Jesus Christ, the good community and the common good

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Miriam Bruning

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Abstract

The revelation and experience of reconciliation with God in Jesus Christ leads people to form communities that seek, demonstrate and support the common good.

Christian communities are adversely influenced by a noticeable absence of the concepts of and practices for the common good in contemporary Western society. A combination of the concepts of contest among individuals and the priority of the nation-state in modern Western society has competed with the concept of the common good. A theological elaboration of the common good arising from the person and work of Jesus Christ revealed in human history can support Christian communities confronted with alternative concepts of human society.

In this thesis, the method of canonical narrative theology is used to step through an account of God’s self-disclosure in Jesus Christ and commences by specifically drawing on Karl Barth’s account of divine self-revelation. The coherent Christian narrative generates people’s understanding of their community and encourages specific behaviour internally and towards wider society. In a context of plural ideas, independent Christian thinking arising from this narrative can contribute a perspective of the common good.

The treatment of revelation as an intention for divine-human relationships, most profoundly present in reconciliation in Jesus Christ leads to communities that are concerned with and practice support for the common good. Reconciliation through Christ demonstrates and transforms people’s relationality to be generous, creatively surprising, conciliatory and faithful. Reconciled relationships with God and each other enable communities that extend beyond mere reciprocation to an overflow of benefits to other people regardless. The Spirit calls and equips and sanctifies such communities for mutual virtuous edification in the context of their scriptural narrative. The good relationships of these Christian communities are extended in beneficial interaction
throughout society. Such communities recognise that their concept of the common good benefits from their engagement with the wisdom of dissimilar communities and that their practices for the common good are extended in their experiences with those with the most damaged relationships.

These theological outcomes are illustrated by comparison with a case study of Anglican churches in three dioceses. The common good has a low profile in the Anglican Church in Australia that results in unclear identification of the concept and associated practices. There is indication of a very longstanding but unspoken tradition that there will be Christian community effort for everyone’s good.

The divine intention to engage with humankind, revealed in Jesus Christ, is fulfilled in reconciliation of people with God. Jesus Christ leads people in relationships and community that support the common good. The common good in such communities supports each person’s good in ways that competitive individualism cannot. The collaboration of all good communities honourably contributes to the common good across society, and to a far greater extent than government regulation alone. This theological account provides a contemporary foundation for Christian communities to deliberate upon, to fully articulate and to support their traditions for the common good.
Introduction

The preoccupation, by all the major players, with holding office for the sake of holding office, has shifted the emphasis of government from doing what is just and good to doing what is politically expedient, socially acceptable and is least likely to alienate key interest groups.

This expediency has created a moral vacuum in our current political system, where human rights and compassion too often come second to shrewd politics designed to appeal to the masses. It is this space where the church can, and should, come to the fore to do what it has always done best — provide a moral roadmap that can contribute to a broader social good. ("Easter a reminder of values" [Editorial], 2016, p. 8)

In this editorial, the author says that secular leadership needs to attend to the common good and would benefit from the influence of Christianity. The editorial in the national capital states that leaders are not motivated by good purposes for the benefit of all in society. I perceive that society’s leaders have disregarded the concept and practice of the common good. The author opines that secular leadership cannot be relied on to build civil society (possibly a widespread attitude) and as an alternative, (admittedly on an Easter weekend) requests assistance from the church. The author expects that Christian churches can supply rationale and purpose for, and thus describe, the common good. I maintain that this noticeable absence of the common good in contemporary society also has an adverse influence on Christian communities. Consequently, I consider it urgent that Christian communities can both conceptualise and demonstrate the common good among themselves and, therefore, across society.

By the common good, at minimum, I refer to the notion that collectively people possess benefits that only contribute to each person’s fulfilment, but are neither merely
reduced to separate individual gain, nor entirely accrued distantly by people’s maintenance of institutions.¹

Discussion concerning the common good has had a long history within Western society, not least because most discussion took place within the Christian tradition. Some strands of Christian tradition, notably within the Roman Catholic Church, have continued to think and write about the common good. Consequently, the Christian tradition has provided various rationales for the common good as both concept and practical demonstration.

In this thesis, I propose to continue this tradition by providing a substantive theological account of the common good. Beginning with the Trinitarian life of Godself, I propose to traverse a theological journey through God’s self-giving engagement with God’s relational creatures and reconciliation of those human creatures to God in Christ, through to God’s establishment of responsive participatory communities who share a God-given common good. To this end I deploy a wide range of theologians, biblical scholars and other commentators, who each contribute insights to this theological narrative. In the interests of developing this account linearly and substantively, I will relegate comments about the circumstances and intellectual burdens of these scholars to footnotes.

Orientation

My own theological account begins with the most influential discussion that is provided by St Thomas Aquinas’s Christian expansion on the work of Aristotle:² that

¹This description was derived from the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, para. 164) and the expanded versions in Maritain and FitzGerald (1946, p. 437); O’Donovan (2016, p. 2), which also exclude entities that exist at the expense of individuals.

²The principle source is: Summa Theologiae (St Thomas Aquinas, d. 1274/1969-2006, Parts I, I-II and II-II). (In this introductory chapter, I will indicate by footnote the principle work used for each thinker; but in all chapters I will give in-text referencing for specific citations.)
people seek a provisional earthly common good because they are oriented to fulfilment in God’s ultimate goodness.

Aquinas explicated that attention to the natural law enabled discernment of God’s revealed loving purpose, in which behaviour and virtues in loving relationships thereby demonstrate this common good. Roman Catholic scholars depending on Aquinas were attentive to social doctrine, including the concept of the common good, particularly during the twentieth century. There has been other interest apart from Aquinas, including new twentieth century appreciation for Trinitarian doctrine. As an instance, Volf proposed that the Divine communion is the exemplar revealing perfect relationships, demonstrating the perfect community sustaining a common good. Lastly, the writings of Hauerwas suggest that there is a common good in a community that develops virtues as people attend to the revelation of the Christian narrative. Examination of these rationales suggests they are ultimately dependent on the person and work of Jesus Christ revealed in human history. I propose an explanation of the common good more explicitly grounded in God’s revelation and encounter through Jesus Christ. Such an explanation can support Christian communities confronted with decreasing comprehension and practice of the common good in modern Western society.

This notion of the common good is under threat from two concepts that are uppermost in modern Western society’s self-description. The common good is explicitly questioned by adherents of liberalism, such as Rawls, who consider that society benefits

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3 This interest is found notably, in Jacques Maritain’s philosophical application of Aquinas and in thinking directly contributing to, arising from and dependent on the Second Vatican Council such as the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004).
4 This proposal is explored in: “The Trinity is our social program”: The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement (Volf, 1998).
5 The topic is explored in: ACommunity of Character (Hauerwas, 1981). Other examples include: After Virtue (MacIntyre, 1981); The Christian case for Virtue Ethics (Kotva Jr, 1996); Christian Ethics: The End of the Law (Cunningham, 2008); Virtue (Kallenberg, 2011; Patrick, 2011).
6 These concepts are identified in: In Search of the Common Good (Stackhouse, 2005, p. 279).
7 The liberal perspective is elaborated in: Political Liberalism (Rawls, 1996).
from competition among plural ideas. As such there cannot be common agreement for a common idea. The common good is also implicitly threatened by demands that the common good is delivered by and resides in the life of the nation-state — an account of common life described as ‘civic republicanism’.\(^8\) MacIntyre and Cavanaugh,\(^9\) critique the perspective that the state promises to provide the purpose for the common good and that people are deemed to benefit indirectly through sustaining the organs of state. Adherence to a combination of both these concepts has influenced social structures and institutions so that people increasingly seem to be isolated competing individuals connected to an impersonal and supposedly infallible state. Further, it is increasingly difficult to understand the concept of the common good because the influence on social structures has undermined practices demonstrating the common good.

It is the context of these competing ideas, which threaten the common good, that confronts a Christian theological perspective. A theological perspective of the common good will not simply endorse the liberal framework, if the common good has been undermined by liberalism’s competitive pluralism. And a God-given approach to the common good does not only propose a better model of government if state-centred republicanism has hindered the common good. A theological perspective will address people’s self-conceptions as individuals remotely connected to the state.

Fiddes (1989, p. 14)\(^10\) suggests there has been an emphasis that the benefits of salvation are more transactional and less personal. This emphasis could be ascribed to the influence of individual sufficiency as a corollary of competition. God bestows a benefit that simply requires fulfilment of certain commitments. By contrast, theological insight

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\(^8\) The concept is illustrated by a discussion in: Civic republicanism and Sir Robert Menzies (Carr & Jones, 2013).

\(^9\) Examples of their critique are found in: After MacIntyre (MacIntyre, 1994); and In Search of the Common Good (Cavanaugh, 2005).

\(^10\) Fiddes is a British Baptist systematic theologian concerned with people's involvement in reconciliation with God, such as in Past event and present salvation: the Christian idea of atonement (Fiddes, 1989).
into the common good indicates a complexity of engaged relationships rather than separate unencumbered transactions. God engages with people, leading them progressively to engage with others in the same way, so that they no longer need to consider themselves solely individuals, and leading the resulting community to engage beneficially with other communities. People need the perspective of their good interaction, rather than a prescription for individual behaviour or the distant but pervasive responsibility of the state. People’s good engagement leads to a good community that treats people in other communities well. This description of the common good is of an individual living in a community of communities.\textsuperscript{11}

The direct importance of revelation in Jesus Christ for the foundation of the concept and practice of the common good becomes apparent. God’s self-disclosure engages and transforms relationships. Jesus Christ reveals the substance of divine-human relationships and sheds light on human behaviour in relationships. Jesus Christ encompasses the engagement and relationship of God with humankind, and becomes the ‘location’ for people’s resultant relationships. More specifically, reconciliation with God, understood as the purpose of salvation, continually conforms people to seek good relationships. Comprehension of God-given relationality can lead the individual to view themselves in an ever-widening circle of the common good.

This theological foundation for the common good brings a Christian community to the forefront. What matters is the individual’s behaviour within a community. It is material that the community is conscious of the reasons that lead people to act together. Behaviour within the community is for the common benefit. In such behaviour, demonstration of this way of being community contributes to a wider common good. A

\textsuperscript{11} Stackhouse (2005, pp. 285–286) indicates that an intentional community demonstrates the common good and “federates” with other communities. Williams (2012, pp. 3–4) proposes that government institutions work for the common good when they see themselves within a “community of communities”.

