or ‘life force’ and this perfection is possible.

The coming Kingdom is imminent and sensible in the moment at which it is lived. This sense of inevitable progress is expressed in Tutu’s hopeful language:

There is a movement, not easily discernible, at the heart of things to reverse the awful centrifugal force of alienation, brokenness, division, hostility, and disharmony. God has set in motion a centripetal process, a moving toward the centre, toward unity, harmony, goodness, peace, and justice ... everyone, everything, belongs. None is an outsider, all are insiders, all belong. There are no aliens, all belong in the one family, God’s family, the human family. (Tutu, 2000: 201)

This movement, like gravity continuously pulls toward ‘goodness, peace, and justice.’ In Hauerwas and Wells’ essay *How the Church Managed Before There Was Ethics* they argue that early Christian ethics was formed in worship by way of example they remind their readers that when Paul exhorts the Philippians to treat each other well he grounds his appeal in Cosmic claims about the nature of God that in all probability reflect an ancient hymn:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature god, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
- Philippians 2:5-6
(Hauerwas and Wells, 2004: 39)

The worship of Jesus and exhortations to imitate his way of life predated the new Testament. This sacramental and eucharistic practice of worship is a continuously unfolding process through which the character of Christians is developed. “Christians do not believe they ever ‘get it right.’ This is why one of the first lessons Christians learn is to confess their sins” (Hauerwas & Wells, 2004: 41). The sacraments propose a solution to sin - belonging and beginning through baptism and participating in a process of sanctification through the Eucharist. The highest good is the nature of God who is love and defines love and is embodied in Jesus who in humility is the paragon of virtue. For this reason – an ethics based in the practice of worship cannot declare that an ethical dilemma and the proposed solutions are ‘good’ or ‘bad’ but can evaluate the solutions in terms of questions like ‘does it belong on this side of the river of baptism?’ and, to paraphrase the famous Methodist class meeting question: ‘Is it pressing on toward perfection?’

3.5.4 *Ontology Conclusion*

An ontology of progress means that there is always hope and joy, as explained in 3.5.1.2 and 3.5.1.3. But it also means that there is capacity to deal with the suffering of the present. Even those who are the perpetrators of violence and injustice may belong. This narrative ontology is relevant to crises of conscience and of life and so I thought that a reflection on Miroslav Volf's *The End of Memory* (2006) would be a good illustration of this narrative ontological model to deal with complexity.

3.5.4.1 *Suffering & Injustice Incorporated*

Volf in wrestling with the trauma of his own incarceration and interrogation when he was suspected of being a CIA spy imagines himself “feasting with laughter and camaraderie” (Volf, 2006: 16) seated at an eschatological feast in the presence of his chief tormentor and interrogator, ‘Captain G’. Because of his faith-filled ontology feasting with his enemy is not his own *telos*, it is not a goal that he envisions working towards out of a sense of duty or even responsibility as Jesus reminds him to be reconciled or to forgive as he has been forgiven.

This *telos* of redemption and reconciliation is God's own *teleological* tangent. It is an eschatological inevitability that somehow in God we look forward to the great day of the Lord, the day of reconciliation and God's justice embodied in Revelation imagery as a lamb that was slain rather than in the form of an avenging and angry lion (Rossing, 2007: 111, Volf, 2006: 127). Eugene Petersen explains: “evil takes place in an historical arena bounded by Christ and prayer. Evil is not explained but surrounded” (Petersen, 1991: 85). This ontology locates itself in God's narrative finding meaning and motivation grounded in ‘faith’ which produces ‘works’ whose moral value as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ in a utilitarian, teleological or even deontological sense. They are good or bad in that they are able to fit into the narrative.

The eschatological feast is God's *telos* and not humanity's.

For Volf the struggle to get to the point of being reconciled and being able to enjoy the feast in the presences of his enemies does not mean that he ignores the trauma he suffers – but rather that he incorporates the experience in a way that integrates, interprets and inscribes them into a “larger pattern of meaning – stitching them into the patchwork quilt of one's identity as it were” (Volf, 2006 :28). NT Wright proposes that “the beauty we see in creation

be understood as one part of a larger whole,” of the corresponding trees ‘of the knowledge of good and evil’ and ‘with leaves for the healing of the nations’ joined together by the tree on which Jesus died we should see “a sign of redemption that speaks powerfully of beauty restored, of something in the original creation that had gone wrong now being put to rights” (Wright, 2010: 200–201). For Volf integrating the pain of his story towards the fulfilment of that same story integrated into God’s inevitable eschatological end, illuminated in the working out of that journey by the “light of Christ’s self-sacrifice and resurrection” (Volf, 2006: 83). The patchwork quilt will be beautiful when it is finished. In this narrative the ability to see the present the future and the past all at once is incredibly important, Moltmann comments on the way in which the parables of Jesus “demonstrate the hidden presence of the future” (Moltmann, 1981: 62).

Volf is able to deal with his memories of brokenness through the light of his trust in God’s future. But in this framework past present and future are held together in one moment just as they are in our imagination and in imminent relationship with God.

Summing Up

I will call this mixture of blessing, belonging and progressing an Ubuntu Methodist Theology. In Methodist theological ethics and in Tutu’s *ubuntu* theology the three strands of blessedness - as an overarching narrative framework, belonging - as a manifestation of God’s loving intention to the world, and progressing – the possibility of harnessing the energies of God and relationship in a move toward wholeness, balance or perfect love. Have the capacity to carry a theology suited to ideas of identity, complex ethical phenomena and hope against impossible suffering and woundedness. The strength of this ontological theological framework is that as illustrated in the sense of Volf’s *The End of Memory* (2006) and in Tutu’s *No Future Without Forgiveness* (2000) we can be brutally honest about the present because we are inevitably, immediately and constantly moving toward God’s *telos*. This movement is not intentional, it is not dependent on our strength, it is a gift of grace and the way of God’s creation.

Volf describes the end of memory, in *The End of Memory*:

“I think of that life as like being absorbed in a piece of arrestingly beautiful music – music that captivates my entire being and takes me on an unpredictable journey.”
(Volf, 2006: 230)

3.6 Ubuntu Methodist Sacrament

3.6.1 Introduction

Sacraments which are outward signs of invisible grace are an enactment of and at the same time an opportunity for participation in what God is busy doing in the world. They create space in which we can bring all that constitutes our being into relationship with the Trinity and ask that it be lifted up, brought down; or transformed on a daily basis. As Desmond Tutu says: “There is no such thing as a totally hopeless case” (Tutu, 2005: vii). The thrust of this paper is toward exploring a concept of the sacraments in the light of a Methodist / Ubuntu theology. This brings me to a reflection on the baptism and eucharist using the framework outlined above.

3.6.2 Sacramental Ontology – *Life Under Water (Blessed)*

In trying to explain *ubuntu* to an American audience Battle writes “Imagine a fish trying to understand what it means to be wet, when all it has ever known is life in the water” (2009: Loc. 22). When Luther was confronted with temptations and doubts, experiencing attacks from the Devil it is said he would remind the devil “*baptizatus sum!*” [I am baptised!]. As Battle uses the fish in water metaphor to describe the *ubuntu* world view; so, baptism marks entry into a life with new meaning a new ontological framework with which to view the world and belong in the world. As a Methodist minister I have the privilege of presiding over two moments of parentheses that surround the life of the Christian; as we prepare to baptise we sing or say the Apostles’ Creed; I hold new lives in my arms and the church celebrates with loudly sung choruses of Amen as we sprinkle water and welcome them to our diverse family. I am pleased to say that in my young congregation I get to mark the opening of the parentheses more often than their close, but sometimes I also have the privilege of standing by the grave and instead of water we gently sprinkle sand after we’ve sung the Apostle’s Creed and repeated more times than I can sometimes count:

Nakukuvuka komzimba ekufeni;
And the resurrection of the body
Nabubomi obungunaphakade.
And the life everlasting.
Amen.

3.6.2.1 The Circle Dance of Sacrament and Church³⁶

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa records in its book of order:

The Methodist Church is at once evangelical and sacramental. It recognises and observes two Sacraments, namely Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as of Divine appointment and perpetual obligation. (MCSA, 2016, para. 1.6)

To be 'evangelical' is to say that the Methodist Church believes that the good news about Jesus birth, life, death on the cross and resurrection has life liberating and saving power. To say that the Methodist Church is sacramental is to say that we also recognize that there is life liberating and saving power in the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Gospel proclamation and the administration of Baptism and the Lord's Supper actually has the capacity to change lives bending them towards the goodness of God's Kingdom and God's love. There is an important difference between saying: "The Methodist Church preaches the gospel, baptizes and serves the Lord's Supper." And "The Methodist Church is at once evangelical and sacramental" (MCSA, 2016, para. 1.6). In saying that the Church 'is' evangelical and sacramental we are also saying that sacrament and gospel proclamation is what we are. Our entire order, our reason for being as church is evangel and sacrament. It is also easy to get distracted by the words 'Methodist Church'. With these words written in a 'Book of Order' that outlines the structures, conventions, rules and legal establishment of the church as church we could easily forget that 'Methodist Church' is not a thing, but rather it is a 'people'. Heitzenrater's title: *Wesley and the People Called Methodist* (1995) is drawn from the way in which Wesley spoke of these people from various denominations who made up the Methodist Societies before Methodist was officially a church. If there are no people there will

³⁶ As I re-read this after thinking and reading more about Karl Barth's doctrine of the church especially in Bentley's thesis *The Notion of Mission in Karl Barth's Ecclesiology* Bentley stresses Barth's insistence that the church is 'a people' in order to distinguish 'church structure' from 'church people' (Bentley, 2004: 22). I also realise that what I am describing in terms of the co-operation of church and Spirit is quite Barthian (Torrance, 2006: 79). This is probably because I read and listen to too many 'Barthian' theologians. I also think that it is in Barth's 'Neo-Orthodoxy' that we find a link to Methodist / Anglican and then Eastern Orthodox / Catholic traditions. Added to this is Barthian theology's grounding in pastoral ministry, working out an 'evangelical / sacramental' theology conscious of God's activity and the congregation's eagerness to receive God's word in the scripture narrative (Bentley, 2004: 16)

be no sacrament and no evangel. Sacraments are *ubuntu*. If people are people because of other people; Sacraments are sacraments because of other people-and-God.

Church (which is people), evangel and sacrament cannot be separated, each realises the other in a sort of perichoretic dance of the Trinity. If church, evangel and sacrament could be personified as dancers the *perichōrēsis* of the Trinity and the Church would be perfectly synchronized as the church's dance takes its cue from the movement of the Trinity. In sacrament the church participates in the life of the Trinity.

3.6.2.2 The Dance Floor with a Sprung Foundation (Hypostasis)³⁷

Through the lens of faith – people, bread and wine are seen to be more than just material phenomena, they are outward signs of an invisible spiritual reality. Bread and wine is now blood and flesh and humans are no longer 'just' blood and flesh. This transformation of bread and wine caused much confusion from the 9th to the 12th centuries; beginning with Radbertus and leading up to Aquinas' development of a doctrine of transubstantiation. Perhaps it was the rise of Monasticism that led to greater reflection on what happened at the altar than on the rest of the process that might be understood to consecrate the elements. Aquinas' solution to the philosophical conundrums that arose in understanding of the presence of Christ in the bread and the wine was the doctrine of transubstantiation:

...the bread and wine is miraculously transformed into the body and blood of Christ, even though the "accidents" (outward appearances) of the bread and wine remain the same.
(Evans, 2002: Transubstantiation)

Macquarrie (2003: 478) points out that many protestants misunderstand the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation believing it to be a sort of 'magical' belief that bread, and wine is 'transformed.' Transubstantiation stresses the continued existence of the form but also accepts

³⁷ The best dance floors have a basket weave of wooden purlins that form a foundation (hypostasis) which absorbs and returns the energy of the dance through the feet of the dancers. Zizioulas (1997: 59) speaks of "hypostasis" as it is used in Hebrews 11:1 "Now faith is the assurance [hypostasis] of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Referring to the way that we discover the fullness of our human 'being' in worship and sacrament.

the importance of a change in substance. As Schmemann (1982: 42) pointed out; there is more to the ‘Sacrament’ than just the ‘Sacrament’ “...the whole liturgy is sacramental” It is not just about that moment in which reality is changed; there is a wider set of circumstances and purposes for this transformational process which leads to a transformed encounter with the world beyond the walls of the church. This is also where a protestant, more specifically Methodist understanding (for the purposes of this thesis) of the sacrament is helpful.