Christian community can therefore expect both to exemplify and act purposely for the common good.

Comparison of my theological approach with actual Christian community attitudes and activities indicates approaches that to varying degrees support the common good. The observations prompt identification of opportunities for raising my theological concerns.

Jesus Christ, as the reason for Christian faith underpins Christian approaches to the common good that will be relevant and apparent in Christian communities, leading to the following question:

How does revelation and salvation in Jesus Christ lead directly to the common good?

I maintain that Christian theology can provide a rationale for the common good that is more closely connected to revelation than are alternative conceptualisations. Salvation revealed in Jesus Christ transforms people through and for reconciled relationships and can lead to the common good. God reveals by engaging with people, enabling a distinctive relationship to which people are conformed in their life with God and one another. These relationships bring about a distinctive community in which seeking the common good can flow out to any and everybody. Aspects of my theological rationale of common good thinking could therefore augment people’s conception of their Christian communities.

Method

I propose an argument and explanation for the concept and practice of the common good resulting directly from revelation in Jesus Christ. To this end, I will first consider the main descriptions of the common good by Christian scholars. My description will
begin with Aristotle\textsuperscript{12} to whom Christian scholarship is indebted, particularly in the most prominent Christian account of St Thomas Aquinas. I critically consider how Christian descriptions of the common good are implicitly but indirectly reliant on revelation in Jesus Christ. These descriptions also introduce some concepts, such as relationships, community, virtues and human purpose, that remain important for any account of the common good.

I pay particular attention to available scholars and social research in the Australian context, as I inquire into the common good concept. Most of the scholars in the conversation are from outside Australia. As the question has arisen within the author’s Australian context, the convergence or divergence with Australian thinking and attitudes helps illustrate this context.

I will argue that the common good should be urgently considered because there are alternate conceptions of the good in society that compete with and undermine the concept of the common good and a corresponding human flourishing in community. I critically examine the liberal rejection of the common good, of which Rawls’s thought is an example, and the civic republican assumption of a national common good, which can be inferred from Menzies,\textsuperscript{13} for example. I am working in a context in which Christianity is no longer considered the dominant influence in a Western society such as Australia. I am particularly concerned with the impact of alternative ideas on people’s conception of their Christian community and consequent attitude to the common good, within a context

\textsuperscript{12} The principle source is \textit{Ethics} (Aristotle, d. 322 BCE / 1976).

\textsuperscript{13} Australian Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies served multiple terms, and his outlook is described in: Civic republicanism and Sir Robert Menzies: the non-liberal side of the Liberal leader (Carr & Jones, 2013).
where Christian thinking is deemed to be only one of several competing ideas. I describe this impact, drawing on available social research.

In this contemporary context of plural ideas, independent Christian thinking about the common good can address the impact of alternatives. A theological perspective of the common good can contribute because current Western society is less constrained by modern assumptions about the kinds of knowledge that have most worth. This Christian contribution does not sweep aside other perspectives because ultimate dependence on God need not mean earthly domination.

The theological method I will deploy is described by Graham, Walton, and Ward (2005, p. 78) as canonical narrative theology. In this method, I step through Christian doctrines in which there is a coherent story about God made apparent in Jesus Christ (2005, p. 80). This story provides a Christian community with identity and encourages distinctive behaviour (2005, p. 80). Reception of revelation in Jesus Christ generates people’s understanding of their community and underpins the community’s interaction externally (2005, p. 99). As such, in this method, there is a story that equips Christian communities to address the impacts of pluralism, notwithstanding that communities cannot generate such self-understanding exclusively without reference to their wider context. I commence with Karl Barth\textsuperscript{14} who has been strongly influential as the origin of a particular narrative theology (2005, p. 79). In this method, the bible contains the primary data, giving an account of what people know and experience, and providing knowledge of an encounter that indicates divine initiative and human response. Thus, people will apprehend both objective revelation and their subjective engagement.

Barth in particular was most emphatic that God’s story is told by God and the way people know God relies on God’s disclosure. Archbishop Rowan Williams (2000, p.

\textsuperscript{14}The principle source is \textit{Church Dogmatics} (Barth, 1956-1975, Vols. I-IV).
indicates that people are dependent on this disclosure because the story brings or
initiates something new, outside human expectation, so that:

Revelation [...] is essentially to do with what is *generative* in our experience —
events or transactions in our language that break existing frames of reference and
initiate new possibilities of life.

Specifically, through Jesus of Nazareth, communities exist:

His revelatory significance is apprehended by way of what it means to belong to
a community whose character and limits he defines — not simply as ‘founder’ but
as present head and partner in dialogue and relation. (2000, p. 136).

If God reveals, central to a Christian community’s faith and theology is that Jesus Christ
indicates and encompasses an effective revelation.

It is apposite for inquiring into the common good, to step through the doctrines in
this narrative of encounter centred on Jesus Christ. Divine-human engagement in Christ
makes the divine relationality of the Trinity apparent. The encounter demonstrates and
effects God-given salvation and people are called together and sanctified by the Holy
Spirit. God’s relational disclosure leads to distinctive relationships and characteristics in
a community. The human response is within a community that is oriented to engage
positively with those whom the community encounters in a creation of which Christ is
sovereign. The practice of such a community can be conceptualised as the common good
and can support a common good for wider society and the whole creation.

In this thesis, I will lay out coherent steps from God’s encounter to Christian
communities that seek the common good, inquiring into and working from scholars who
have addressed these steps.

As I have already stated, the first theological step concerning the common good
commences with the primacy of the Divine self-disclosure, drawing on the perspective of

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15 During his episcopacy as Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, Williams displayed a keen interest in
public theology e.g. *Faith in the Public Square* (Williams, 2012).
Barth and his interlocutors, such as Williams. I also follow Barth’s emphasis that the
disclosure is Trinitarian, from which I consider it to be a relational disclosure, as well as
involving humankind in the person of Jesus Christ.

My next step is to consider God’s good relationality disclosed in Jesus Christ. I
discuss salvation as reconciliation in terms of a framework of relationships particularly
present in Brümmer and Fiddes as Barth’s (unfinished) description does not
systematically utilise this framework.

In the subsequent step, I consider the human involvement in these good
relationships. I continue to work with Fiddes concerning the human relational response,
with some more isolated concepts in Barth, as well as Constantineanu’s concern for the
social dimension of reconciled relationships.

In the next step, I am concerned with the role of the Holy Spirit in resultant
communities of those reconciled to God and in people’s formation in virtue. I discuss the
reluctant agreement by protestant scholars including Barth and Berkouwer that people
are involved in sanctification and inquire into growth in virtue proposed by Hauerwas.

For the final theological step, I consider in what way the common good of
Christian communities is unrestricted and results in participating for the common good
of wider society. I discuss sphere sovereignty proposed by Kuyper and Dooyeweerd, Roman Catholic subsidiarity and Hauerwas’s more distant stance. I also inquire into the
kind of engagement that Christian communities demonstrate in seeking the common

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16 Relationships are discussed in: *Atonement, Christology and the Trinity* (Brümmer, 2005).
17 The social perspective is explored in: *The Social Significance of Reconciliation in Paul’s Theology*
   (Constantineanu, 2010).
18 A reformed approach to sanctification is found in: *Faith and Sanctification – studies in dogmatics*
   (Berkouwer, 1977).
19 Sphere sovereignty is proposed in: *Calvinism: being the six “Stone” lectures given at Princeton*
   *Theological Seminary U.S.A* (Kuyper, 1932); and further expanded in: *The Christian idea of the state*
   (Dooyeweerd, 1968).
good, utilising thinking from Williams and Gascoigne. This is theology in which the knowledge of doctrine is not separated from norms of behaviour. A community need not accept a creed in one hand that has limited apparent connection to a compendium of rules given to the other. Barth (1981a, p. 3) points to this method as he integrates ethics and theology: first because God’s revelation is a relationship between God and humankind; and second because this relationship indicates God’s character. The proclamation of faith is an account of divine relationship and behaviour. God’s self-revelation denotes relational behaviour and therefore the ethics of people’s behaviour towards others. At the same time revelation indicates behaviour uncovered during divine-human relationships, rather than an abstract set of rules. In this method, the doctrines of Christian faith, relationship with God, and potential human behaviour share much of the same content.

This theology is practical in the sense that meaning, ethics, and practice cannot be separated. Practical theology is considered to pervade all aspects of theology rather than to be another sub-branch; and is theology fully realised in practice rather than practice derived from theory (Veling, 2005, p. 4). The tenets of Christian faith are not separate from the way people are formed and are demonstrated by their practice. Effectively, theology is meaningful when expressed in practical living and the fuller dimensions of understanding are with action. I consider theological doctrine as rationale for the common good but only as and when people seriously inhabit the reality of encounter with Jesus Christ such that the common good is manifest. I argue that revelation and salvation in Jesus Christ is the reason for Christian communities to engage with the concept of and consequently seek the common good. But also, a Christian community manifests the common good because proclamation nurtures behaviour. Consequently, in this theology

20 An approach to such engagement is explored in: The public forum and Christian ethics (Gascoigne, 2001).
theological import is expressed in people’s lives; doing and outcomes can speak theologically; and formation for and in practice illuminate theology.

Similarly, in this theology, definition, practice and purpose are held together, so that:

The important thing is that the practice bears faithful witness to the God from whom the practice emerges, and whom it reflects, and that it enables individuals and communities to participate faithfully in Christs’ redemptive mission. Thus the efficacy of the practice (the good to which it is aimed), is not defined pragmatically by its ability to fulfil particular human needs (although it will include that), but by whether or not it participates faithfully in the divine redemptive mission. (Swinton & Mowat, 2007, p. 22)

The end results are not separated from means and meaning. The concern is to maintain a close connection between what people do and their purposes. Theological concepts and practice of the common good are possible because they are oriented to and envisage the divine end. The common good is not, therefore, an end separate from Christian faith, life and purpose.

Theological reflection that is fully expressed in people’s lives may challenge or be challenged by existing Christian communities’ attitudes and practices concerning the common good. Actual practice and its theological import can be compared with potential practice that would be an expression of my theological rationale. I compare this proposed concept and practice of the common good with a case study of the reality within a sample of church communities by content and discourse analysis of reported statements and actions. Such a study highlights attitudes to the common good. There can be recommendations for action that respond to the situation identified in the study (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 404). I indicate some enhanced approaches to the common good that my theological perspective supports.

My case study will be within the Anglican Church of Australia. This case study comprises examination of events, processes and attitudes that indicate conceptions of the
common good. A case study examines relationships and processes in a natural setting to discover interconnections and interrelationships (Jones, 2006, p. 315). The case study makes it possible to inquire into the communal behaviour of Christian communities and their interaction with associated Anglican organisations. The most fruitful gage of attitudes to the common good is to understand their connection to conceptions of community as the location for people to manifest something in common that might be a common good.

I study the activities within the three most populous dioceses of the Anglican Church in Eastern Australia representing both the diversity of church expression and the prevalence of urban Australia. I am concerned with congregations, their co-ordinated activity within dioceses and Anglican welfare agencies who conduct professional, socially beneficial activities. I examine accounts of Anglican communities’ activities, opinions and explanations that show the way they portray themselves both internally and to wider society. Within this study, I analyse thematically both activities and reinforced perspectives, including their relative prominence. I identify those themes that are indicative of the common good.

**Terminological issues**

Within this thesis, I need to reserve certain terms for specific purposes so that their use aids clarity. Some terms are described in the chapter in which they are used. Those terms I use more widely are set out in the following discussion.

A discussion concerning the common good must address people’s collective existence. There must be something that people have in common and on which they agree together, to recognise that it is common. In this thesis, I anticipate that it will be a community that seeks the common good as something all members can have in common, share and enjoy. For a theological discussion, concerning the revelation of God in Jesus
Christ, my focus is Christian communities whose primary formation leads them to seek the common good. Community or congregation refers to a body of people and their communal activities in contrast to organisational or theological concepts that might be inferred from the term church. For Christian communities, the origin in God-given goodness leads people to seek a common good that may potentially be concerned with all humankind, that is all human society. From a post-Christendom perspective, Christian communities are situated in and must function within a wider society — such as the whole population living in Australia with a specific governmental structure, institutions, social organisation and culture — although their concern for the common good need not be restricted to this society.

Discussion of the common good requires consideration of the role of government because it is also concerned with the whole of society. It is preferable for the discussion to address those institutions that perform the role of government rather than the concept of the state. Discussion concerning the state can imply a particular perspective of society considered as a single entity or of an entity supported collectively to which all other aspects of human activity are subordinate. As I discuss in chapter two, such concepts are not consistent with common good thinking and the term government is preferred.

One governmental role is to provide the conditions for all contributions within society. I discuss in chapter seven that governments regulate society, not simply by legislation but by its enforcement, keeping the peace and enabling services enjoyed by all. I make a distinction between this regulation by human institutions and the order established by God — that is, order in the sense of the way the universe works and what God intends for creation in the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus Christ.
Chapter outline

Common good thinking has a long history within Christian scholarship but also utilises a framework available from Greek philosophy. Aristotle (d. 322 BCE) described the importance of collaborative choices for the good of the community to achieve goals of human excellence. St Thomas Aquinas modified and transmitted a Christian perspective of the common good for which the goal is divine purpose. In my review in chapter one I consider the various Christian rationales for the common good: from orientation to the goal of fulfilment in God; or by discernment of divine purpose in natural law; or by aspiration to an analogy of the Triune community; or from understanding the narrative of a virtue-forming Christian community. I maintain that theology of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ underpins these conceptions of divine goal and purpose, divine life, and a formative Christian community, and that there is need for greater exploration of the way such theology more directly sustains the common good.

The concept of common good has not fared well in Western thought since the enlightenment. I discuss in chapter two the way ideas such as individualism, pluralism and a state-centred society have competed with and undermined the concept and demonstration of the common good, so that through their influence experiences of communal life have weakened. In this environment, my concern is that contemporary Christian communities have difficulty with their own concept and practice of the common good. Christian communities are not conscious actors for the common good because they have difficulty withstanding the tide of modern thinking, and existing Christian conceptualisations of the common good make less headway. There is both an opportunity and urgent need for Christian communities to resist the undermining of the common good with a theological rationale, which, I later propose, can be grounded in God’s revelation in Jesus Christ.
Beginning with God’s revelation, Christian thinking can consider a common good for all humankind in the context of creation, as I discuss in the subsequent five chapters (three to seven). This approach reflects contemporary self-awareness, but in response to, and in the context of God’s revelation. People’s individual responses to God enable them to discover their situation within a community situated among other communities.

I commence theological discussion of the common good, in chapter three, by considering the Divine initiative. Following Barth, reliable knowledge of God comes from God revealing, engaging and relating with the creation, and particularly with the consciousness of the human creature. God revealing reveals God to be relational. And God’s revealing invites people to engage in this relationality. What God discloses about God is that God initiates relationship with humankind.

God’s revealing has made known the relationality of Godself. Barth also pointed to the divine communion of the Trinity that is the source of revelation. The unified and eternally reliable divine communion looks outward in relationship with creation. As people are dynamically engaged in these relationships they can discern the Divine life. Human life has fulfilment in orientation to these relationships. The concept and practice of the common good arises because of people’s engagement through, and mutual reflection of, these relationships.

People can discern divine relatedness because God’s engagement with humankind includes their participation. Barth also indicated that revelation is not simply imparted by, but present in, the life of Jesus Christ, such that he reveals eternal election of humankind for relationship with God. There can be a human common good because people participate in divine revelation’s account of human purpose. Jesus Christ mediates divine relationality: the kind of relationship intended with humankind and thus the kind of
response invited. All people may, in common, participate in transformation in the divine relationship, which can lead them to the common good.

Specifically, the person, earthly life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ fully demonstrate the nature of the relationship that God intends with humanity. This revelation conveys the fulfilment of human relationships. In chapter four, I discuss the way God’s goodness is manifest in people’s reconciliation with God, through Jesus Christ, for the fulfilled relationships that God intends. Reconciliation is a relational description of salvation in which there is forgiveness and repentance. Reconciliation through Christ exposes people’s behaviour that separates them from God, and indicates the surprising creativity beyond human expectation evident in re-establishing the relationship. Moreover, Jesus Christ selflessly undergoes the cost of exposing the kind of human behaviour that is forgiven, and at the same time enables humankind’s participation in reconciliation with God. In the resurrection, people are assured of the extent of God’s forgiveness. The past event is real for the present because it also entails a future hope. God’s goodness promises that these reconciled relationships continue, by giving hope in the presence of Christ through the Spirit. The good relationality God enables through Jesus Christ makes possible the most co-operative human relationships, and recognition of the common good. Reconciled relationships, reflecting God’s generous, surprising, reconciliatory and reliable goodness, make the common good possible.

The common good is dependent on reconciliation in Jesus Christ because there is a human response. While the divine-human relationship is reliant on God, for it to be a relationship, people need to know and experience that they are participants. People’s participation in the best kind of relationship with God shapes their relationship with other people. I discuss in chapter five the way God’s goodness generates a common good because people can respond in relationships that increase and are increasingly good.
The person and work of Jesus Christ that effects reconciliation removes the sense that people are burdened with contributing by their response to God. Overjoyed that God bestows worth on humanity and recognising and humbled by the selfless generosity of Christ, people are grateful for the measureless reach of God’s goodness and love. People can respond to forgiveness in Christ, and repent as they recognise the relative limits of their self-sufficiency. People’s relationship in Christ can draw out their response to reflect generous, faithful, conciliatory and surprising creativity in all their relationships. People reconciled through Jesus Christ may be transformed by God’s goodness.

Jesus Christ leads people in their transformation. Enabled and assured by God’s Spirit, people can follow his example of God’s goodness. Transformed, people form a community where they are attentive to reconciled relationships inclusive of all humanity and seek peace. The common good not only arises through deliberate attention to reconciled relationships in Christ but also arises from the attendant benefits that overflow through all people from the goodness of God.

The Holy Spirit that enables people’s response to the reconciliatory presence of Jesus Christ makes possible a community that seeks the common good. In chapter six, I discuss people’s sanctification and the development of their virtues that take place in such a community. This is a community sustained by the narrative of Jesus Christ that nurtures human character, both giving rise to and supporting the common good.

Sanctification is intended and initiated by God. Called and led by the Holy Spirit, people participate in their journey of sanctification in a distinctive community life. Even protestant theology — which is often cautious about the capacity of a person’s will — allows that people participate, even if sin prevents people from initiating the transformation and there are limits to people comprehending the result. There is no need therefore, to estimate the extent of or people’s contribution to their change. People can
change, to see themselves grow in virtue in an environment of mutually supportive relationships, which their virtuous dispositions positively reinforce. This community life supports virtues and is supported by them. The community maintains a narrative of Jesus Christ and provides the context for people to develop in accordance with that narrative. People’s dispositions in this community can enable them to reach supportively beyond the community to others. Sanctification and virtue can lead to a community that manifests the common good for members and anyone they may reach.

Christian communities nurtured through good God-given selfless, conciliatory, creative and faithful relationships, make present a common good. Through these relationships, there are no boundaries to the extent of the common good throughout human society. I discuss the concepts of Christian communities’ encounters with wider society in chapter seven, and the possibility of a widespread common good.

God’s purpose for the whole of creation and bestowal of worth on all humankind leads to consideration that good relationships may extend to everyone. I discuss God’s purpose for society-wide engagement within the conceptuality of ‘sphere sovereignty’, and the benefit of diverse contributions within the conceptuality of ‘subsidiarity’, alongside Hauerwas’s conception of a more independent Christian community. I consider that Christian communities can intentionally engage with wider society in interdependent, equitable and adaptable relationships for the common good.

A Christian community would engage in relationships in wider society that reflect God’s goodness. Communities can conduct relationships witnessing to God’s purpose prior to human institutions and need not simply accept other purposes unquestioningly. As Christian communities reflect God’s goodness, they can encourage constructive relationships in a well-regulated society where diverse groups can contribute to the common good. Communities that have due regard for people’s worth, can engage with
other perspectives and accept their insights into good relationships; and can engage those with the most damaged relationships. Mutual recognition of concepts of the common good and good relationships can reinforce these relationships and offer the most widespread common good.

Any theological reflection arises from and is worth comparing with human experience and expression within Christian communities. A comparison enables consideration of the reflection’s relevance. I examine some actual experiences within the Australian Anglican Church.

Initially in chapter eight, I examine material that broadly indicates interest in the topic of the common good. I look for actual discussion of the topic. I also consider activities that are beneficial to more than the contributors — practised both within parishes and by welfare agencies. It is also relevant to examine the reasons given for these socially beneficial activities. Beneficial practical action manifests some capacity for good relationships and generosity that can indicate an unarticulated striving for the common good.