Felton (2005: 13) writes of the United Methodist approach to the sacrament of communion:

We do not embrace the medieval doctrine of transubstantiation, though we do believe that the elements are essential tangible means through which God works. We understand the divine presence in temporal and relational terms. In the Holy Meal of the church, the past, present, and future of the living Christ come together by the power of the Holy Spirit so that we may receive and embody Jesus Christ as God’s saving gift for the whole world.

In this understanding of the sacrament of communion the relationship of the gathered community is as important as the bread and wine in that a community gathered in worship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit prays:

Grant that by the power of the Holy Spirit
we who receive your gifts of bread and wine
may share in the body and blood of Christ.
(Methodist Church, 1992: B14)

A relational ontology that incorporates the Trinity, as the gathered congregation participates in the life of the body of Christ (Zizioulas, 1997: 58–59). Sacraments like the Lord’s Supper and Baptism become ‘real’ because of the faithfulness of God and the community that is obedient to perform these acts of worship that are “deeply affecting practices” (Smith 2009: 231). If sacraments are acts of worship it follows that they are acts that remind the church of the worth of God, who is worthy of our love, worthy of our trust, worthy to be loved and worthy of all our being. But they also remind the church of its ‘worth’ / being or essence ‘hypostasis’ which is found in God.

To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.
(William Temple in Foster 2008: 158)

3.6.2.3 Keeping Time

Here William Temple describes worship as an active encounter with God which transfigures consciousness to holiness, fills the mind, transforms the imagination, fills the heart with love and through which worshippers unite their will with God's will. Speaking of the sacrament of communion, Shutte, consciously applying the lessons of *ubuntu* to the Theology of the Catholic church, writes that it is "the expression of the meaning itself". He describes the act of receiving and serving communion as the bearer of the transcendent power that effects what the symbolic act declares" (Shutte, 1993a: 117). The transcendent power is in the meaning of the act which is imposed through relationship with the gathered community and the Trinity. This encounter is also transformational of all relationships. Hauerwas and Wells point out:

"...worship challenges assumptions about what goodness, truth, and beauty mean in the light of the gospel."
(Hauerwas & Wells, 2004: 4)

Worship effectively recalibrates our ideas of "goodness, truth and beauty" and thus our relationship to what we would call good, truthful or beautiful thus helping us to "critique the kinds of binary distinctions that appear to make terms like 'unreal,' 'spiritual,' and 'ideal' meaningful and at the same time secondary, and exposing the social locations and power relations of those who unselfconsciously describe their own perspective as 'real'" (Hauerwas & Wells, 2004: 5). In the context of worship, God is recognized as the ultimate ontological authority and worshippers are those who, through faith, embody, and participate in this renewed and renewing ontological relationality. In this relationality a new identity is formed; a new understanding of 'family' and 'familyness' is generated.

Rowan Williams comments:

Recognizing and responding to God's presence among us means recognizing something about the very nature of God: a God the "pressure" of whose being is toward the other, so intensely that the eternal divine life itself is a pattern of interweaving difference that then animates a world of time, change, differentiation, in which the unifying calling for all things and persons is to show forth God in the way each one is uniquely capable of doing.
(Williams, 2004: 498)

Communion and Baptism carry with them a complex set of symbols that help us to realise God's presence among us; and in realising the presence of God realising what Williams following Moore describes as "pressure" (Williams, 2004: 496). This pressure opens up our hearts and minds to the community of which we are a part – a community that transcends

living humanity but includes our connection to God and all the saints who participate in the heavenly banquet. It is in this moment of sacrament that we find our true humanity and it is in our true humanity that are able to act ethically in ways that cannot simply be described as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ but as Williams describes them: “transparent or opaque, truthful or illusory, grounded in life or leading to death” (Williams, 2004: 496).

3.6.3 A Sacrament of Hospitality (Belonging)

3.6.3.1 Hospitality

In discussing the relinquishment and care of children Hauerwas writes “the issue is how we as a Christian community can live in positive affirmation of the kind of hospitality that will be a witness to the society we live in” (Hauerwas, 2001a: 616). Baptism and Communion are the sacraments of Christian hospitality; Mark Thiessen Nation explores foot washing as “Preparation for the Christian Life” in his essay he wonders why foot washing is not a sacrament of the church pointing out that in John’s gospel the mandate to wash feet is more clear than the mandate to celebrate the Lord’s Supper (Hauerwas & Wells 2011: 479). Sandra Schneiders points out the way in which Jesus’ “foot washing in John is the analogue of the eucharistic institution narrative in the synoptic gospels” (Schneiders, 1981: 81). She also notes the power dynamics of an act like foot washing as a prophetic sign of Jesus’ kenosis and hospitality. She points out foot washing is an act of intimacy. Friends and lovers and friends can wash each other’s feet as equals. Parents can wash their children’s feet as those in a position of ‘oversight’ to them. Jesus in washing his disciples’ feet teaches them about being ‘friends’ with God and also about true servanthood; their new call to disciple and baptize (Schneiders, 1981: 84-86). The acts of foot washing, baptizing, and sharing communion are not signs that we have reached our goal: They are a foretaste of what is to come.

3.6.4 A Sacrament of Grace (Progressing)

Reflecting on Tutu’s belief in the power of the Holy spirit to bring change, Battle (1997: 108) remarks that Tutu focuses more on the transformation of the people and the community who gather around the communion table than about doctrines of transubstantiation and concern about what happens on the table; he writes:

“Therefore, the *epiclesis* can be seen as a prayer for the consecration of the people as well as of the elements of bread and wine.”

Grounded in Ubuntu Theology Catholic Theologian and philosopher Augustine Shutte writes of the eucharist:

“In the eucharist we enact symbolically the communion between ourselves and Jesus and the community between each other that is the ultimate goal of all our real activity ... the expression of the meaning itself is **the bearer of the transcendent power that effects what the symbolic act declares.**” [Emphasis Mine]
(Shutte, 1993a: 117)

Sacraments bear ‘transcendent power’ because of the complex network of relationships that imbue them with meaning. Differences in doctrine might prevent Catholics and Methodists from sharing at the same table but there are foundational commonalities that recognize the transformation that takes place to make the presence of Christ ‘Real’ in the bread and wine. It might be asked whether communion truly is communion in either the Catholic or the Protestant churches if they are not able to share in their faith and practice of the Eucharist. In these matters the church is able to maintain an intention toward unity; accepting of their true diversity. Diversity in the community of the church has almost always been a given condition and it is through the Eucharist, gathered around the table that Christians are able to see a ‘Divine foretaste of the heavenly banquet.’

This sacrament of grace is the meal of a community gathered in the in between time. Between crucifixion and resurrection, between the now and the not yet, or rather between the resurrection of Jesus and the general resurrection of all people (Wright, 2010: 110, 112 & 218). At this meal the violence of blood and flesh as a reminder of sin and death become energising refreshing resurrection sustenance like the meal Jesus shared with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. The disciples who shared this meal had the courage to return to Jerusalem, to face their fears, because they had eaten in the presence of the wounded and resurrected Messiah (Luke 24:13-35).

3.6.4.1 Learning to Walk on Water

Baptism is so much more than just a symbolic ritual washing with water that marks entry into the church.

“In Justin Martyr’s account of baptism, the “hinge” between baptism and the Eucharist is the neophyte’s first exchange of the kiss of peace with the gathered community.”
(Bauerschmidt in Hauerwas & Wells, 2004: 259)

As indicated above, baptism marks the entry into the community of the church by way of the creed – the declaration of a common faith in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit – the Trinity. The kiss of peace is an intimate sign of belonging and sharing; not only in a community that has *Shalom* with each other; but also, a community united in their dependence and trust of God. The community is able to kiss and be reconciled because of their mutual “continuing dependence upon the free grace of God” (Meilaender, 1991: 25). In this faith filled Baptism is the promise of the resurrection and life everlasting. This faith foundation declares belief in a God who is outside of the limitations of time and immortality and so reminds the believer that those baptised now belong to this new reality which by its very nature is progressing toward God’s future. Baptism, especially the baptism of infants marks the promise of a plan in the heart of the community for these children – but also in the heart of God. Reno comments on Hauerwas’ emphasises on real sacramental significance coming not from human choice to participate but from God’s power to initiate: “in baptism and Eucharist, we are *subject* to something that has power” (Reno, 2018: 307). Zizioulas (1997: 59) speaks of the foundation of this new ontology as its *hypostasis*; a deeper reality than the fleeting biological reality limited by birth and death, a:

“...paradoxical hypostasis which has its roots in the future and its branches in the present.”
(Zizioulas, 1997: 59)

Baptism is the first step along the journey to confirmation, in Baptism we pray for the child being baptized; in anticipation of the prayers we will pray at confirmation when again we ask that they would be filled with the Holy Spirit:

Increase in them your gifts of grace, and fill them with your Holy Spirit:
Amen, come Holy Spirit.
(*Silence*)

The Spirit of wisdom and understanding;
Amen, come Holy Spirit.
(*Silence*)

The Spirit of discernment and inner strength;
Amen, come Holy Spirit.
(*Silence*)

The Spirit of knowledge, holiness, and awe.
Amen, come Holy Spirit.
(Silence)

The minister lays his/her hand upon the head of each candidate saying:
 Lord, confirm your servant N by your Holy Spirit that she/he may continue yours forever.
 Amen.

(Methodist Church, 2018)

The liturgy continues to remind the parents to remind their children through a life lived that they belong and that this belonging is for the purpose of progressing. As children are baptised their parents are invited to commit to love their children “caring for the in body, mind and spirit,” in a world that cares mainly for bodies and minds; reminding ourselves of the ‘spirit’ aspect of our full humanity is important. They are invited to “ensure that” their children “are nurtured in the faith and life of the Christian community,” and set “before them a Christian example,” that through their parents “prayers words and deeds, they may learn the way of Christ” (ibid.). The whole congregation is invited to “maintain the Church’s life of worship and service” that these children “may grow in grace and in the knowledge and love of God and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” To all of these commitments the parents and the community promise: “With God’s help we will.” This set of commitments and promises acknowledges that the full humanity of these children will be realised within the faith paradigm of a community. In Methodism this community should be multi-racial and intentionally connected through circuits to diverse communities ensuring that children baptised belong to a true and diverse rainbow reflection of God’s *ubuntu* community.

3.7 Conclusion - A Methodist Ubuntu Framework

In my first chapter I explained my research question: “Is that your (real) child?” The question is asked in a specific context. Helping my black son cross a busy intersection in a predominantly white suburb a black woman checks to see that the little boy is safe. It’s a question about where he belongs and to whom he belongs. In seeking to answer this question I came across Kelley Nikondeha’s *Adopted: The Sacrament of Belonging in a Fractured World* (2017). Nikondeha’s book says a lot about baptism, belonging and about the quality of church community baptism should engender. The answer to the fairly unanswerable question: “Is that your (real) child?” might be “Yes, he is, in the same sense that bread is Jesus body and wine is his blood when we have communion.” This kind of answer tests the capacity of

imagination and the limits of language. I needed to find a framework that would suit the question and my hypothesised answer (3.1).

First, the question is answered in a specific set of circumstances. I've tried to describe those circumstances in chapter 2. Chapter 2 explored the ways in which children are relinquished and the directions toward which they are relinquished (2.2). The statistics are hard to track but I concluded that every year in South Africa about 100,000 children are relinquished to abortion (2.2.1), 40,000 to foster care (2.2.2), 3,000 abandoned (2.2.3) and about 1,000 for adoption (2.2.4).