A comparison of my theological concerns and the results of the broad-brush examination, leads to more targeted questions in chapter nine. I maintain that interest in the common good arises from good God-given relationality; is based on reconciled relationships in Jesus Christ; gives rise to good communities whose interdependent behaviour recognises people’s worth; and is supportive of people’s welfare throughout society. I specifically inquire, therefore, into Anglican attitudes to, and demonstrations of, relationships, community and interdependency. I also ascertain the expected roles of Anglican organisations in advocacy, expansively supportive community life and numerical community growth. For each theme, I note the roles conveyed by the presence of Anglican welfare agencies and the influence on the community life of local
congregations. Finally, I consider any theological reflection on these themes that might be connected to and suggestive of the common good.

Through this qualitative survey, I provide a description of approaches indicative of the common good within the Anglican Church. I identify themes that indicate a varying degree support for the concept and practice of the common good. By comparison with my theological concerns I observe a complex of attitudes; some endorse my theological reflection; and others suggest an opportunity to pay more attention to this theology. From the perspective of my thesis, I recommend some behaviours and more concerted theological encouragement and reflection so that Anglican communities more robustly seek the common good.

I next move to commence this thesis with the discussion of the common good concept in Christian thinking.
Chapter 1 — Advocates for the common good

Introduction

The concept of ‘common good’, with its bearing on the meaning and conduct of human society, has a long history in Christian scholarship. Either people make choices expressly for the common good or it is pursued indirectly as people seek a heavenly goal and the common good becomes manifest. Some of Aristotle’s philosophical description of the good choices for the community continue to be relevant. St Thomas Aquinas adopted Aristotle with modifications and both thinkers’ accounts entered Western thought. Aristotle continues to be used directly and through Aquinas by those still advocating the importance of the community good in Christian thought — particularly the Roman Catholic Church.21

There are now several approaches to the concept of the common good in Christian thinking. An important feature of the common good is a human purpose or goal, but unlike ideas found in Aristotle, the goal in Christian thinking is fulfilment with God. For Aquinas and those who followed him, natural law, in which divine purpose could be discerned, indicates that people’s good is common. In addition, the Divine life in the Trinity provides the communal example to which human life is analogous, and to which it aspires as the common good.

Finally, it is important to attend to Christian communities’ narrative because it is significant. All ideas of divine purpose and people’s consequent relationships and community are directly dependent on revelation in the narrative of Jesus Christ. In later

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21 This advocacy is found in Jacques Maritain’s Roman Catholic philosophical application of Aquinas; the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace; and David Hollenbach S.J., a protagonist for social justice. Aristotle and Aquinas are also used by Alisdair MacIntyre, a philosopher increasingly attached to Aquinas’s teleologically directed virtues; Stanley Hauerwas, an advocate and academic of Christian ethics; and more recently by Joseph J. Kotva Jr. (1996) and David S. Cunningham (2008).
chapters I consider in what way the theology of this narrative provides a foundation for the common good concept.

**Common good chosen by good ‘men’**

Aristotle’s common good is set in the context of human fulfilment, and is found most notably in his *Ethics*. Those who deliberate upon the common good enjoy good relationships; they teach one another virtues for a common good in the community; and are involved in government. In all these things those people strive towards a recognised end or *telos*.

Aristotle’s interest in the common good is associated with personal human fulfilment. He is not, consequently, interested in defining separately a theory of society or co-operation or the constituent values for such an ideal. What is of interest to Aristotle (d. 322 BCE /1976, 1097a15–b2)\(^{22}\) is that people achieve fulfilment in goodness through attaining virtue. Among those virtues are friendly human relations (1155a3–24). Citizens can achieve a kind of friendly relations, translated as concord, when they agree on the means to virtue, which they pursue together (1167a18–b4). This agreed or common good requires the agreement of a select group of good men, otherwise they will not be sufficiently consistent in their virtues for agreement (1167b4–28). Therefore, Aristotle argues that the existence of human relationships not only is part of virtuous fulfilment but has a strong bearing on the achievement of virtue. It is in the context of those human relationships that the common good is decided.

For Aristotle, human beings are observably social. People are dependent on one another, not only providing care for the young, the old and the frail but also providing objects for the munificence of the rich and powerful (Aristotle, d. 322 BCE /1976,

\(^{22}\) The references to Aristotle indicate the page, column and line number range in the Greek text (Bekker) used by customary convention.
The virtue of friendship is present when concern for another is given, received and acknowledged as such (1155b29–1156a16). The best kind of friendship is simply wishing for another’s good, out of one’s own virtue (1156b2–23). Conversely, by their own virtue, men recognise, admire and adopt the virtues of their friends (1172a6–15). Perceiving that they may learn what is good from one another, people will deliberate together concerning these goods (Terchek & Moore, 2000, p. 909). Friendship provides for mutual improvement, greater virtue and therefore fulfilment.

Virtuous fulfilment is therefore dependent on the common good determined in friendly concord. In *The Politics*, the virtues of decision makers strongly influence what the corresponding virtues of the citizens will be (Aristotle, d. 322 BCE /1981, 1260a14–24). It is expected that those ruled, particularly subordinate women and children, “must be educated with an eye to the constitution” (d. 322 BCE /1981, 1260b8–20). Not all can equally attain virtue or consequently have useful input into the way it will be attained. In his *Ethics*, Aristotle considered women and children (d. 322 BCE. /1976, 1158b17–1159a9), slaves (1161a6–26), non-Greeks, and anyone made brutish by disease or limited development (1145a15–34) less able to contribute to virtuous development. Consequently, Aristotle (1099b21–1100a9) states the purpose of the practical science of politics is to enable the (male) citizens to achieve fulfilment by acquiring virtues. The common good they decide enables that virtue. Virtuous social engagement will enable society to encourage still greater virtue. Only suitable male friends decide for the common good on behalf of society.

Action for the common good requires something similar to Aristotle’s concord, but even among male friends, friendship is limited. Aristotle (d.322 BCE. /1976, 1158a31–b17) considered friendship unlikely among those not equal. If a person of quality befriends a lesser person, the lowly must respond proportionately to make up the
difference (1158a31–b17). In Aristotle’s perspective, there is a hierarchy of friendship and corresponding virtue. Bad people are simply less able to be consistent in their friendship (1167b4–28). There is the possibility of an exclusive group whose friendship is limited to those of similar virtuous achievement.

There are limits to what can be expected of fulfilling virtue, not only because of unequal attainment or contribution to human fulfilment. Aristotle’s (d. 322 BCE /1976, 1097b22–1098a8) virtues are for those in pursuit of human excellence. Such an ego-centric goal, as discussed, does not exclude either friendship or generosity. Nonetheless, for Aristotle, magnanimity is the crown of the virtues because the virtues are in full view (1123b35–1124a23); not for the sake of display, but for the desire for virtue (1124a23–b14). The magnanimous man is generous with his life and service, is not overbearing to those beneath him and speaks the truth (1124b14–1125a4). The same man cannot, however, abide to be indebted to anyone, nor to be other than haughty to his superiors (1124a23–b14). Only among his equal friends can this man accept dependence (1124b14–1125a4). I observe here that this specifically human goal limits people’s interaction because of an insistence on success without humility, failure or neediness.

The common good, for Aristotle, enables a human society to achieve its end. Aristotle (d. 322 BCE /1976, 1097a15–b2) finds that there is an ultimate end to life that is translated as happiness. This happiness can be described as achieving excellence or fulfilment as a person (1097b22–1098a8). Human excellence is in rationally exercising the virtues, which requires time and experience (1098a8–27). Achieving happiness is a life journey which can overcome most misfortune (1100b27–1101a20). Virtuous men decide for the fulfilling purpose of human excellence, with choices for the common good whereby the virtues may be developed and flourish.
Aristotle’s goal had a human horizon. Human excellence shines relatively brightly against random fate and chaos (Aristotle, d. 322 BCE /1976, 1101a20–b9). Aristotle (1101a20–b9) accepted, however, that his goal was limited by what people can conceive and achieve.

To conclude: Aristotle emphasised the importance of relationships for the common good; the significance of community formation; the value of positive government; and the need for a purpose to life. His notion of the common good is only decided by a select group of men and is limited to merely a human achievement.

The heavenly and earthly common good

St Thomas Aquinas also described human fulfilment. God, the origin of all things, gives the end of human fulfilment in the ‘beatific vision’ for people who are in perfect relationship with God. In this description, God provides a good order that is ontologically purposed to this end, and within which people can discern the laws for this common good. Notwithstanding that laws enable people to have good basic habits, virtues comprehensively express human quality. The greatest virtues make possible the best earthly common good because they are heavenly.

In his Summa Theologiae, St Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274/2006a, I-II, 19,10) held that God’s goodness is the good of the entire universe and God’s will is for that most extensive common good. God is the ultimate good, the source of happiness (beatitude), and, therefore, fulfilment in a common good (2006d, I-II, 3,1; 3,2). God as the origin is the end of all creation (2006d, I-II, 1,8). Everything must have an end (2006d, I-II, 1, 4) and everybody is only satisfied with their ultimate good (2006d, I-II, 2,8). Human

23 These reference abbreviations for Summa Theologiae indicate the part as I, I-II or II-II, followed by the question number, followed by the article number.
fulfilment, as happiness, is in the presence of God who is the common purpose of all people as the ultimate good of the universe.

If God is the good of all, ultimate fulfilment is in relationship with God. As rational creatures, human life looks forward to perfect bliss, to contemplate God without any veil (2006b, I, 62, 1). Consequently, each person’s fulfilment is their relationship with God (2006d, I-II, 4, 8). People love each other because God loves all and they are able to enjoy their fellowship because of fulfilment in God (2006d, I-II, 4, 8). Because God is good and God is the creator, people’s fulfilment is in relationship with God in which their human relationships are also present.

Heavenly fulfilment is significantly different from earthly life. People cannot achieve unaided their uncreated end and their knowledge of it will not require their created senses (2006d, I-II 5, 1). Similarly, people’s dispositions of character — their virtues — are associated closely with their material existence; if there is no pleasure, there is no need for self-control; if no death, no fortitude; and if no balancing of the created order, no need for justice (1969b, I-II, 67, 1). The virtues change from their earthly role to one in which they are perfected in orientation to God (1969b, I-II, 61, 5). But there is some happiness possible on earth in hope as the virtues develop in their orientation to heavenly beatitude (2006d, I-II, 5, 3). For Aquinas, happiness and fulfilment on earth is limited but possible — commensurate with earthly existence and in preparation for a heavenly purpose.

A limited common good on earth is possible because of the good of the universe. There is an eternal law that can be recognised in God’s providential order of the universe (2006c, I-II, 91, 1). God, as noted, is and intends the fulfilling common good of the universe (2006c, I-II, 90, 2). Consequently, all “law is nought else than an ordinance of reason for the common good made by the authority who has care for the community and
promulgated” (2006c, I-II, 90, 4). Human earthly life, lived in community is to be shaped for the common good (2006c, I-II, 90, 2). All law derives from God’s eternal law and is directed to the common good.

People are able to discern the eternal law as natural law. God has promulgated natural law in people’s minds, which they recognise in the human condition (2006c, I-II, 90, 4). It can be assumed that there a few “common conceptions”, although people might not all agree on the same practical decisions (2006c, I-II, 94, 4). Consequently, in its role in the common good, Aquinas (2006c, I-II, 94, 2) expected the foundation of all natural law was “that good is to be sought and done and evil avoided.” Because of divine provision for their ultimate end, however, people need divine law as well as natural law. Human judgment is unreliable and cannot address ultimate consequences and interior motives, as God can (2006c, I-II, 91, 4). Natural law and divine law combine for people’s development for their ultimate fulfilment. People’s discernment and divine contribution also make possible the earthly common good.

The law will enable people to be virtuous for the common good. For Aquinas (2006c, I-II, 90, 1), “law is a kind of direction or measure for human activity through which a person is led to do something or held back.” People’s dispositions and virtues need practice, and by regulating behaviour, the law enables people to practise (2006c, I-II, 92, 1). Because the law is for the common good, these practices will make people good, so enabling their virtues (2006c, I-II, 92, 1). The law is for a community that will ensure everyone is good within the context of the community good (2006c, I-II, 92, 1). There are, however, limits to practical application of the law. As the same law applies to all, it does not address the nuances of people’s behaviour, and it is best reserved for the most socially disruptive behaviour (2006c, I-II, 96, 2). Moreover, for the common good, the law is focussed on the practice of virtues for social order and discipline for justice and
peace (2006c, I-II, 96, 3). For the common good, law enables a basic standard of human behaviour.

Human virtues express the complete development of each person, ultimately for heavenly fulfilment. “Virtue is a good quality of mind by which one lives righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us without us [. . .]” (1969b, I-II, 55, 4). The cardinal virtues — prudence, justice, temperance, and courage or fortitude — address all the principle reasons a person acts; they are the dispositions for all sources of human behaviour: reason, will, passion that overrides or withdraws respectively (1969b, I-II, 61,2; 61, 3). In the context of the existence given them by God, people can acquire the disposition of these virtues and do good (1972, I-II, 109, 2). There are also theological virtues — faith, hope and charity — with which people are infused as they are enkindled with the divine nature (1969b, I-II, 62, 1). Theological virtues direct people to God; to what is beyond their own abilities; they are infused and cannot be acquired; but people co-operate in the dispositions that God works (1969b, I-II, 62,1; 55,4). God’s grace enables people to perform the transcendent good of infused virtue, and more so enables them to live fully in accordance with their created existence because they are healed of sin (1972, I-II, 109, 2). God has, therefore, made provision for the best expression of human virtue in earthly life, which also directs each person to their heavenly fulfilment.

In the development of each person’s character, virtues also enable the common good on earth. Prudence is the disposition of reason to discern right conduct, consequently people’s prudence will mean they decide to share and participate for the common good otherwise there is no private good (1969a, II-II, 47, 4; 47, 10). A disposition for justice is to ensure every person receives their due, so justice directs a person to equitable relations with others and the whole community and means other virtues are so disposed, so justice directs people to the common good (2006f, II-II, 57, 1; 58, 5). For a person to be willingly
disposed to God and neighbour as external to self, they are directed by virtues such as charity and justice (1969b, I-II, 56, 6). Charity is the greatest theological virtue because it is about the actual encountered relationship with God (1969b, I-II, 66, 6). As people reach for their ultimate fulfilment with God, they are enabled by charity (1972, I-II, 114, 4). Grace is exercised in changing people’s disposition to charity, as it overflows from the incarnate Word through the Holy Spirit (1972, I-II, 110, 1; 110, 2). People’s disposition changes in grateful response to grace given gratis (1972, I-II, 110, 1). All of a person’s virtues are directed by their willing and voluntary charity (1972, I-II, 114, 4), so directing them to love where there is no return both enemies and sinners (2006e, II-II, 23, 1). The cardinal virtues mean each person must be well disposed to others and seek the good of the whole community, the love of God, however, changes a person. God’s grace, which perfects human virtue, also enables people to intend the good of all regardless, as they are oriented to their fulfilment in the love of God.

For St Thomas Aquinas, the earthly common good happens on the way to and is directed by fulfilment in loving relationship with God as origin and goal. The grace of God, whether in their created context or in enabling their heavenly end, leads people both to discern a law for the common good which regulates behaviour, and to grow in character in virtues enabling the common good. Furthermore, discernment and growth are enhanced because by grace in charity people are led to transcend both their natural capacities and their failings.

Modern Christian thought has drawn on Aristotle and more so St Thomas Aquinas to consider the common good in the following terms: fulfilment in God, natural law, relationality in the image of God, and the nature of community.
Common good directed towards divine fulfilment

The goal of human fulfilment in communion with God guides people for the common good. In Christian thinking that follows St Thomas Aquinas, fulfilment in God transcends human community. I will now examine the way such fulfilment can lead to unforeseen possibilities and an abundance of goods for communal life. People’s fulfilment can encourage social stability, innovative social support and a provisional earthly common good.

The ultimate encounter for the human person is when the soul “enters into the very bliss of God and draws its life from the uncreated Good, the divine essence itself, the uncreated common Good of the three divine persons” (Maritain & FitzGerald, 1946, p. 424). This is the beatific vision and it transcends any common good within creation (Maritain & FitzGerald, 1946, p. 424). The “blessed soul” knows God and is known without any created intermediary, indeed the Divine lights the soul exposed to “very Being” itself (Maritain & FitzGerald, 1946, pp. 423–424, who draw on Aquinas). Moreover, this orientation to God is the ultimate end intended for each human person that exceeds any earthly common good or the common good of the entire created universe (Maritain & FitzGerald, 1946, p. 421). The heavenly community is transcended by God while personally each individual “ beholds the divine essence”, which is thus the foundation of the community (Maritain & FitzGerald, 1946, p. 425). If, as Maritain and FitzGerald (1946, p. 421) asserted, each person is “ordained” to God, then I infer that God, ultimate power and authority, intends this end. The “dignity” of a human person comes from this end in God, therefore, human life is not an end in itself (Paulhus, 1987, p. 262). Consequently, every social institution and the universe must be subordinate to the “conversation of the soul” of each person with God (Maritain & FitzGerald, 1946, p. 421). Aquinas has, according to Maritain and FitzGerald (1946, p. 421), transfigured Aristotle by providing a radically different telos for humanity. Earthly life is lived
according to its purpose, as Aristotle proposed, but understanding the purposes of God points to living beyond the known human condition. Paulhus (1987, p. 264) uses Aquinas’s approach to explain that a specific result directs the way people organise themselves. This result is something that happens beyond the way a community is organised and not merely a perfected internal organisation for community structures (Paulhus, 1987, p. 264). Milbank (1993, pp. 214–215)\textsuperscript{24} discusses the way people are oriented to divine purposes in history. People are engaged by divine direction when they expect what has happened in history to point to a purpose (Milbank, 1993, p. 214). Further, those who act participate in this divine activity without knowing the ultimate outcome of their actions (Milbank, 1993, p. 214). As each person’s actions affect other people, life’s meaning is synthesised from the mediating relationships (Milbank, 1993, p. 214). People grasp the sense of the actions and the resulting relationships (Milbank, 1993, p. 215). People’s purpose of the goal in God enables their understanding of events and relationships, and their orientation beyond what they can construct for themselves (Milbank, 1993, p. 215). This goal is the best good, the most common good, God in whom alone all may share (Paulhus, 1987, p. 265). I consider in chapter four the way God’s goodness is creatively surprising and gives hope, enabling possibilities for the common good beyond human conception. Consequently, the divine end, God’s goodness, completely changes the possibilities for an earthly common good. Within the goal in God’s unceasing love, an earthly common good arises that has a resultant social possibility of something more and unforeseen. The total of community good is, therefore, more than simply a sum of individual contributions. Offe (2012, p. 678) searches, in secular terms, for reasons that will make possible the social cohesion over time to carry the goods and values of the common good, and he admits there are few suitable reasons

\textsuperscript{24} John Milbank, an English Anglican theologian surveys theological and other concepts of society and politics–in this case explicating Blondel.
that go beyond the contractual. With the divine vision as a possibility, Paulhus (1987, p. 264), using Aquinas as his authority, considers it natural that a community is more than mutual obligation. The material things that enable people to live are simply the sum total of all individual possessions, but if always divided up among people they may be less than they were as a whole (Paulhus, 1987, p. 264). Contrastingly, when people share their rational and spiritual capabilities, live virtuously and seek God in community, what they have is *more* than the sum total when it is shared (Paulhus, 1987, p. 264). There can be an unforeseen excess from response to the end in God’s love (which I explore in chapter five). The common good is the abundance of goods and values in a community with the divine goal.

For those who have faith in God, there is tension as they participate in the earthly community. Augustine’s legacy (both mediated by Aquinas and directly arising from Augustine’s thinking) is that the highest good is in God (McCann & Miller, 2005, p. 5); therefore the achievement of the highest good is neither by humanly defined excellence nor by politics. As such, a Christian community will not be in total agreement with governmental institutions concerning the ultimate goal (McCann & Miller, 2005, p. 5). On this reasoning, the goals of an elected government therefore become less edifying if they are simply what will achieve its re-election (Offe, 2012, p. 676). While people may fail in even the provisional goals of government, Augustine was willing to give qualified support to governments, which McCann and Miller (2005, p. 5) understand to be instrumental for social stability. The tension is not between a Christian community and governmental authorities but between and within people as they pursue both earthly and heavenly ends (Weithman, 2001, p. 237). Christian communities can recognise their provisional earthly nature, know their heavenly goal, and accept the unknown divine possibilities within history. A community alert to fulfilment and alternative possibilities may, therefore, not only offer their perspective on earthly society but have active concern
for society as a whole (Milbank, 1993, p. 223, using Blondel). There can be an earthly common good, which is provisional, yet directed by the divine goal and ultimate common good.