The circumstances of those who relinquish their children are dire – children are relinquished because of poverty and their pregnant mother's inability to care for them. Many of these mothers are impregnated in circumstances that should not be described as consensual sex. They are trapped in poverty because of terribly unjust circumstances and the burden of more mouths to feed is more than they can bear (2.2). There is reluctance to relinquish children to adoption rather than abandonment because of concerns around race, culture and religion (2.4).

In looking for a framework to deal with this ontological / ethical question I first wanted to intentionally draw on my own Methodist tradition – for this I found that Hauerwas and Long's essay *Methodist Theological Ethics* (2011: 255) laid a solid theoretical foundation. But I appreciated Dube's description of a theological framework that is able to move away from oppressive and exploitative paradigms, propose liberating frameworks, reject gender discrimination and reject eurocentrism (Njoroge and Dube 2001: 15; Section 3.2). I chose Tutu's *ubuntu* theology as a conversation partner to Hauerwas and Long's essay in an attempt to flesh out an ethic and ontology adequate to discuss the question proposed. In Tutu's *ubuntu* theology and in Methodist theology especially with regard to a theology of sacrament I recognized three characteristic themes: Blessedness or blessing, belonging and progressing. Blessedness describes an overarching narrative, belonging denotes inclusivity with the potential to lift up the voices of the marginalized and progressing denotes the inevitability of moving toward justice. In sections 3.2-3.5 I've done my best to describe this scheme based in Methodist and *Ubuntu* theology while drawing on concepts of Trinitarian *perichōrēsis* as described by Moltmann (1971 and 1981), LaCugna (1993) and Zizioulas (1997) / Zizioulas & Williams (2007). In section 3.6 I've shown how this scheme applies to the sacraments.

The point of this chapter (3) is to develop a framework suitable to reading Nikondeha's narrative: *Adopted: The Sacrament of Belonging in a Fractured World* in order to learn more about what it means to call adoption a sacrament, and baptism an adoption. I set out to explore Nikondeha's narrative and in the process I've found myself in a conversation with:

My own narrative as an adoptive father. (Chapter 1)

The narrative of the South African context (Chapter 2).

Desmond Tutu's *ubuntu* theology. (Chapter 3)

Methodist theological ethics & Stanley Hauerwas. (Chapter 3)

And finally I'll bring the four partners above into conversation with Kelley Nikondeha's *Adopted: The Sacrament of Belonging in a Fractured World* (2017).

In the next chapter, Chapter 4. I will discuss Nikondeha's narrative in terms of the themes outlined in chapter 3: blessing, belonging and progressing.

Chapter 4:

Adopted: A Sacrament of Belonging in a Fractured World

4.1 Introduction and Background

It is difficult to describe the nature of Kelley Nikondeha's text; she writes as an adoptive mother, an adopted daughter, a mission and development agent in Rwanda and co-worker with her Burundian husband Claude. On her website she describes herself as a "Practical Theologian Hungry for the New City" (Nikondeha, 2019a). I came across her book while I was looking for a window in to describing a way in which adoption can be considered ethically and theologically, the title drew me in. The idea of thinking of adoption as a sacrament seemed fascinating. Nikondeha does not dwell on examples of bad adoption practices or bad experiences (although she does mention some unhealthy attitudes³⁸) but rather uses her own adoption and her adoption of her two children as a window into understanding a "new way of belonging and connecting" (Schlumpf, 2017: 1).

Nikondeha's story is a positive story but it does not ignore the complexity of tensions between good and bad even in the title this complexity is reflected: "belonging in a fractured world" points toward the brokenness of things and "belonging" does not mean that these fractures are repaired; but rather in the sense of taking the thing that was once whole and putting the parts together so that they belong – but not necessarily so that they could pretend that there was never a problem in the first place. In this short chapter I will not be able to represent the richness of experience that Nikondeha relates through her narrative; nor will I be able to explain the art of writing that elicits emotion and deeper resonances with experiences of worship; travel in Africa; the smells and experiences of market places and settlements that contribute to the meaning of the story and an understanding of belongingness. But I will explain how it relates to my thesis especially as outlined in Chapter 3.

My starting question for this Thesis was the question that I am sometimes asked: "Is that your (real) child?" I chose to reflect on this question specifically in the context of the taxi rank near

³⁸ Nikondeha 2017: Loc. 1015

my home in the suburbs. I was riding bicycles with my adopted son; he is brown, I am white. Often when I'm asked that question, I'm inclined to be offended; but in the context of a busy taxi rank on a busy street; being asked whose child this is meant so much more. The African mother who asked the question was probably checking to see if they child was safe and if I was a safe person to be looking after this child on a busy street in a white suburb where he might have seemed a little bit out of place. Could "sacrament of belonging" be a way for me to describe the reality of how my child is truly my 'real' child? Is there a theological way to describe the way in which our relationship or our family is 'real'?

Our personal story as adoptive parents has informed my approach to this question. Our family plan was to adopt a child and have a child. My experience and studies as a minister had made me aware of the need in South Africa for children to be adopted. When we struggled with infertility, we decided to adopt our first child and wait and see if we would one day conceive. Today we are a family of four; one adopted child and one 'biological' child. When we adopted our son we were privileged to meet his young mother briefly as she handed him over to us; I continue to pray for a world in which parents do not need to relinquish their children and also where couples who long to have children are able to conceive. But in this fractured world we have to work with what is presented to us.

As I read Hauerwas and Long's essay on Methodist Theological Ethics and reflected on what they describe as a "life of beatitude" (Hauerwas, 2011: 257) my mind played with the word 'beauty' whose links to 'beatitude' could only be aesthetically imputed – if I substituted 'beautiful' for 'blessed' in the beatitudes I am drawn to a deeper understanding of beauty that is held in the tension between horror and hopefulness. Beautiful art is vulnerable art; that at once exposes the heart of the artist and the observer eliciting a response that might not necessarily be positive; but rather assents to the truth of this art. It is in the 'amen' of my soul, the mutual bowing of observer to observed that I receive the abstracted connection that cannot be translated in words. Hauerwas writes of the way in which artistic language communicates:

"Poetry and literature do not just bolster our moral intentions; they affect how we perceive the world and hence what the moral life is about. For poetry does not just describe the known; it reveals dimensions of the unknown that make the known seem unfamiliar."
(Hauerwas, 2001a: 167)

Nikondeha's book is not a long academic treatise on adoption; it is a story told in the tension of hope filled and pain filled truths; it is a story told with poetic nuance; language fit to

describe real life. My attempt here is to try and describe why and how it is a good description of adoption; and a representation of a way in which adoption in all its complexity may be called ‘good’.

There are concrete ethical / technical questions and values that come to mind when it comes to adoption; questions like: “What is in the best interest of the child?” or “What if the relinquishing mother changes her mind?” There are systems of laws, values and evaluation in place in the practice of social work that help to make these decisions; these are continuously debated and even re-legislated. My interest as a pastor is more abstract; asking the question, following 2 Peter 3:11: “...what kind of people ought you to be?” Or in this case: “what kind of adoption ought this to be?”

4.2 Framework

In chapter 3 I described a framework that joins Methodist Ethics and Tutu’s Theology and Practice of *Ubuntu*; the connection points were blessedness, belonging and progressing. I will briefly re-iterate these concepts and articulate some of the themes that I will look for in Nikondeha’s narrative; in the previous chapters I have outlined them from blessedness to progressing; but in my analysis I will move from belonging to progressing to blessedness.

4.2.1 Blessedness

In *Ubuntu* and in Methodism this concept of blessedness is an awareness of God’s part in the whole process. Sometimes this is described in people as a sense from outside themselves that this is what they should do. Occasionally it is experienced in perceiving miraculous answers to prayer; whether these answers can be explained through reason or Spirit; they are still perceived to be miraculous acts of God. These are strange questions that describe events that are quite impossible to measure; but they depend on attention and respect for the subjective experience of those who participate in the process. Perhaps the most definitive question is: “Could you do this in worship?” This dimension of ‘blessedness’ is obviously hard to describe but I will look for moments in the story where it seems clear that God was at work.

4.2.2 *Belonging*

Ubuntu realises that our personhood is true personhood because of the personhood of others; Tutu specifically encourages the recognition that this is not just a tribal value; but a value that is to be shared across our humanity. No matter how different we may be; we need to recognize the voices, positive or negative that make up our identity. One of the issues of difference between western Christianity and African *Ubuntu* is a sense of connection with the ancestors who are part and parcel of human identity. Evidence of this belongingness would be seen in a respect for the adopted child's birth background and family whether it is known or unknown. Especially in the case of transracial and transcultural adoptions this would mean the inclusion of customs, practices and respect for the child's 'relinquished' identity.

4.2.3 *Progressing*

Progressing implies the acceptance of the potential for change, renewal, improvement and healing. It acknowledges the brokenness of the situation but also recognizes the power and grace of God to bring healing and renewal. In Christian and Methodist Theology there is the concept of 'pressing on toward perfection' growing toward perfect love; knowing that we haven't attained the goal yet. In Tutu's *ubuntu* this aspect is incorporated in the promise of Jesus return and the Day of the Lord which is a day of justice on which all is set right. But pure *ubuntu* recognizes the need to make amends and restore relationships through rituals and practices from day to day in order to maintain proper balance in the world. The question of progressing would be: "Can this improve"? or "Are we working on it?"

Njoroge & Dube's *Talitha Cum! Theologies of African Women* (Njoroge & Dube, 2001) speaks of developing 'Theological Frameworks' (Njoroge & Dube, 2001: 15) robust enough to carry Theology in a way that are critical of colonialist and patriarchal thought systems. Esther Acolatse succinctly describes the kind of ethic / framework that this should result in:

...practical steps of living together within the household of God in way that edifies all who belong to the community. This means that men, women and children together live in such a way that accords full humanity to all participants in the *oikos* of God.
(Acolatse in Njoroge & Dube, 2001: 17 & 136)

I hope that this framework applied to this book will helpfully illuminate some of the ways to find 'steps' that would 'accord full humanity' to all participants in the '*oikos*' of adoption.

4.3 Belonging

Desmond Tutu says that ubuntu is a deeply compelling force capable of removing barriers between us. It is a process, he says, like a cosmic embrace where “None is an outsider, all are insiders, all belong.”
(Nikondeha 2017: Loc. 940)

Baptism into the church is adoption by the church; Kelly Nikondeha weaves a thread through her narrative that reflects her own Baptism and sense of belonging to the church. As it turns out the church is quite promiscuous – accepting relinquished children as her own and willing to bear the stigma and burden of being mother to children who don’t know who their father is. At the same time as realising her belongingness to the church; adoption results in mutual transformation. Kelley reflects on the ways in which adoption has changed her and on the importance of encouraging her adopted children to explore and know their own identity.

4.3.1 Inclusivity and Baptismal Promiscuity

4.3.1.1 Other Mothers

As Nikondeha’s narrative unfolds she shares the story of her Baptism and what that means to her. Baptism is a mark for her of belonging in the world and in the church when at her birth she was relinquished. Even though there were times when her relationship with her adoptive mother was complicated, she found a sense of purpose and belonging in her ‘mother church’. As she tells her story she also shares the experience of being mothered by a church friend about the same age as her own mother: “Janelle has mothered me through some hard seasons, seeing me as her own” (Nikondeha 2017: Loc. 1373). In South Africa many fathers deny their paternity, but mothers are not able to deny the fact that the child with whom they are pregnant is theirs. These pregnant mothers bear the brunt and burden of social stigma and childbirth while fathers carry on as if nothing has happened. In this stigmatization it is the mothers who are accused of promiscuity, somehow the fathers are able to use their male privilege to escape. Interestingly Kelley mischievously identifies as “ecclesiastically promiscuous” (Nikondeha, 2019b) even when she shares her sense of belonging to the Catholic Church which frowns on such behaviour.

She calls her baptism as an infant which she calls her ‘first adoption’.

“A priest sprinkled holy water on my forehead, and the church embraced me. I slipped into God’s family almost unnoticed. This was my first adoption.”
(Nikondeha, 2017: Loc. 85)

Later in life, having moved to with her parents to the protestant church (Nikondeha 2017: Loc. 1430) she to the Catholic Church in a search for her roots, part of this move is in response to Phyllis Tickle speak of the ‘cyclical movements of church history’ and the image of ‘Mother Church’ (Nikondeha 2017: Loc. 1444, Tickle 2008: 135).

When I walked into Saint Clare of Assisi’s on Ash Wednesday, I dipped my fingers into the basin of cool water in the sanctuary. I made the sign of the cross, blessing dripping from my fingers. I centred myself in the space, breathing it all in.
(Nikondeha, 2017: Loc. 1438)

She recounts some of her formative experiences within the church that she would call her ‘mother church’:

Amid the height of the charismatic renewal movement
...I spoke in tongues and was baptized in the Spirit.
(Nikondeha 2017: Loc. 1446)

This ‘mother church’ has played a major role in her process of spiritual formation and in her formation of identity; especially because it was her original ‘family’ the source of her baptism; what she calls her first adoption.

She is the birth mother I never knew I needed until I was older. Since returning to her, I stand more deeply rooted in my own story. My own identity seems less shrouded, though mystery will always remain.
(Nikondeha, 2017: Loc. 1454)

In these sacramental moments of being baptised when she was in the care of the Holy Family Adoption Agency, of experiencing the Spirit as a teenager - speaking in tongues; and returning to church on an Ash Wednesday dipping her fingers in the water and signing the cross on her forehead Nikondeha describes the way that she centres her identity as a child who belongs to the Church; in this case, specifically to the Catholic Church.

4.3.1.2 Promiscuous Polity

Faber’s account of debates around baptism in the Christian Reformed Church in North America about whether and on what grounds adopted children may be baptised (Faber, 2019: 99) points to an interesting point of doctrine in a church that in some branches understood

baptism to be a reflection of God's covenant with their parents. This was especially controversial for this church in the case of foundlings; how could they tell whether these foundlings were subject to the covenant of grace that God had made with their parents? Yet even in this reformed church a kind of baptismal promiscuity was encouraged "permitting the baptism of 'children of all sorts of people such as of adulterers, excommunicated papists and others like them' on the grounds that 'it is certain that these children are not outside the covenant' and, thus, cannot be denied baptism" (Faber, 2019: 91).

4.3.1.3 The Emergence

Forster identifies two trends in evangelical Christianity in response to the diversity of self-identification in the world today; one towards 'theological protectionism' and the other towards 'assimilation and transformation' (Forster, 2019b: 272); perhaps these trends may also be applied to movements within Catholicism. Nikondeha seems to belong to the latter group of those being assimilated by association with the Emergent Church movement. Kelly and Claude Nikondeha were the founders and organizers of the emergent church associated Amahoro emerging church conversations (Hadebe, 2009; TWOTP, n.d.). She seems to identify with the movement of *The Great Emergence* as described by Phyllis Tickle (2008: 13, 134). In an at this time unpublished chapter Forster reflects on *Baptism and Ecclesiology in Wesleyan Theology*; in his concluding remarks he notes the "erosion of our understanding of the identity and purpose of the Christian church" (Forster, 2019d: 14). This existence of the church which is no longer recognized as an over-arching authority for morality and identity (Fukuyama, 2019: 26, 33; Smith, 2014: 31; Taylor, 2018: 506–509).

When I was the minister at the Franschhoek Methodist Church many holiday makers would join our community during their time in Franschhoek; one man introduced himself to me as a Baptist but said he was very happy being part of the Methodist Church while in South Africa because, in his words: "it's all one girl." *Promiscuity* tends to describe problematic or transient sexual relationships; in another sense of the word it describes a non-selective approach; a refusal to be fussy and pass judgment on others and even to give them honours without caring if they have earned them. The Methodist Church's declaration in Paragraph 3.1 and 3.2 of its book of Order might indicate that it is a promiscuous church:

Membership is not conditional upon the profession of theological tenets, or dependent upon traditional authority or ecclesiastical ritual. It is based upon a personal experience of

the Lord Jesus Christ, brought about by the Spirit...
(MCSA, 2016, para. 3.1)

All persons are welcomed into membership who sincerely desire to be saved from their
sins...
(MCSA, 2016, para. 3.2)

This emphasis on belonging being something that is bestowed by the grace of God alone is modified by further explication of the conditions and privileges of church membership and then by customs according to local society's / congregations practice that determine times of probation and various courses of study to be completed before confirmation or the baptism of children. Developments in the 1960s through the Church Unity Council and through the establishment of the Lima document the traditional 'protestant' church has expanded its ability to recognize a diversity of unity in belonging (Lombaard, 1999: 193–196) and a celebration of 'One Baptism' that unites us all. The beauty of Baptism is the promiscuity of the Holy Spirit who welcomes gentiles, foundlings, sinners and the children of papists and adulterers leaving Peter astounded and without excuse exclaiming:

"Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." (Acts 10:47)

4.3.2 Kenotic Hospitality, Identifying, Emptying and Filling

Apparently Heraclitus said you can't step in the same river twice. Once you've stepped in it; it is changed; if you step out and step in again you're stepping in new water. Sometimes we think that Baptism only changes the one being baptized; but we often forget what we are doing to the river in which they are baptised.

4.3.2.1 Baptised in Vomit

Our son loves to be told of the day we first met him. We were nervous; we had been to baby classes with a midwife – having explained we were adopting; but we still didn't know what we'd do when we first held him. He was handed to us with a full bottle and our first task was to feed him. We forgot about burping him. He promptly threw up his milk all over us; we had discussed his baptism; but hadn't thought we'd be getting baptised too. This was our first of many baptisms into parenthood. Baptisms in tears, vomit, snot, blood, heartbreak and the list goes on.

4.3.2.2 Baptismal Call

Part of Kelley Nikondeha's return to the Catholic Church is a search for her roots; a quest for identity; to find:

...that unread chapter that might provide pivotal information about our origins. We want to connect to our own creation narrative. We come around early or late, but all of us have curiosities about home.
(Nikondeha 2017: Loc. 1405)

Despite a sense of belonging to and identification with the Catholic Church as the church in whom she was baptized Kelley acknowledges she will always live with the mystery of not knowing her birth parents or her origins. I have expressed in chapter 2 – section 2.1.2 one of the arguments against trans-racial / trans-cultural adoption in South Africa. Nikondeha reflects on the gap in the history of her identity that needs to be filled; 'all of us have curiosities about home.' She moves on to reflect on Jesus' baptism by John in which Jesus' true identity and vocation is brought to light, she weaves her narrative experience into Jesus experience – lending insight into the way in which an 'adopted'³⁹ reading of the text might inform our understanding:

The origin of his exceptionalism finally explained, he is both the Father's only Son and Joseph's firstborn. His identity gives him confidence and initiates a fullness of self-knowledge that will propel him into public life.
(Nikondeha 2017: Loc. 1463)

Nikondeha (as one adopted) reflects on her own complex identity with missing chapters that would normally help define one's identity. She identifies with the way in which Jesus identity is an unfolding mystery and finds comfort in the unfolding of his story. He is at once the son of Joseph and the Son of God; in his Baptism he discovers – or understands more fully his vocation; who he is called-into-being as God the parent speaks from Heaven and the Holy Spirit descends like a dove (Wright, 1997: 644). At the same time the Baptism event of Jesus is testament to the not-yet-but-coming-to-be of the Kingdom of God; as John the Baptist's re-enactment of the crossing of the Jordan into the promised land; and Jesus the modern Joshua

³⁹ I mean this in terms of terms like 'womanist,' 'feminist,' or 'queer' readings of the text that emphasize the importance of life experience for receiving these words and events in new contexts and developing a fuller understanding.

presents a threat to the dominion of Rome (Hauerwas & Wells, 2011: 15; Wright, 1997: 644) and is as such a danger to himself. In these moments there is a deep sense of the already and the not yet; the mysterious and the resolved held in tension as we await the coming of the kingdom; but that is for the theme *Progressing* in the next section. Jesus vocation, identity and being are all linked to his purpose lived in a dynamic dance with God the Father and the Holy Spirit.

4.3.2.3 To Identify with our Humanity

I've never been satisfied with the answer to the question: "Why did Jesus get baptised?" People tend to say: "To identify with us in our humanity." I'm never convinced that those who answer me this way know what they mean – but adoption; the mutual transformation of identities that takes place when this child is added to my family and my family is added to this child might help me to understand what "To identify with us in our humanity" might mean. Will Willimon preaches:

The chief biblical analogy for baptism is not the water that washes but the flood that drowns. Discipleship is more than turning over a new leaf. It is more fitful and disorderly than gradual moral formation. Nothing less than daily, often painful, lifelong death will do.
(Willimon, 2015)

These words make me think of Charles Wesley's Hymn: *And can it be that I should gain:*

He left His Father's throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace;
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race;
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God, it found out me.
(Wesley, 1873)

4.3.2.4 Kenotic Hospitality

As Jesus 'identifies' with our humanity in being baptized he begins his journey to the cross. It is at this point that his *Kenosis* is revealed to us; Tutu preaches:

God, in Christ, emptied God's being of divine glory and God paid the price for our sin. ...we need silence in the presence of this God we worship and adore, to be emptied of ourselves and to be filled with God, and so to become more truly ourselves as we are filled with the fullness of God.
(Tutu in Battle, 1997: 77–78)

This is an interesting dynamic – as Tutu argues that we need “to be emptied of ourselves and to be filled with God” (Battle 1997: 77) so God is emptied of ‘himself’ to be filled with humanity. Hauerwas and Wells declare: “The baptism of Jesus is the foundation of Christian ethics” (2004: 14) they point out the action of the Trinity in this moment; the Father who speaks, the Son who in baptism enacts his own death and resurrection and the Spirit who rests upon Jesus. In his essay *Abortion Theologically Understood* Hauerwas writes of framing our ethical dilemma around abortion with a discussion of hospitality:

“‘Abortion’” reminds us of how Christians are to envision life: we are a baptizing people ready to welcome new life into our communities.
(Hauerwas, 2001a: 611)

Jesus, in his self-emptying; the Holy Spirit in her descending and God in opening the heavens to speak create space for belonging; it would seem like bad doctrine to say that the nature of God is ‘changed’ in all of this – that by receiving humanity God becomes ‘different’ – but in Revelation and resurrection appearances Jesus still bears the scars of human (in)hospitality. Davis unfolds a helpful understanding of Divine *apatheia*: “The language of acute divine anguish is important, no less so than the language of divine changelessness, in giving substance to Christian hope” (Davis & Hays, 2003: 293). As an example of reciprocal hospitality Hauerwas quotes the baptismal covenant from *The United Methodist Hymnal*, the church that gathers to baptize is asked to nurture those baptized and include them in care; to live in a way that helps them to experience true Christian community of service and sacrifice; all this accompanied by prayer (Hauerwas, 2001a: 613). “By these vows the church reinvents the family” (Hauerwas, 2001a: 613).

4.3.2.5 Kenosis is only for the Powerful (Acolatse’s Critique)

Acolatse in her essay, *Rethinking Sin and Grace* (Njoroge & Dube, 2001: 121-139) makes an interesting critical point about the nature of *Kenosis*. She is responding to Niebuhr’s description in *The Nature and Destiny of Man* of sin as the product of a decidedly male theologian and pastor. Niebuhr’s thesis is that the origin of sin is in Pride and Sensuality (Reinhold Niebuhr, 1941: 186 & 228), Acolatse notes that for women in Africa sin leans more toward absence of pride which leads to an absence of the fulness of her humanity in herself offering (Njoroge & Dube, 2001: 136). In response to this kind of harmful self-emptying Dube writes: “self-assertion befriends grace” (Njoroge & Dube, 2001: 17). Nikondeha cites the story of Naomi and Ruth (a woman of valour); Claassens (Claassens, 2016: 19)

commenting on Nussbaum's concept points out the need for traditionally oppressed and marginalized women to be able to foster their own self-identity. Nikondeha illustrates the possibility of being a 'woman of valour' of allowing her children to have their own identity; among the difficulties and challenges of motherhood – especially through her own sense of belonging which is self-emptying but never draining.