The boundless fulfilment in communion with God can lead each person to seek the unforeseen possibilities of God’s purposes in earthly life. People do not have to accept life as it is, or accept political goals as life’s fulfilment, but can enjoy the abundance of God’s love as the common good.

The divine purpose changes the goal and possibilities, but specific reasons are required for deciding the common good. It appears, following St Thomas Aquinas, that discerning the divine purpose by natural law will offer a way to discern the common good.

**Common good results from natural law**

There is a view, derived from Aquinas, that through natural law all people can recognise what is best for humanity. People can therefore agree together to reach for what is best as the common good. I will now consider how, within a natural law framework, there can be recognition of common human sociality, and the benefits from communal discernment of natural law. Natural law ultimately originates with God who has created everything and whose purpose can be discerned in what is best for creation.

Each person is able to discern the way human life should be. Maritain (1944, p. 6) states that the human species has “intelligence” and “will” to control their existence. Human life is not merely material but there is a “spiritual superexistence” that arises from a person’s knowledge and capacity to love (Maritain, 1944, p. 6). From these capacities, O’Brien (2009, p. 28) explains that people are able to recognise their need to preserve themselves and their families, and their desire to fulfil their potential. When people recognise that all humanity has these same ends, they have discerned the natural law (Maritain, 1944, p. 34). Consequently, Maritain (1944, p. 14) expected there to be some
recognition of principles such as justice, dignity and neighbourly love through which people can co-operate for the common good of society. Each person will recognise that it is better to live well with others by enabling all to pursue these ends (O’Brien, 2009, p. 28). People will, therefore, organise themselves as a society to achieve these shared ends and accept that some individual claims must give way for everybody’s good (O’Brien, 2009, p. 28). With their capacities people recognise, want and accept that there is some common good (Murphy, 2005, p. 134). Decisions for society are to achieve a common good in which everyone flourishes (Murphy, 2005, p. 137). The natural law that people can discern enables the common good.

Discernment of human nature finds that people are social. While people are materially, intellectually and morally interdependent, they also are naturally social in seeking relationships (Maritain, 1944, p. 7). Because of the human capacities of intelligence and will, people will decide what is the natural social order (Maritain, 1944, p. 7). Natural law recognises the importance of the individual and all groups within society, starting with the family (Maritain, 1944, p. 9). From within their natural sociality, people will determine that the natural law will tend to the common social good. Natural law defends freedom; by avoiding servitude to goods or to the powerful, people support the common good (Maritain, 1944, p. 59). In this way, Maritain (1944, pp. 8–9) indicated there is a common good, providing everyone benefits. This common good is more than the sum of individual goods but precludes sacrificing individuals to a social entity, external to people’s good (Maritain, 1944, p. 8). Murphy (2005, p. 150) argues therefore, that even indivisible social goods are intended to benefit each and every member of society. Murphy (2005, p. 136) proposes that a definition of the common good such as Maritain’s be accepted because people are able to discern that it is good and common.
There remains a question of whether most people are able to discern the natural law of a desirable common life. Maritain (1944, p. 35) accepted that most people would not find the natural law easy to discern. He made an exception for Aquinas’s rule, that good must be done and evil avoided (Maritain, 1944, p. 35). I observe here that even when people with the most active consciences recognise such norms, they are not able to live up to them. Other norms of unrestrained self-interest are recognised and pursued by many. Maritain (1944, p. 9), therefore, identified that people will need integrity and lead upright moral lives to seek the common good. He concluded that such values should be taught to members of society (Maritain, 1944, pp. 9–10). O’Brien (2009, p. 28) considers that people can only become fully human when communities so intend. It appears that the more a community desires the common good, the better people are able to understand it for themselves.

Discernment of the natural law originates with God. Those human capacities have a spiritual aspect that give rise to each person’s entirety and uniqueness (Maritain, 1944, p. 6). As such, people are made in God’s image (Maritain, 1944, p. 6). Consistent with my earlier discussion of Aquinas, Maritain (1944, p. 34) indicates that God is the origin of human nature and God’s eternal law is the source of the natural law that humanity may discern. The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (2004, para. 20) states that people can apprehend the gift of God’s creation and the way God’s provision should be best enjoyed. Accepting this gift, including the intellect that determines natural law, people are inclined towards the divine provision fulfilled with Godself (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, para. 140). Christian thinking finds that natural law gives rise to the common good as the best alignment with God’s provision and creation’s fulfilment.

In summary, on the basis of natural law, there can be a proposal for discernment of God’s provision for earthly life. In such discernment, people will recognise that their
life is to be social and where they cannot discern, their social life will enable them to be taught. When people discern God’s provisions in this social context they are enabled to seek the common good.

Discernment of the natural law relies on discernment of the divine purpose, and leads to the common good. Divine revelation of life in the Trinity provides a model that may more directly lead to the common good.

**Common good aspiring to the Divine example**

People should aspire to the characteristics of the divine community of the Trinity, and thereby to the common good. Creation in the image of God discloses that human behaviour is analogous to the divine relationships which are for the good of each divine person. In one version, aspiration to their unique relationship with and fulfilment in God moves people to seek community life in which a common good assures the good of all. Alternatively, there is a relational model of divine society that people adopt, again because they are made in God’s image. The equal, mutually indwelling, self-giving relationships that are determinative of the identity of the divine persons may sufficiently correlate with human life to inspire people.

The unity of God in Trinity means seeking the good that benefits all. Following in the Roman Catholic tradition, Eschmann (1945, p. 190) proposed that God is the sole source of the entire created order, so it is preferable that the creation comes to unity. Consequently, the more unified the creatures are in a common good, the closer they are to fulfilment in the universal goodness of God (Paulhus, 1987, p. 265). God made people to be social and work together, therefore, everyone should be included in the common good (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, paras. 149, 167). Maritain and FitzGerald (1946, pp. 436–437) were concerned that society works for the good of the whole not goods divided among each where the stronger individual gains advantage. As
an earthly end, the common good must safeguard each person so that the common goods benefit all (Maritain & FitzGerald, 1946, p. 437). Consequently, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (2004, para. 164) provides the following definition of the common good:

the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily.

The definition also reflects the concern of Maritain and FitzGerald (1946, pp. 421–422) that God is concerned with each person as such, not simply with a unified universe. Cochran (1978, p. 233), drawing on both Maritain and Simon, therefore emphasises that the common good must be enjoyed by all people. In this view, the common good arises from the possibility of fulfilment in the unity of God and eventuates in human social unity where everyone is included in a good that benefits each.

More specifically, the divine communion is the source and goal that leads human society to a common good. First, people are made in God’s image, made in the “image of Trinitarian love”, so they are made for relationship (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, para. 36). The characteristics of God are something that people would reflect. Second, human society may find an analogy in the perfect example of personal relations of the divine Trinity (Maritain & FitzGerald, 1946, p. 440). God provides the supreme example of personhood as only God can demonstrate the capacity for pure love (Hollenbach, 2002, p. 130). All activity of the Divine life is concerned with the good of each divine person (Maritain & FitzGerald, 1946, p. 441). The demonstrable common good is entirely devolved on to the constituent persons (Maritain & FitzGerald, 1946, p. 441). Finally and ultimately, people will aspire to the divine example as it is their fulfilment (Hollenbach, 2002, p. 130). Although admitting that the divine-human analogy is inadequate, Maritain and FitzGerald (1946, p. 441) proposed that human society fits into a scale of being between lesser creatures that have no separate personhood and the
divine society of “pure Persons”. Using Augustine’s consideration that the quality of society reflects the members’ greatest loves, Hollenbach (2002, pp. 127–128) proposes that a Christian community, whose focus is love of God, will therefore seek the highest standards for society. To conclude, human persons seek fulfilment in the image in which they are created, looking to God as the exemplar of interpersonal care to which they aspire in seeking the common good on earth.

Aspiration to God for personal fulfilment purportedly drives society to work for the common good. God is greater than the common good of the universe (Maritain & FitzGerald, 1946, p. 422). In supporting Maritain, Eschmann (1945, pp. 190–191) proposed that humanity is most like the image of God in a person’s rational capacity to know and love God. In their likeness and relation to God, each person takes priority over the universe (Eschmann, 1945, p. 192). Maritain and FitzGerald (1946, p. 422) interpreted Aquinas to propose that in their fulfilment in God, each person’s relationship with God is uniquely important, and does not simply support the good of the universe. Maritain and FitzGerald (1946, p. 445) asserted that the spiritual life of each person is unique and cannot be disregarded. Eschmann (1945, p. 200) understood from Aquinas that this personal contemplation is in isolation and superior to concepts of the common good. Contemplation of the Divine has greatest worth in human life, even though the common good has the most utility for human good (Eschmann, 1945, p. 202). There should be harmony between a personal life and a person’s effort for their communal life by which a person’s spiritual life might be enhanced, but they sacrifice contemplative existence for the demands of the common good, and this sacrifice is of individual life that is unconnected to their communal existence (Maritain & FitzGerald, 1946, p. 444). I observe here that something in individual human life is reserved from human social life. Consequently, in this perception, the common good ultimately rests on all people’s ability to seek their personal fulfilment with God.
The importance of relationships has led to another correlation between the Triune God and the created order. There has been much theological discussion in the later twentieth century that is broadly referred to as “social Trinitarianism” (Kärkkäinen, 2009, p. 13). Both divine and human persons only truly exist in relationships in which diverse attributes are contributed for mutual benefit (Kärkkäinen, 2009, p. 14). It has been argued that there must be some correlation because humanity is made in the image of God (McIntosh, 2008, p. 170). There is also a contemporary interest in the importance of relationships to human identity (Kärkkäinen, 2009, p. 13). The common good may arise in the benefit of diverse contributions within relationships that mutually enhance.

The relationships of the Trinity are significant because they bestow identity within community. As a guide to human social relations Volf (1998, pp. 405, 406) notes that the divine-human correlation cannot be exact replication. People are not God; the human concepts of person, relation and the nature of the interaction are limited; and human insight is veiled by sin (Volf, 1998, p. 405). Critics of social Trinitarianism, such as S. R. Holmes (2009, p. 86) also indicate that the relations of origin described by the church fathers should not be confused with human relationships. The Trinity may be a positive example when Volf (1998, p. 409) notes that the divine persons are distinct, yet indwell one another and are present in each other’s actions. The implication for people is that personal identity is important and not dissolved into relationships (Volf, 1998, p. 410). Further, the identity of the divine persons positively involves others, and this is also the case with people (Volf, 1998, p. 410). The divine example points to the importance of interdependency; persons in relationships bestow identity so that they remain distinct in their relationships. Without the common good of such relationships, people do not even have self-knowledge.