4.3.2.6 Shaping Tomorrow Today?

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa has a worrying mission theme / sub-theme for 2018 and 2019: *Shaping Tomorrow Today* (Siwa, 2018); the intention is better than the title; reading Bishop Siwa's address to the Methodist Conference the intention is that the church sees what it can change in order to be more hospitable to young people and children (Siwa, 2018: 4). But the phrase 'shaping tomorrow today' does what the church often does – shape others to fit – rather than reshape itself to be hospitable; realising that it should engage in 'mutual hospitality'. Forster spoke of the need for hospitality and inclusion especially in the light of recent violent attacks against women and children; yet; following Paul he takes the notion of our mutual hospitality further – arguing that in 1 Corinthians 12 Paul makes "an ontological equation between the church and Christ" (Forster, 2019c: 6). Belongingness is not just the availability of space or accommodation – it is Christ-like *kenotic* hospitality. Christ cantered self-emptying makes good relationship possible; and thus makes good adoption possible. I didn't realise; and I still don't realise how much adoption would and will change my identity.

4.3.2.7 To Be Burundian American

Nikondeha reflects on some of the ways in which her family honours the identity of her children:

Alongside the undeniable sadness that Emma won't ever get to see her birth mother or know her name lives the graceful sway of her adolescent hips as she learns the traditional Burundian dance. Justin won't know why, exactly, he was relinquished, but he speaks his

mother tongue of Kirundi, loves soccer, French rap, and sambusas⁴⁰.
(Nikondeha 2017: Loc. 1479)

Nikondeha reminds her children that they are *Burundian-American*; she goes on to write “they have been told from their toddler years that their adventure *is to discover what it means to be both Burundian and an American*” (Nikondeha 2017: Loc. 1491 *emphasis mine*). *Ubuntu* shaped identity recognizes mutual reciprocity in hospitable engagement; the host will go out of his or her way (to the point of self-harm) in order to receive the blessed guest. This is illustrated in the ‘western’ persistence in failing to learn African languages; the Church’s imposition of ‘western’ practices and formulas into African liturgies; a lack of willingness to learn about the benefits of partnership and mutual reciprocity as characterised by *ubuntu*.

4.3.2.8 Building a wall of Bitter Almonds

One illustration from history is the planting of Van Riebeeck’s hedge of bitter almond trees from Salt River to the Kirstenbosch Garden on the slopes of Table Mountain. My son spends hours climbing the branches and exploring the ancient hedge and it is hard to explain to my coloured son why this hedge was planted by Jan Van Riebeeck to ensure that the colony was “well protected against raids by the Hottentots” (H. B. Rycroft M.Sc., 1958: 21; Worden et al., 2004: 25). Apparently the fruit of these trees account for the first death by poisoning in the Cape Colony; when an explorer with Jan Wintervogel’s 1655 expedition died from eating too much of it despite the Khoi people’s knowledge of ways to prepare the fruit so that its poison could first be neutralized (Notten & Malan, 2003). If only the colonists had taken the trouble to listen to the Khoi. As I stand in the shade of those bitter almonds and look out over Cape Town’s vista of apartheid spatial planning (du Plessis, 2014: 71) I imagine how much better things could have been if as human beings we had worked out how to empty ourselves in order to be filled with each other.

Reflecting on mutual belonging and identity Nikondeha writes:

Solidarity with this small African nation has altered my perspective on security, necessity, privilege, and poverty and enriched my children’s lives immeasurably. Returning to one’s

⁴⁰ Similar to South African samosas.

roots can be a communal, transformational blessing.
(Nikondeha 2017: Loc. 1507)

She knows that not everyone would have the privilege that she has had as someone working along with her husband Claude living with one foot in America and the other in Burundi; her sense of belonging continues to realise the fact that her children don't just belong to her. Returning to the '*Rainbow Centre*' where they first met their children the nannies that cared for them when they were there as abandoned and orphaned babies rush out to greet these grown up (8 years old) children:

It was clear that both Emma and Justin still belonged to them.
...Together we remembered the ways in which we continued to belong to each other, our stories forever linked, our gratitude boundless for a return that was a blessing for us all.
(Nikondeha 2017: Loc. 1584)

Nikondeha's adoption story reflects on the mutual belonging that is exemplified in baptism; a joining of community; a weaving together of life stories in to the Bible storied community of the church. In this process identities are changed. Yet sometimes we forget the importance of acknowledging important differences that enable belonging.

4.3.2.9 Seeing Colour

Interviewing families that have adopted trans-racially Attwell reports one mother's answer on the question of the race of her trans-racially adopted child:

"I do not see him as a different race to me, to me he is exactly the same as I am; his skin is just slightly darker and his hair is more curlier."
(Attwell, 2004: 46–47)

DiAngelo & Dyson write about the 'colour-blind ideology':

"While the idea of colour blindness may have started out as a well-intentioned strategy for interrupting racism, in practice it has served to deny the reality of racism and thus hold it in place."
(DiAngelo & Dyson, 2018: 124)

On one hand – not seeing colour is a way of saying that I see this child as one and the same as me; as belonging to me and my family. But failing to see that having a different colour skin means a different set of life experiences especially with regard to privilege and prejudice could rob a white parent of the necessary resources that are needed to raise black or coloured children in a world that is often hostile to them (NABSW, 1972: 2). Nikondeha models a life

lived cognisant of the colour of her children and the need to inform herself; and for adoptive families to inform themselves of what the colour of their children means for their lives. She doesn't pretend that it will ever be possible to fully understand what it means to be black; but through love she learns and commits herself to learning more about understanding her own children.

4.3.2.10 James Cone and Reinhold Niebuhr

On her blog Nikondeha reflects:

I hold my breath because I now know that brown boys don't always make it through their suburban neighbourhood. Sometimes they don't survive the park, the street, even the walk home to watch a basketball game with their dad. How can they survive their bouts of immaturity under such conditions, I wonder.
(Nikondeha, 2015a)

She also offers some recommended reading especially for trans-racially adoptive parents that should help them in understanding 'blackness' and what it means to raise black children; one of the books she recommends is James Cone's *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Nikondeha, 2015b). In *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* James Cone helpfully explores the activism and ethic of Reinhold Niebuhr; he praises Niebuhr for his ability to articulate a theory of ethics and justice that will deal with racial injustice but his most difficult criticism is: "Niebuhr had 'eyes to see' black suffering, but I believe he lacked the 'heart to feel' it as his own" (Cone, 2013: 108). Cone goes on to write: "What I questioned was his limited perspective, as a white man, on the race crisis in America. His theology and ethics needed to be informed from critical reading and dialogue with radical black perspectives" (Cone, 2013: 144). A progressive theologian like Niebuhr had trouble crossing the boundaries of race in order to engage as he would have liked to; regular adoptive parents do not necessarily have the benefit of Niebuhr's philosophical background – but as parents they are able to rely on what Cone describes as "the 'heart to feel it'" (Cone, 2013: 108). Yet, even with the 'heart to feel it' the crossing of cultures and translation of understandings that are necessary for transformative dialogue in a still segregated South Africa are hard contexts to generate and participate in. White privilege continues to make the conditions necessary for intergroup contact that

effectively reduces prejudice difficult to produce⁴¹. As a part of our formation for ministry in the Methodist Church we visited rural churches in rural settlements of the North West, I found I was not able to ‘identify with’ what it meant to be born in to one of these impoverished settlements; I knew that my advantages in education, my connections in life, my whiteness would mean someone would fetch me if ever I was stuck there. I’m not sure if I, or any white parent am or are capable of enough *Kenosis* to understand the experience of any of our children.

4.3.2.11 Jesus’ *Kenosis*

Kenosis refers to Jesus’ self-emptying in order to identify with humanity. In his baptism Jesus enacts his death and resurrection; God the parent affirms his identity and the Holy Spirit rests on him like a dove. In his self-emptying Jesus is filled with all the fullness of God; but in a mystery that is difficult to understand he is also making space for humanity. *Ubuntu* which realises that I am because of others should theoretically allow others to glory in their ‘otherness’, Senghor writes of African individuality and community:

“...it was founded on dialogue and reciprocity, the group had priority over the individual without out crushing him, but allowing him to blossom as a person.”
(Senghor, quoted in Battle, 2009: Loc. 1266)

As we celebrate otherness; we empty ourselves of our own identities in order to make room and recognition for the essence of other’s identities; purposes and needs. It is in his *Kenosis* that Jesus is glorified. For the Church to baptize is to make room for more children; and in that it is for the church as a community to be changed. Nikondeha shows the way in which belonging is mutual; she doesn’t pretend that it is perfect – but she expresses a longing and along the way; an embodiment of what it should be.

⁴¹ Forster discusses the usefulness of intergroup contact (Forster, 2017: 58) for reducing prejudice. Hewstone & Swart point out that among the conditions that Allport identified to be useful for reducing prejudice were “equal status among the participants” (Hewstone & Swart, 2011: 375). The relationship of parent to child is definitely not one of ‘equal status among the participants’; in a conversation with adopted adoption story teller Thola Anthamu she reminded the group of white adoptive parents we were with that you can still be a racist even if you have adopted a black or coloured child.

4.3.3 Conclusion

Belonging is obviously most central to this thesis, this belonging is characterised by an ontology of blessedness accompanied by a progressive sense of eschatology – spiralling towards hopefulness and healing. Reflection inspired by Nikondeha’s narrative offers value lessons about adoption and about baptism. The lesson of promiscuity – or lack of judgment and carefulness seems important; when I asked a friend for advice about having children his words of wisdom were “you’ll never have enough time or money but it’s worth it.” Today I agree and somehow there is enough time and money – even though it truly is never enough. This story of their being ‘enough’ is a reminder to the church and to families that there is always room for more; to be more inclusive; to be more willing to receive and be hospitable. This lesson of promiscuity is also one of being willing to belong to God’s extended family. Belonging also has to do with identity and it is important not to impose our identity on others – even on our own children. With kenotic love it turns out that our children baptize us into their extended families and our familiness becomes more than just being ‘white’ or ‘South African’ or in the case of Kelley Nikondeha – American. Instead she becomes with her children ‘Burundian American’ and recognizes that she and her children belong to a wider family. In this kenotic act we empty ourselves to be filled; not in order to be empty. Within this belonging and identifying is the reality that in a radically unjust world we can never fully identify with each other across race and gender; sometimes knowing that we don’t fully understand each other and can’t fully belong as we would hope to is the tension that needs to be accepted.

4.4 Progressing

Belonging has to do with finding your place in a fragmented world. In the above discussion of some select themes in Nikondeha’s narrative I’ve identified two important ideas; Baptismal Promiscuity – the willingness of the church to identify itself as the mother of ‘illegitimate’ children; and in so doing to make these children ‘legitimate’. With this comes the need to ensure that these children really ‘belong’ which is a step that the church is not always very good at in that it most often expects children to adapt to its demands; it expects to ‘shape’ children rather than be ‘shaped’ by them or for them. Church also often expects families to conform to a stereotype that is not often found in the Bible. In being baptised; I mentioned the way in which Jesus baptism by John is the beginning of his journey to the cross (See Section

4.3.2 Baptismal Call). Crossing the Jordan in Baptism re-enacts Joshua's crossing into the promised land; it re-enacts the return of exiles; it is the moment of exhortation before the first Passover in the promised land – a moment of ethical decision: "Choose this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15).

4.4.1 Returning to Repair

Nikondeha describes the work that the returning exiles began:

God knew that returning matters. Return was perfumed with justice, the scent of shalom thick around the shoulders of our ancestors as they walked home. Once they arrived in the ruined city, they gathered up their courage and began the repair work...
(Nikondeha 2017: Loc. 1545)

In hindsight we know how the repair work worked out; the scripture narrative tells and retells the story of the way things should be and never turn out to be and ends in the protestant canon with Malachi looking forward to return of the Lord to the temple . Brueggemann and Linafelt describe the importance of the 'now' and the 'not yet' in their theory of the narrative interpretation of Old Testament canonical history:

The pre-land Torah looks "with eager longing" to the narrative of the land, and the land narrative of the Former Prophets looks to the pre-land literature as normative for life in the land.
(Brueggemann & Linafelt, 2012: 36 [See also 296 on minor prophets])

The pre-land / land narrative of the Old Testament constantly points to hope that promises to be fulfilled yet never is; in the New Testament this hopefulness promises to be fulfilled in the apocalyptic narratives of Revelation where the land is renewed and Jerusalem descends. This hope-filled-ness and faith in the inevitability of repair and renewal characterises Desmond Tutu's *Ubuntu* it is embodied in Methodist Theology in a belief in the possibility and inevitability of perfection. It means that a good adoption is devoted to constant and consistent repair work towards *shalom*.