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25 A scholar in the episcopal church in systematic theology, here concerned with trinitarian thought.
26 Volf, a protestant theologian who explores the bridges between Christian theology and public life, here expounds the importance of the divine source of relationships.
Whether people aspire to their personal fulfilment in God, and recognise fulfilment is everybody’s good, or whether people aspire to the example of divine interrelationships, which demonstrates mutual giving, people could have a model of their ultimate fulfilment which they may seek for themselves, which leads to the common good. Aspiration to good relationships has another setting in the good community. Understanding the common good may also come from the particularity of Christian communities, which maintain a certain God-given tradition.

Common good arises in community

A community relies on relationships. A community with a distinctive narrative and consequent relationships seeks the common good with and for the whole of society. In this final perspective, communication within a community relies on relationships and the communicated narrative informs relationships. I consider next the effect of the reconciliatory narrative of Jesus Christ in Christian communities. This narrative also depicts character that contributes to relationships and thereby provides a perspective on people’s virtues. With this narrative and relationships, communities are interested in solidarity (support and recognition) and subsidiarity (contribution for coexistence).

A community requires a certain level of communication and therefore, relationships. Using an analogy with the family, Hollenbach (2002, p. 8) demonstrates that there has to be interaction other than simply shared material goods, otherwise even those goods will not be shared. When some of the community are considered of less worth, the difference in status makes communication difficult and conflict more likely (Maritain, 1944, p. 23). Moreover, Maritain and FitzGerald (1946, p. 436) indicated that people intend relationships to continue beyond specific needs or material ends. Relationships are, therefore, a good in themselves rather than a means to other ends (Hollenbach, 2002, p. 81). When relationships are good everybody’s lives are enhanced.
(Cochran, 1978, p. 238). Consequently, Cochran (1978, p. 238) proposes community life is as good as the constituent relationships, and that the common good resides in the quality of community life.

More specifically, Jesus Christ demonstrates and enables those relationships. God promises to fulfil the good of creation in the gift of love (Victor Paul Furnish, 2005, p. 61). It is the event of Christ that makes fulfilment possible (Milbank, 1993, p. 398). At the same time, in the life of Jesus, the norm of God’s goodness is made known (Victor Paul Furnish, 2005, p. 85). Consequently, Hauerwas (1981, pp. 42, 49) considers that Jesus did not so much teach a life of goodness and love as live it; demonstrating the way God’s promise is fulfilled.

The community, relationships and the common good do not only pertain to life on earth. The narrative of the earthly community does not proceed to a perfect earthly end, and the narrative includes sin (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 163). Christian communities on earth also see themselves as part of the heavenly city (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 161). The practice of earthly communities is oriented to life in the heavenly city (Augustine, as used by Milbank, 1993, p. 409). The heavenly city is satisfied by transcendent divine love that also illuminates earthly communities (Milbank, 1993, p. 409).

Christian communities teach and embody the model of community relationships specific to the narrative of Jesus Christ. Each community as a whole is seen as the body of Christ — not simply acting together but united in their expression of the living Christ (Thiselton, 2000, p. 991). Paul argues that the gifts God has given are for the common good before moving to use the analogy of the body (I Cor. 12:7 cited by Victor Paul Furnish, 2005, p. 63). The gifts are analogous to the parts of the body and all contribute to the functioning of the whole. Immediately after describing the purpose and function of the body, Paul expounds at length on pursuit of the gift of love (I Cor. 13:1–14:1 cited by
If all gifts are for the good of the community, they are made available in loving relationships. Consequently, Hauerwas (1988, p. 93) proposes that:

we learn to see our relations with one another as part of a continuing tradition of discourse which helps us serve a common good. That good, at least among Christians, is to be a community of the forgiven empowered to witness to God’s kingdom of peace wrought through Jesus of Nazareth.

Christian communities envisage, therefore, that as well as laws and punishments there can be repentance and forgiveness (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 162). There need not be defensiveness toward others but trust, vulnerability (Hauerwas, 1981, p. 50), and reconciliation (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 163).

The quality of community relations is important because people are formed in community. People only learn how to communicate in the relationships among the community within which they develop (Hollenbach, 2002, p. 79). As such, people receive what they cannot obtain by themselves (Hollenbach, 2002, p. 83). Moreover, what is shared between people extends beyond one person’s lifetime, giving each access to a greater diversity of experiences (Cochran, 1978, p. 231). People inhabit what has been described as the narrative of their lives provided by the community (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 199). Consequently, no person is entirely responsible for the story of their life (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 199).

People learn their relations from the characters in the community narrative. The community narrative portrays characters, so that:

It is through hearing stories about wicked stepmothers, lost children, good but misguided kings, wolves that suckle twin boys, youngest sons who receive no inheritance but must make their own way in the world and eldest sons [sic] who waste their inheritance on riotous living and go into exile to live with the swine, that children learn or mislearn both what a child and what a parent is, what the cast of characters maybe in the drama into which they have been born and what the ways of the world are. (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 201).
People’s actions are interpreted in accordance with the narrative (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 194). MacIntyre (1981, p. 204) explains that people learn the dispositions or virtues of the characters that are part of the narrative. In a circular fashion, not only does the community narrative form people, but people in turn are able to be model characters demonstrating the virtues for others, corresponding to the strength of the virtues that people develop (Milbank, 1993, p. 362). Hauerwas (1981, pp. 95–96) notes in addition that the narrative has a variety of characters that the community would accommodate. Christian communities are entrusted with a vision that recognises the gifts of all (Williams, 2012, p. 305). As such, there is a narrative of a Christian community that is preserved and practised (Milbank, 1993, p. 249). Both Milbank (1993, p. 249) and Hauerwas (1981, p. 91) consider the Christian narrative to be specific and distinct from the narratives of other communities. Moreover, narratives enable characters to develop virtuous integrity as the narrative proceeds to a particular goal (MacIntyre, 1981, pp. 203–204). MacIntyre (1981, p. 163) proposes, therefore, that the distinctive Christian virtues are for the development of a character within a narrative with a heavenly end.

Christian communities can see themselves as porous because they demonstrate virtues by positive and inclusive action toward wider society. In the parable of the good Samaritan the extent of neighbourliness is not defined. Rather, the characters change in the presence of love and removal of boundaries (Victor Paul Furnish, 2005, p. 60, citing Lk. 10:25–39). A community believes that they should be concerned with all humanity because the love of God is shown to all as brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, para. 3).

Inclusive action leads to the principle of solidarity. Given an understanding that God is concerned for each person, the common good of society must flow to each and all. As diversity is important, each person’s contribution is not identical, and it is important
to seek what is good for others (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, paras. 150–151). It is also important to recognise the communication of goods and people’s reliance on their social context (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, paras. 192, 194). Thus solidarity, the virtue to enable the common good, recognises the good of others, which can only be attained in community (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, paras. 192, 194). Consequently, Cochran (1978, p. 238) suggests that any decisions or goods pursued for the sake of the common good must enhance communal life across society.

The Christian interest in earthly society is one interest among the interests of many other people and groups. Christian communities would expect to pursue the common good in a pluralist setting (Hollenbach, 2002, p. 113). It is preferable that contributions to the common good are identified by the smallest units possible — individuals or as few as can agree (Cochran, 1978, p. 234). This, Cochran (1978, p. 232) suggests, maintains diversity while restricting authority to what is necessary. The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (2004, paras. 186–187) describes the situation as the principle of subsidiarity: the diversity and dignity of all groups is preserved by the restraint of power. This diversity is necessary so that wisdom, spirituality, friendship, virtuous examples and material prosperity will flourish (Maritain & FitzGerald, 1946, p. 438). The diverse groups must contribute to the common good, and people rely on their intercommunication within society, and not only on governmental decisions (Maritain & FitzGerald, 1946, p. 438). Consequently, Christian communities are interested in the good of all society and in co-operating for an orderly society (Williams, 2012, pp. 306–307). Communities are not, therefore, only interested in self-preservation (Williams, 2012, p. 306). While Paul advises a church community to live acceptably in society, it is not so that the Christians can live by themselves or recruit more members, but so that they can express God’s love (Victor Paul Furnish, 2005, pp. 64, 84, citing I Thess. 3:12; 4:12; 5:15).
It is expected that the Christian conception of community can be offered in goodwill because the activity of the Holy Spirit has no boundaries (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, para. 12). The influence that communities have can only be to the extent of love expressed in relationships (Hollenbach, 2002, p. 136). If Christian communities have good reasons to advocate a view of the community good, then non-Christians can expect this advocacy for the sake of Christian integrity (Hollenbach, 2002, p. 114). Williams (2012, p. 306) indicates that Christian communities can be judged by their contribution to society and their willingness for that contribution to be compared with their narrative. Moreover, non-Christians need not fear the Christian contribution (Hollenbach, 2002, p. 124). As Christian communities believe all earthly societies are provisional, they should not be seeking to perfect them in a theocracy (Hollenbach, 2002, p. 118). The aspiration for the good of the heavenly city only leads Christian communities to seek the best common good for earthly society (Hollenbach, 2002, p. 128).

As Christian communities lives by the Christian narrative, effectively, judgment is passed on the whole of society. Milbank (1993, p. 387) believes that it is necessary for communities to offer an explicit critique of society. Hauerwas (1981, pp. 2–3, 10) however, warns that it is not for Christian communities deliberately to influence decisions in society, nor do communities provide the ethos for the nation-state. In chapter seven I discuss Christian communities’ attitudes to seeking the common good in wider society.

To sum up: communities are known by the quality of their relationships. A Christian community learns about relationships from the narrative of Jesus Christ and focuses beyond the earthly common good. This narrative teaches people about their virtuous dispositions for relationships. Such relationships are to include the well-being of everyone and enable this community to be well disposed toward other persons and communities for the common good.
What determines the common good?

These various viewpoints supporting the concept of the common good have strengths and weaknesses. Aristotle provides original ideas and a contrast with Christian views. I will now draw attention to the way that Christian views of the common good, notwithstanding their immediate reasons, ultimately rely on theology concerning Jesus Christ.