4.4.2 The Promise of Repair

It also means that it is possible to tell the truth about the pain and injustice that leads to the necessity of adoption. Nikondeha reminisces on the behaviour and attitude of a departed

friend; Richard Twiss, a Sicangu Lakota⁴² and partner in the Amahoro dialogues who spoke openly about the pain that the colonisation of America had caused his people:

And because we were family, he refused to be coy about the fractured state of our relationship and what must be explored so we can move toward shalom as siblings in God's family.
(Nikondeha 2017: Loc. 1634)

Tutu's leadership of the TRC in South Africa; his resilience in the face of the hopeless evil of humanity was fuelled by his faith in God's promise and ability to heal. In this sense Tutu's *Ubuntu* is Christianized. He does come into much criticism for his insistence on the possibility of forgiveness and renewal. His vision of the rainbow as illustrated earlier was perhaps too optimistic for some. The lack of restitution and repair in South Africa has led to much pessimism about the rainbow of hope that Tutu and Mandela painted at the time of South Africa's transition. But one of the qualities of adoption that Nikondeha's narrative embodies is the importance of telling the truth and being true to adopted children.

4.4.3 The Truth about Relinquishment

Relinquishment often sits on the other side of justice, revealing what little we have left after injustice steals its dark portion.
(Nikondeha, 2017: Loc. 509)

Nikondeha could have chosen many themes for her title; using Baptism as the sacrament of new life and new identity; of new birth – a washing away of the past and the dawn of new life; but she chose 'Belonging' it is not the same as 'Healing' or 'Repairing'; belonging does not pretend that the world is no longer fragmented. After we adopted our son many people felt free to tell me that they were also adopted; many of these people were white and their parents were white – their adoption was not advertised on their bodies. For some people there is much debate about telling children that they are adopted – in transracial adoptions it is inevitable that there will be some explaining. Nikondeha's use of the word 'Relinquishment' is much better than 'given up' or 'abandoned' and other words that might be used to describe what it means to release a child. In the context of hope for redemption and healing it is

⁴² A First Nation American Tribe

possible to be honest with children about the pain of the world we live in. This is one of the reasons why it is so hard to articulate and ‘ethic’ of adoption and why a complex and nuanced metaethics is needed; situated largely in the hope of God’s eventual redemptive justice as promised in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus.

On two occasions she describes her children’s mourning at the loss of their relinquishing parents, I will highlight one occasion:

Emma and I sat on the couch. At age eleven, she was asking to hear another part of her story:

What happened to her birth mom?

I told her that her first mom carried a disease in her blood, one that made her very sick. But at the same time she carried life—Emma’s life.

The day Emma was born, both life and death had their say. We cried together as I confirmed her growing suspicion: her mother died of AIDS while giving birth to her. (Nikondeha 2017: Loc. 1140)

Along with the truth of the sadness of her mother’s death; through ritual and symbol Nikondeha is able to help her child. One day while her daughter is lighting a candle in memory of her birth mother she notices a picture of Jesus crucified on the cover of a book and asks if Jesus really died (Nikondeha 2017: Loc. 1141). It seems the answer “Yes” is all that her daughter needed at that point; without the reminder that Nikondeha quickly offered: “Three days later God raised him from the dead.” In reflecting on the Eucharist James Smith doesn’t say much about Jesus’ death; or the violence of the idea of drinking the ‘blood of Christ’; rather he points to the eschatological hopefulness of the meal (Smith, 2009: 230); Moltmann writes in his preface to *The Crucified God*:

...at the centre of the Christian faith stands an unsuccessful, tormented Christ, dying in forsakenness. The recollection that God raised this crucified Christ and made him the hope of the world must lead the churches to break their alliances with the powerful and to enter into the solidarity of the humiliated.

(Moltmann, 1993: ix)

In my second chapter I spoke of the unavoidable realisation that those who are in a position to adopt are more powerful than those who relinquish; and those who are relinquished exist at the base of intersections of vulnerabilities. In the previous section I spoke about the hope of *kenosis* the self-emptying of ourselves of our identity in order to meet relinquished children (especially in trans-racial adoptions) at the vulnerability of their identity. As mother Nikondeha helps her daughter to mourn; she expresses the desire to tell the good news of resurrection – but quickly realises the need to wait at the cross. “What do we do between the

first resurrection and all the others? For my daughter, this isn't a theoretical question. She doesn't do 'theoretical.' She wants to know why God can redeem her body, but not her mother's." (Nikondeha, 2017: Loc. 1146)

Tutu says:

"We are fragile creatures, and it is from this weakness, not despite it, that we discover the possibility of true joy ... "Discovering more joy does not, I'm sorry to say, save us from the inevitability of hardship and heartbreak. In fact, we may cry more easily, but we will laugh more easily, too. Perhaps we are just more alive. Yet as we discover more joy, we can face suffering in a way that ennobles rather than embitters. We have hardship without becoming hard. We have heartbreak without being broken." (Gyatso, Tutu & Abrams, 2016: 25)

I believe the joy that he is speaking of here, joy that is able to deal with difficulty is sourced in a faith filled awareness of the possibility or inevitability of blessedness as a received way of life that is not within our own power to claim but rather to receive in trust.

This is the unresolvable tension between the now and the not yet; but the not yet makes the now bearable; in the middle of the unanswerable questions Nikondeha focusses on the constant need to work towards redemption; reflecting on the story of Ruth and Naomi who in the bitterness of mourning and death continue to find ways to redeem and be redeemed through loving partnerships and small deeds. In the following chapter she writes of *tikkun olam*.

4.4.4 Tikkun Olam (Small Repairs)

... the recognition that we each do small things toward the healing of our society. Each of us makes individual contributions toward the collective work of justice. (Nikondeha 2017: Loc. 1194)

She goes on to say "Our small gestures insist that everyone belongs and that the structures of the world must be calibrated toward inclusion" (Nikondeha 2017: Loc. 1194). Illustrating progressive and redemptive inclusivity Nikondeha goes on to write of her and Claude's (her husband) mission work in Burundi; as people with privilege, influence and commitment to change they are able to do work that gradually repairs relationships between Hutu and Tutsi neighbours. Her illustration of something that fosters reunion is the work of building a shared road together to aid access to their villages. She describes Tikkun Olam as the work of a needle gently sewing fragmented cloth together; building binding relationships for a shared

world. Recalling the pain of division between Hutu and Tutsi she paints a powerful picture of the possibility of redemption through reconciliation and relationship.

4.4.5 *Movements in Time and Space*

In this passage Nikondeha clearly implies the *perichōrēsis* of the Trinity as reflected in the interaction of friends and families:

For those in the company of the adopted, reciprocity is the spiralling deeper in mutual hospitality. We allow belonging to form us by spinning us more tightly together, making us a family. We practice two-way connection, not settling for one-way expressions of care. We move in mutuality with one another. Because the reciprocity at work in our family energizes us, we cultivate belonging not only inside but outside our home. We become sirens of belonging in our schools, churches, and workplaces. This is where adoptive goodness turns outward—we are blessed to be a blessing to others.

True belonging is part of the divine dance that always makes room for others at God's table. When we belong well to others, that connection cannot be contained.
(Nikondeha, 2017: Loc. 931)

Hospitality and belonging as described in 4.3 (above) creates space for hospitality. Through time narratives and relationships progress – visiting and revisiting fostering new possibilities of belonging and reciprocating. Moltmann describes the missional character of this cosmic dance (Hill, 2007: 47):

Then the triune God is at home *in* his world, and his world exists *out of* his inexhaustible glory. This is the eternal feast of heaven and earth. This is the dance of the redeemed. This is 'the laughter of the universe'. Then all things join in the Song of Wisdom ...
(Moltmann, 1981: 128)

As Nikondeha reflects on the progression toward which this all moves she reminds her readers:

"When you belong to a family, you are an heir. You are part of a larger story that reaches back but, more importantly, surges forward... our present reality has huge implication for the future... we are adopted into this family to enact God's dream for a communion of saints from among the nations... our belonging has no end."
(Nikondeha 2017: Loc. 1815-1824)

Progression is thus a movement toward the eschatological promise of the scripture narrative; yet at the same time it is a constant movement back and forth between people, within people, and between people and God; all of these movements progress toward the promise of improved and perfected love.

4.4.6 Conclusion

As is quite clear from this and the previous section it is difficult to untangle belonging and progression; each makes room for the other. The primary characteristic of the work of progression is the work of repair to do the work of repair is to remember that you don't work alone but you work with God toward God's purpose.

4.5 Blessedness

In Nikondeha's narrative belonging takes centre stage. She illustrates the importance of a sense of mutual belonging in families, across national boundaries, in churches and among friends (4.3). Within this sense of belonging is a sense of progressing – as I have described in Section 4.4. This progressing is toward God's hope for the world and the coming of the Kingdom. Within this sense of belongingness and progressiveness Nikondeha points toward a sense of the influence of God toward realizing this belonging and progression; a sense of God's prevailing grace. Nikondeha writes:

Brokenness opened the door to redemptive work in my life. By the strength of one mother, I was born despite the odds towering against her. Another mother, saddled with infertility, imagined a family that included me. Both these women demonstrated how brokenness can give way to wholeness. They taught me I could be relinquished in love and redeemed by love. I learned I could trust redemption to come in this world.
(Nikondeha 2017: Loc. 1002)

In the Baptism liturgy of the Methodist Church we preach a short sermon to those being baptized:

for you, Jesus Christ came into the world;
for you he lived and showed God's love;
for you he suffered death on the cross;
for you he triumphed over death,
rising to newness of life;
for you he prays at God's right hand:
all this for you,
before you could know anything of it.
In your baptism, the word of Scripture is fulfilled:
'We love, because God first loved us.'
(Methodist Church, 2018: 3)

This excerpt from the Methodist service of Baptism emphasizes Methodist faith in the fact that 'before you could know anything of it' Jesus, the son of God intercedes and prays for you. For Methodists infant baptism is a sign of God's prevenient grace, a reminder that this

‘grace’ is not just the notion of God’s favour, but God’s power working in the child’s favour, willing the child toward salvation. Nikondeha’s recognition that in her relinquishment and adoption God had in some way prepared a narrative for her life, similar to the way that Volf describes the importance of integrating the events of one’s life into a greater patchwork (Volf, 2006: 32, 35, 88). In a moment of brokenness Nikondeha sees the work of God’s repair, God’s hospitality prepared for her life.

Soon after she was born Nikondeha was baptised:

...the good women of Holy Family Adoption Agency in Los Angeles made sure I was baptized. A priest sprinkled holy water on my forehead, and the church embraced me. I slipped into God’s family almost unnoticed. This was my first adoption.
(Nikondeha, 2017: Loc.85)

In the first quote in this section Nikondeha is thinking back on the story of her life, she is able to weave repair into the broken moment in which she was relinquished. She expresses a desire in the story to know more about the woman who relinquished her (Nikondeha, 2017: Loc. 1405). When she was born the church was there to play their part as sacrament (3.4.2) by baptising this child who by the conventions of the day was born in an inhospitable world due to circumstances beyond her own control. This baby needed feeding, it needed diapers, hugs and all of those things babies need. But the act of baptism was not just a reminder to the baby or to God that she belonged in this world because of a greater ontological force at work. As much as the ‘good women of the Holy Family Adoption Agency’ wanted to bring her to be baptized; for their identity, for the purpose of their work, their understanding of the sanctity of life they also needed to bring this child to be baptized.

Bauerschmidt writes of the rite of baptism in the Catholic church as the child is brought to the priest the cross is signed on his or her forehead: “touching in the shape of the cross, the sign of the renunciation of control” (Bauerschmidt, 2011: 294) he goes on to write: “the baptized body is a body subjected ... to God and to God alone” (Bauerschmidt, 2011: 295). As much as the Catholic liturgy might have more rituals even in my low Methodist church the baby is handed over to the minister; showed to the congregation, introduced as a new part of the community. The child is baptized and named, the parents make commitments to care for these children in body, mind and spirit, and to set before them a Christian example so that they might learn the way of Christ (Methodist Church, 2018: 5). In baptism the reason for caring is remembered; this child belongs to God and as such is sacred. A certificate is filed in some

dark drawer, a register is kept in musty church, a risographed copy of church notices remembers this moment and an adult seeking to integrate the story of their existence can say with Luther “Baptizatus sum” (I am baptised). “Before I could know anything of it ... I love, because God first loved.”

A few weeks later, a woman scooped me out of the white-wicker bassinet in the viewing room of the adoption agency and claimed me as her own. Her physical emptiness prepared the way for my fullness; now I was twice adopted. By the time we left the building, with her cradling me in the crook of her arm, I belonged. That’s how sacraments tend to work—altering reality in an instant.
(Nikondeha, 2017: Loc. 85)

Nikondeha goes on to tell her story, in words that remind us of the scooping up of Moses; the scooping of baptismal waters; the crook of a shepherd that guides lambs, the involuntary kenosis of infertility made room for her to belong and for ‘a woman’ to become a mother. “That’s how sacraments tend to work – altering reality in an instant” (Nikondeha, 2017: Loc. 85).

To read Nikondeha’s book is to know that she doesn’t think that some sort of transubstantiation happened in the moment of her being scooped from the bassinet. Reality was altered because being scooped up and belonging set in motion a life that would lead to her writing this book about adopting and being adopted. And to get to the point of writing this book she would be working in Burundi, and she would adopt two children to be her sons.

Blessedness recognizes belonging and progressing to be signs of a sacramental reality in which God is actively and gracefully leaning towards redemption; willing the salvation of the world. Having told her story of being scooped out of a basinet Nikondeha celebrates the adoption of her own children.

In a children’s home in Burundi she held Emma, a child in hospice care. None of the nannies in the children’s home wanted to touch her because her mother had died of HIV/AIDS and they were suspicious of the disease. Nikondeha had planned to adopt a young boy named Justin but had to make arrangements from the USA; she kept in touch with the people running the home and would call to find out about Justin’s health. One day while she was enquiring about Justin the missionary running the centre:

... told me about Emma and her resilience, how she was still fighting to live and showing some slight improvement. I almost missed her words entirely because I heard another

Voice, as if on another frequency, say,
"She's yours, too."

I knew the Voice; I recognized the timbre and the invitation. This time there was no question, just a simple declaration:

"Yes, she's my girl."

If there was room for one child in our home, then certainly there was room for two.
 (Nikondeha, 2017: Loc. 970)

Emma still tested positive for HIV but when it was time to take her and Justin home she tested negative. "After 17 months her mother's antibodies had "finally flushed out of her system ... her true negative status was revealed" (Nikondeha, 2017: 990). Nikondeha receives this as a miracle. An ontology of blessedness is able to receive these moments of wholeness and healing that bend toward life as grace filled miracles. In the next paragraph Nikondeha writes: "when the relinquished call, redemption often responds" (Nikondeha, 2017: 997).

4.6 Conclusion – Belonging, Progressing, Blessedness in a Fractured World

Eddie Brickell and the New Bohemians sing:

I'm not aware of too many things
 I know what I know if you know what I mean
 Philosophy is a talk on cereal box
 religion
 Is a smile on a dog
 (Eddie Brickell & The New Bohemians, 1988, v. 1)

Besides being a song with a great tune, Brickell's cynical lyric reminds me that in theological work we tend to find what we are looking for; I remain convinced that my dogs smile but those who are afraid of dogs and don't know mine very well tell me that they scowl menacingly. In *The Little Prince* (1943) Antoine de Saint-Exupéry tells of the Little Prince's visit to a large and beautiful planet inhabited by a geographer (de Saint-Exupéry, 1943: Loc.699) the excited prince has so many questions:

"Your planet is very beautiful," he said.
 "Has it any oceans?"
 "I couldn't tell you," said the geographer.
 "Ah!" The little prince was disappointed. "Has it any mountains?"
 "I couldn't tell you," said the geographer.
 "And towns, and rivers, and deserts?"
 "I couldn't tell you that, either."
 "But you are a geographer!"
 "Exactly," the geographer said. "But I am not an explorer. I haven't a single explorer on my planet. It is not the geographer who goes out to count the towns, the rivers, the mountains, the seas, the oceans, and the deserts. The geographer is much too important to go loafing

about. He does not leave his desk...
(de Saint-Exupéry, 1943: Loc. 717)

The geographer cannot answer the questions because he is not an explorer. He also has some terrible theories about how to tell good explorers from bad explorers. Hauerwas and Long write:

Wesley's understanding of theology—that is, theology is never an end in itself but should serve the interest of transformed living. Accordingly theology is in service to essential Christian practices, which means that theology is first and foremost to be preached, sung, and lived. Wesleyan theology is not abstract speculation but joyful contemplation and obedience, manifest in the conjoining of happiness and holiness.
(Hauerwas & Long, 2011: 255)

The theology of John Wesley and subsequently Methodism if it remains true to his doctrine. And the theology of Desmond Tutu whose Christian *Ubuntu* theology and practice bears a great amount of responsibility for peaceful transition in South Africa is optimistic theology in a cynical world (Katangole, 2018: 350). Tutu and Wesley have put these theologies that are “first and foremost to be preached, sung and lived” (Hauerwas & Long, 2011: 257) into practice and it has worked. It seems Nikondeha has done the same and according to her narrative it makes some sense. She and Claude are making a positive difference in the world and their practice of adoption seems positive. For adoption the simple values are an optimistic ontology of blessedness able to incorporate stories of relinquishment and redemption into a wholeness that does not diminish the pain of loss or experience of the adopted but rather creates space for it. The quality of ‘belonging’ that implies inclusivity is a reminder of the importance of love motivated self-emptying or *kenosis* not to the point of self-harm, but following Jesus a *kenosis* that creates room for reciprocal love. All of this is part and parcel of the work toward God's inevitable *telos*; we live in the tension between the now and the not yet, sacraments remind us of the constant opportunities for new beginnings with God in partnership with humanity toward that which is whole and good.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

I started with a black woman at a busy-mini bus intersection in a white suburb asking a white man with a black child, “Is that your (real) child?” I was the one being asked. And I needed to reflect on what it means to be asked this question. In this concluding chapter I will sum up the process of reflection that has helped me to understand the question more completely. I think I’ve also begun to think about what the nature of the answer to the question should be. In reviewing the research problem, methodology, goals and questions I hope I will be able to identify how this study will contribute to further dialogue and research.

5.2 A review of the research problem

In South Africa and across the world children are adopted trans-racially and trans-nationally. Poverty and sexual abuse of women combined with a lack of access to birth control information and resources there are many unwanted pregnancies. In South Africa 100,000 abortions are performed every year; 40,000 children are relinquished to foster care; 3,000 abandoned and about 1,000 children adopted. Of those children adopted most of them are adopted trans-racially; well-resourced white families have the resources to adopt children and there are various stigmas around the idea of adoption in African tradition due to concerns about ancestral ties (Chapter 2). Kelley Nikondeha’s book *Adopted: The Sacrament of Belonging in a Fractured World* (2017) illuminates the way in which adoption has lessons to teach us about the significance of baptism and baptism has lessons to teach us about adoption. In comparing adoption to a sacrament she proposes a way in which we might be able to answer the question: “Is that your (real) child?”

I needed to find a theological framework that could deal with the complexity of the question: “Is that your (real) child?” with the hope of finding a way to explain the way in which adoption could validly be described as a ‘sacrament of belonging’.

5.3 A review of the research questions

“Is that your (real) child?” Is my over-arching research question but I have come to realise that it is almost impossible to answer in this way.

Following the analogy of the frustrating hermeneutical gap between cartography (the Geographer) and exploration (The Little Prince) as illustrated above in my extract from de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* (4.6). "Is that your (real) child?" is a question that only explorers can answer and I've had to work out some principles of cartography as it relates to "Mapping the Margins"⁴³ (Crenshaw, 1991: 1241).

Even though I am an adoptive parent, and I can say for certain that this child is my 'real' child because of the nature of my love for him, it is difficult to 'map' this answer.

The Geographer asks The Little Prince for information about his planet and the little prince wants him to know that on his planet he has a flower.

"I have also a flower."

"We do not record flowers," said the geographer.

"Why is that? The flower is the most beautiful thing on my planet!"

"We do not record them," said the geographer, "because they are ephemeral."
(de Saint-Exupéry, 1943: Loc. 749)

As a cartographer I can only record the existence of a valley with a river that would probably be a good place to plant flowers so my questions are:

- a) "What are the mountains like?"
- b) "What is the river like, is it navigable?"
- c) "Are there settlements in the valley?"

Or in the language of academia (as best as I am able to speak it) I can explore these themes:

- a) What are the fractures that result in relinquishment and hamper belonging. (Ch. 2)
- b) A theology of sacrament suited to the concepts of baptism and belonging. (Ch. 3)
- c) How does Nikondeha's narrative relate to this theology of sacrament? (Ch. 4)

⁴³ Crenshaw explores intersections of race and gender especially in the ways that "the location of women of color at the intersection of race and gender makes our actual experience of domestic violence, rape, and remedial reform qualitatively different than that of white women" (Crenshaw, 1991: 1245). Crenshaw is able to use the pronoun 'our' when speaking of being a woman of colour; I can speak as a part of the adoption 'triad' but my part is as the one at the apex of power whose experience is vastly different from all the other participants (1.1 & 2.3).

5.3.1 Chapter 2: What are the fractures that result in relinquishment and hamper belonging?

5.3.1.1 Who's best interests?

In exploring the nature of the fractures in adoption and belonging I found two interesting perspectives presented in the work of Laura Briggs who writes adoption is not “an uncomplicated, good thing” (Briggs, 2012: 2). Laura Briggs’ *Somebodies Children* (2012) is written to counter Elizabeth Bartholet’s *Nobody’s Children* (2000). From Bartholet’s perspective the common maxim ‘the best interests of the child’ is overwhelmingly defined in terms of western (especially American conservative evangelical) ideals of privilege and prosperity. Stanley Hauerwas reflecting on medical ethics and retardation asks “Should suffering be eliminated?” (Hauerwas, 2001b: 557) our immediate answer would be “yes!” We would then have to work out how much suffering was too much. When my daughter is angry with us for being strict she says “I wish I could be adopted by ...” and she names a relative or friend’s parents who allegedly allow their children to watch television during the week, not do their homework and will not ask her to tidy her room. Briggs’ in *Somebodies Children* highlights the history of forcibly removing children from their biological families because of circumstances of poverty, because their mothers were not married, or through especially prejudicial laws like the “Indian Child Welfare Act” in America (Briggs, 2012: 85). The idea of rescuing children from impoverished communities and not being cognisant of who they are and to whom they belong is terrifying and complex (2.1).

5.3.2 Foster Care

South Africa established foster care grants in response to the anticipated numbers of children who would be orphaned by HIV and AIDS; second to abortion this is the most popular form of relinquishment and it does work well in many situations. One of the greatest benefits of this system is its ability to deal with concerns around ancestral traditions so intrinsic to identity and belonging in African traditional culture. In some of the literature major problems were found in that children became the primary source of income for some people who are otherwise thoroughly deprived and disempowered and because the foster care grant carries these children into young adult hood the rural elderly who tend to end up taking responsibility for them become vulnerable to abuse by these children (2.2.2).

5.3.3 Race

South Africa's Social welfare system favours foster care and they do this for some good reasons following the argument of the NABSW about the need for black children to be raised in black families (2.3). The complexity of race not just in South Africa but all over the world means that trans-racially adoptive families need to honestly embrace the race of their children and avoid pretending that they do not see colour (2.3, 2.4 and 3.3.2). Cone's fascinating analysis of R Nieburh's inability to deal adequately with racial segregation and violence at his congregation in Southern America (4.3.2.10, Cone 2013: 108) and Van Wyngaard's appeal to be mindful of the problems of racial myopia in white discourse (1.1; Van Wyngaard, 2012: 122) point to the need for trans-racial adopters to inform themselves of these tensions. Telling the truth about these problems is much easier in this framework of blessing, belonging and progressing (2.1.1; 3.2; 4.3.2.9; 4.4.3). It would be good to see more acceptance of adoption as a way of building families in African culture, the prevalence of foster care in African families especially those who are struggling financially means that the foster care grant is an incentive not to adopt children in their care, it might be a good idea to explore the possibility of reflecting adoptional belonging within a rich foster care culture along with the benefit of some form of foster / adoption grant (2.2.2).

5.3.4 Abortion, Abandonment & Adoption

The sheer number of abortions in South Africa compared to the amount of children adopted is an indicator that adoption will not solve the problem of abortion in South Africa. To curb abortion we need to curb the scourge of physical and sexual violence against women, the church needs to act decisively in dealing with male promiscuity and gender education, we also need to focus strongly on empowering women to take control of their reproductive choices and shared parental responsibilities (Sachs, 2005: 36–37); perhaps the MCSA's latest leadership appointments are going to help pave the way (Shange, 2019, para. 3). Child abandonment is sometimes the result of failed abortions or of young mothers not knowing the options available to them; in some traditional circles people believed that it would be better for a child to die than to be placed in the home of a different tribe (2.2.3). Within African tradition there are ways to inform the ancestors of new family arrangements perhaps these possibilities need to be explored further for better understanding of modes of cultural belonging (Blackie, 2014: 82).

5.3.5 Chapter 3: What does a theology of sacrament suited to the concepts of baptism and belonging look like?

5.3.5.1 Ubuntu / Methodist Theological, Ontological, Narrative Framework

To carry the weight of the subject I needed to find a framework with the necessary nuance and flexibility to hold its abstractions. Thinking of the geographer's inability to map ephemeral flowers (5.3) I needed to find a valley suited to growing them. The Methodist Church of Southern Africa is one of the largest denominations in South Africa and this is largely due to its almost natural embodiment of *ubuntu* (Olivier, 2006: 9). Desmond Tutu's articulation and practice of *ubuntu* theology has been seen to be one of the driving forces of South Africa's peaceful transition to democracy. At the same time this 'rainbow narrative' has also been hailed as controversial because South Africa is still not reconciled (2.1). I was able to find complementary similarities in Tutu's *ubuntu* and Wesley's theology by following themes adapted from Hauerwas and Long (2011: 257) and seen in Tutu's theology: **Blessing** as an overarching narrative of God's positive will toward the world, **Belonging** indicating a spirit and ethic of inclusivity and **Progressing** acceptance of the inevitability of imminent eschatology and the optimism of Christian perfection realised in perfect love.

5.3.5.2 Feminist / Non Eurocentric

Following Dube and the Circle of African Woman Theologians it seems important that this framework be able to move away from oppressive and exploitative paradigms, propose liberating frameworks, reject gender discrimination and reject eurocentrism (Njoroge and Dube 2001: 15; 3.2 & 3.5). I am aware that Methodism comes from Europe and so does Anglicanism but both have found a particular way of being "brewed in an African pot" (Orobator, 2008: 10). These particular churches have found the courage to respond to the overwhelming brokenness of South Africa's situation with a message of realistic liberation hopefulness (Forster, 2014: 95, 2015: 3; Gutiérrez, 1988: 125).

5.3.6 Chapter 4: How does this theology relate to Kelley Nikondeha's "Adopted: The Sacrament of Belonging in a Fractured World."

Nikondeha tells the story of how adoption and baptism are both foundational for her identity; and her adoptive mother's identity – adoption has become a theme of her life. She hadn't

planned to adopt two children but somehow she knew that that was what she would have to do (4.5). Being baptised as helped her to realise that her family is more than just her and her husband's relatives, their two children and each other but the bigger church and extended human family (4.3). This extended family has inspired her to live the way of kenotic hospitality making space for others to become a part of her life and her family vision and blessing them in return (4.3.2). These relationships have helped her to see ways and find ways to bring redemption to the world as she works for justice and restoration in Burundi and in the USA (4.4). Her story is characterised by blessedness, belonging and progression toward the eschatological hope of God's Kingdom of peace. Her narrative is in harmony with the narrative of a Methodist Ubuntu ethical framework.

Nikondeha's story offers insight into what it means to call adoption a sacrament, it truly is an outward sign of something significant and real that is happening spiritually. She conveys the nature of this reality in poetic prose that is too ephemeral to be mapped, in response to those who might claim that adoption is not 'natural' or 'real' she writes:

In our home, ringed by adoption goodness, I am many things: tantrum-wrangler, nightmare-whisperer, Band-Aid dispenser. I am oatmeal-maker, bedside intercessor, conversation partner, affirmation muse, and a conveyer belt of hugs, kisses, and cheeky squeezes. I am not, however, unnatural. I'm not a second-hand mother, a lesser choice for these babes of mine. Nor was my own mother anything less than a natural fit for me. When God is in the family way, it might look mysterious, but never unnatural.
(Nikondeha, 2017: Loc. 1643)

5.4 A review of the research methodology, and research goal(s)

I set out to describe the way in which I could answer the abstract question: "Is that your (real) child?" My goal was to survey the ethical thinking of Desmond Tutu; especially with regard to his theology and practice of *Ubuntu* and the concept of a *Methodist Theological Ethics* as described by Hauerwas and Long. In *Ubuntu* and *Methodist Theological Ethics* I decided to explore three themes: Blessedness, Belonging and Progressing. My Methodology has constituted a review of literature centred on these two concepts in order to bring them into conversation with Kelley Nikondeha's *Adopted: The Sacrament of Belonging in a Fractured World*. Another text that I felt was necessary to make sense of the question has been the context of South Africa and some of the conversation around race, reconciliation and trans-racial adoption.

Through qualitative research and review of some interesting literature around the complexity I think I have been able to describe the South African situation and some of the associated challenges, it was quite hard to find information that was not ‘partisan’ with regard to adoption; most of the media articles were written by people lamenting the Department of Social Development’s lack of willingness to sanction trans-racial adoptions and not a lot of sensitivity to issues around race. Some of the literature was disproportionately alarmist with people choosing the most extreme speculative statistics available to help their causes. (Chapter 2)

The part that I really enjoyed was working with the paradigm of Blessedness, Belonging and Progress to reflect on Tutu’s *Ubuntu* and *Methodist Theological Ethics*. These key themes helped me to organize my own thoughts and especially to grow in understanding of ethics as the working out of a narrative ontological puzzle. Narrative essential to our modes of making sense of the world and realising our meaning and purpose in it, Stanley Hauerwas emphasis on narrative, sacramental, spiritual formation within the “walls of the church” (Reno, 2018: 310) might be something that appeals especially to me because I am a pastor and that is where I live. Not only is this interesting it is also helpful for self-reflection. I have realized through this reading that many things that I felt I knew but never could articulate are so well articulated in the literature. The idea of ‘blessedness’ as an overwhelming ontology that produces belonging and inclusivity in the spirit of the redeeming ministry of Jesus is clearly seen in Tutu’s life and theology as explained in Battle’s: *Reconciliation: The ubuntu theology of Desmond Tutu*. Looking back I would like to gain deeper understanding of the sources of Tutu’s theology. Reading on hope, joy and progress was a reminder of the importance of joy and hope as an important force against the prevalence of despair, despondence, recession and the destructive power of fear (Volf, 2017: 105).

5.5 A review of the contribution and relevance of the study

A sense of belonging is very important to human identity, families come in all shapes and sizes and every child has a different experience of what it means to belong. Macmaster points out the negative effects that break down in family relationships and dysfunctional structures of belonging has on children on the Cape Flats, some of these children in their alienation are drawn into gangs when it would be better if they would find ‘belonging’ in healthier circumstances, preferably in healthy churches (MacMaster, 2010: 49, 125). Belonging and

baptism is not just about belonging in a conventional family way; belonging can be found in foster care or extended families even in institutional care. An *ubuntu* / Methodist theology might even help inform the theological basis for nurture in Methodist children's homes, schools, creches and Sunday Schools. A paradigm of blessedness, belonging and progressing as a conscious cornerstone of church life and practice could be translated into a useful evaluative tool for practical ministry if practical theologians would work out ways of measuring a sense of blessedness, belonging and progress as indicators of church health.

Theologically speaking and in terms of public and political theology it is interesting to examine the potential for this *ubuntu* / Methodist paradigm as a tool for intentional political and societal transformation, a theological paradigm for peace making and reconciliation through which to understand narrative frame works. Theologies worked out in times of crisis and transition by practitioners thinking on their feet don't benefit from the kind of codification that Karl Barth had the time to compile through lectures, book writing and constructive engagement. It is helpful to try and form these paradigms and see if they fit and see if they work. Talking to the Dalai Lama (Tenzing Gyatso) of the way South Africa wouldn't allow him to come to South Africa Tutu comments:

“I asked him, ‘How many divisions do you have in your army? Why is China scared of you?’ And that is what surprises me—maybe they are right—a spiritual leader is something that should be taken very seriously.”
(Gyatso *et al.*, 2016: 45)

On a personal level this journey has been helpful for me as parent to an adopted child and minister to a diverse congregation. How can I apply these concepts of ontological blessedness to my understanding of the formation of relationship with my son, how can I foster this sense of belonging and belovedness as I live as a part of his narrative? I think Nikondeha's book is a helpful catalyst toward better understanding of the potential for adoptional relationships to be manifestations of *ubuntu* possibility especially helping trans-racial families to appreciate the complexity of being held together by a God who – in Nikondeha's words “is in the family way” (Nikondeha, 2017: Loc. 1643).

One area that I have not focused on in this study is the experience of those who have been adopted or have adopted other than Kelley Nikondeha's narrative. Nikondeha's narrative was chosen because it is positive and accessible. As such this research has focussed mostly on positive possibilities.

5.6 Possible areas for further research

As I read what I've written I think I'd like to go back and look at where the Theology of Karl Barth fits into what I've written about the Trinity's involvement in the life of the church and the interaction of narrative, inclusion (expressed in Barth's ecumenicity) and progress in Barth's eschatology. Theologians, like artists, respond to the events of the world around them. The experience of systems and schemes that confront our belief that the universe is 'blessed' force us to deepen our roots to hold against the winds and the floods. Woman theologians, African theologians and all those who work at the margins are the 'explorers of excellent moral quality' (to borrow from de Saint Exupéry again) who will help to chart the valleys, rivers and soils best suited to understanding what it means to love and live in God.

Conclusion

The answer to the question: "Is that your (real) child?" is a question whose answer can only be known in the hearts of parents, children and their surrounding communities and even then the answer is quite subjective. Through exploring the landscape of adoption and relinquishment mostly in South Africa I have come to understand more about the conditions that fracture relationships and cause concern. Poverty, injustice, gender based violence and sexual abuse, cultural and social stigma all contribute to ways in which relationships are fractured. In studying Tutu's *Ubuntu* and Hauerwas and Long's *Methodist Theological Ethics* I think I have accounted for three major themes that unite them: A narrative of blessedness: A belief that the one who is forming the narrative of existence is a participant in the story and has an overwhelming love for every character whose conflicts and struggles will be resolved at the end. A sense of belongingness: Inclusivity that is able to accept people in whatever condition they may be, to see the *imago Dei* deeply and optimistically imprinted. A sense of progression: A sense that God's *telos* is inevitable and not our ethical *telos* but rather it is God's initiative towards which all will be resolved. I believe that this pattern can be seen in Nikondeha's telling of her experiences of adoption and that by embracing these themes adoption which is complex and often confusing can be a helpful part of the matrix of ways of caring for the relinquished, relinquishing, abandoned, abandoning, adopting and adopted. Finally, I hope that this framework of blessing, belonging and progressing would be a helpful way of gauging the health of any community that works in God's economy.

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