The Christian view cannot adopt Aristotle wholeheartedly because, obviously, Christian theology is absent rather than merely veiled. There are resultant limitations in Aristotle’s expectations of relationships and goodness that ultimately relate to his goal for human community. First, Aristotle’s community life can only be directed by select male citizens, in contrast to the possibility that all humankind can be united with Jesus Christ in relationship with God (as I expand further in chapter three). Consequently, St Thomas Aquinas insisted that God is interested in the good of all creation and Roman Catholic teaching proposes solidarity with all other human beings. Second, Aristotle’s virtues can only extend friendship to the similarly virtuous and assume some will never reach that state. St Thomas Aquinas proposed different virtues bestowed by God’s grace, which meant that people could change beyond their obvious earthly potential. The virtue of charity leads human life to accept other people regardless, because that is the way people are oriented to God. Consideration of the common good must be for the long term and for all involved (Fergusson, 1998, p. 150).27 There cannot simply be decisions for the majority (Fergusson, 1998, p. 150). Aristotle’s political community would not make the common good common enough.

For Aristotle, the community government, which has the greatest influence on every person’s pursuit of excellence, must decide on the common good that will achieve

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27 A Scottish Presbyterian theologian and philosopher concerned with the public role of faith in society.
that end. This government is for the city or *polis*, which is not synonymous with a modern nation-state (Hollenbach, 2002, p. 3). Skillen (2005, p. 257) considers that if governments determine the common good completely, there is totalitarian dictation of every aspect of people’s lives. The principle of subsidiarity to which I have referred, rejects that human dignity is consistent with a government-decides-all approach. Moreover, as Christian communities see human government as provisional, the human decisions made for the common good are within God’s oversight that alone enables human fulfilment.

In support of Aristotle, human government must decide its course of action, neutral or otherwise (Fergusson, 1998, p. 127). At the very least, governments must maintain a modicum of social stability so that people can decide and act for the common good. In turn, there must be sufficient acceptance concerning this minimum stability and that it exists at all (Fergusson, 1998, p. 147). Hollenbach (2002, p. 77) contends that where the good, even for a majority but not for all, is enacted, there is not mutual respect among all citizens. The social peace must extend to everyone. Such a common good is not something achievable by separate individuals (Hollenbach, 2002, p. 81). It could then be argued that the citizens will see the importance of promoting an inclusive common good (Fergusson, 1998, pp. 140–141). The principle of subsidiarity again suggests that good government is good, if there is space for everyone to contribute to the common good.

From the Christian perspective, there is fulfilment in God. Aristotle is significant because he proposes that deliberation for the common good is for a specific purpose and goal. Aristotle is limited to a human goal, but fulfilment in God transcends the human condition. The vision of the common good is not, therefore, limited to what people might achieve as they are. As I have discussed, people take hold of transformational possibilities and trust in an outcome beyond them in hope and faith in God; that Christian faith and
hope coming specifically through Jesus Christ. This God-given goal brings a different standard that God’s power enables.

For St Thomas Aquinas, earthly life achieves some happiness and the common good is worthwhile. There is such a strong focus on ultimate human fulfilment, however, that it is easy to lose sight of human life. In particular, Aquinas works with concepts of a heavenly existence that seemingly do not contain many human traits. This fulfilment is not creaturely, does not involve the senses, and people will be like angels in continuous uninterrupted happiness when human minds are united with God (St Thomas Aquinas, d. 1274/2006d, I-II, 3, 1; 5, 1; 3, 2). Even in earthly existence, such fulfilment means that contemplative life is superior to the various diverting concerns of maintaining human life (2006d, I-II, 3, 2). Earthly human life seems to have less worth than the possibility of a heavenly existence. This could have a distorting influence on people’s perspective on human life in general, some kinds of more contemplative life compared to others, and consequently, the worth and inclusiveness of the common good. Nonetheless, people’s same human capacities do persist, howsoever they are oriented. Where faith and hope are fulfilled in heavenly contemplation, charity still remains. If people are humanly capable of charitable relationships, then these are present both in seeking the earthly common good and in contemplating God in heaven. Christian thinking strongly endorses the common good concept by recognising both the God-given goal for human life and the extent to which that goal changes human life and relationships on earth.

The human relationships that are possible on earth and in heaven also mean the common good is not simply founded on individual communion with God. Maritain (1944, p. 14) admitted a tension between a person’s inclination to transcend their existence and their life in society. Brackley (1980, pp. 112–113) indicated that Maritain assumed the personal and spiritual are superior to the communal and practical. The sufficiency of a
person’s relationship with God seems to preclude that they are social; Brackley (1980, p. 119), therefore, proposed that God is all-sufficient for a social person. While Aquinas considered that communion of utmost importance, as I discussed, he did not see that communion with the Divine excluded people’s enjoyment of one another. Indeed, the two go together because it is in their fulfilment in God that people are able truly to enjoy their fellowship with one another. I would add that human relationships in earthly life have profound dignity because the encounter with God in Jesus Christ occurs in human life. The common good may rest more concretely on fulfilment, which involves human relationships.

Where the common good relies on God-given fulfilment, natural law, indicating the common good, cannot by the independence of human reason, appear to limit divine provision. Natural law can be conceived as purely within human reason. Pope (2009, p. 156) notes, however, that a purely rational natural law claiming an unarguable list of goods does not reflect disagreement about those goods or their relative importance. Completely separated from divine provision, people’s discernment can be arbitrary. Conversely, people’s discernment of divine provision can seem to anticipate divine revelation. God’s grace is not free because it can naturally be expected; God does not enter fully into salvation because humanity anticipates revelation in history (Milbank, 1993, p. 222). There is a paradox in which people have desire for fulfilment and purpose and yet people cannot achieve that fulfilment except by God’s grace to which they have no claim (Gilby O.P., 2006, p. 153). Human reason may either ignore or anticipate divine provision, but cannot orchestrate a common good flowing from that provision and fulfilment.

Natural law, moreover, is insufficient without divinely revealed law. As I discussed earlier, for St Thomas Aquinas with fulfilment in view, ultimate judgment rests
with God. Similarly, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (2004, para. 141) proposes that natural law can only be free from error by God’s grace and revelation. If natural law is for the common good, it is only so in the context of human fulfilment, which involves divine revelation and God’s grace.

The idea of Natural law is helpful for pointing to a common good regardless of culture. A common good present in beneficial human behaviour is a helpful concept both across and between societies. Friendship and mutual support will be the norm regardless of the specific social groups a person inhabits. Consequently, not simply concurring for common aims but one of the common aims is concurring. The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (2004, para. 20, citing Mt. 7:12) finds evidence in the presence of the “golden rule” in many cultures; to treat others as you yourself would like to be treated. If natural law demands people treat each other positively, it proposes behaviour enabling people to agree to other benefits. People support a common good when they agree to common behaviour beneficial to all.

The natural law concept has developed in accordance with the Christian tradition. A prior expectation for Aquinas’s “common concepts” governs the Christian perspective of this natural law. What is found to be naturally good is very much coloured by faith in what God has revealed and enabled for human fulfilment. Alternatively, as O'Donovan (1986, pp. 19–22) posits, it is revelation that enables people to know what the natural order really is. Outside the Christian tradition, other values may come to the fore as the basis for finding common ground between traditions. Within the trajectory of Christian thought, natural law concepts tend in the direction in which the concept of the common good is prominent. Accepted Christian truth founded on God’s revelation is responsible

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28 An evangelical British Anglican academic much concerned with theology and politics in his significant diptych *The desire of the nations* (O'Donovan, 1999) and *The ways of Judgement* (O'Donovan, 2005).
for the view that natural law gives rise to the common good. I think it is necessary to reflect on divine revelation as the prior reason for the common good in Christian thought.

The common good relies on good relationality divinely revealed. To be inspired by divine models requires a strong enough correlation between those models and human life. First, if personal fulfilment with God inspires people, it is not clear that this leads them to be concerned with the good of each person in the community. The divine model of personal relations might inspire people, but it is not clear that their ultimate fulfilment will lead them to be concerned for others. Second, C. E. Gunton (2003a, p. 16) was clear that the relationship between God and God’s creature must encompass their difference. Consequently, human to human relations are not the same as the relations of the divine persons (C. E. Gunton, 2003a, p. 16). As Volf (1998, p. 409) noted the identities of the divine persons are irreducible despite their mutual indwelling. In contrast, people do not relate to each other so intensely that they operate as one, so their identities are preserved by less intense relationships (Tanner, 2010, p. 68). Additionally, the divine persons have unchanging relations while people can have various relations with different people in their finite lives (Tanner, 2010, p. 67). Alongside critics here and earlier, I do not think there is sufficient correlation between the Divine life and creaturely life for one to be directly a model for the other. Again, even allowing for the limited correlation, this model may inspire, but it is not clear what would impel people to attempt to follow its pattern. For the common good to be based on a divine model, there must be sufficient correlation and there must also be a strong enough reason to follow it.

Significantly, understanding the Divine life cannot be separated from what the Divine life has revealed. The quality of divine relationships is present in Jesus’ example to others and in the crucifixion (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, paras. 29, 31). Trinitarian love is fully revealed in the “Passover of Jesus Christ” (Pontifical Council
for Justice and Peace, 2004, para. 30). People can and should share in these relationships by the Spirit because of what God has done (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, paras. 29, 31, 32). Similarly, the selflessness of Christ on the cross is the Divine life engaged in transforming the world by love (Volf, 1998, p. 415). People are to imitate Christ’s reaching out to those trapped by “non-love” (Volf, 1998, p. 415). Without the history of events involving the presence of Jesus and the Spirit, there can be no consideration of a divine life that is Trinity. Further, the character of divine life is understood from what is revealed in Jesus Christ. The character of Jesus in relating to people and his example in relationship with the Father and the Spirit disclose divine life. The economic Trinity, therefore, gives an insight into the immanent Trinity. Finally, and most significantly, people primarily respond to Triune life revealed, neither because they see it as their personal goal, nor because it is the best model to inspire them, but because the divine character revealed in Jesus Christ has engaged humankind so that they are able to respond to reflect this model and goal. It is because the economic Trinity engages creation that people can be inspired to live according to Triune self-revelation (as I expand in chapters three, four and five). Reflection of the image of God is, in the first instance, the human ability to respond to the relationships God enables in revelation. This points to a common good that I later explore in terms of the relationships with humankind that God has revealed.

When a community indicates the common good concept and practice, they do so because of the distinctive community that people form. Christian communities are those whose relationships are specifically conformed to the narrative of Jesus Christ. In such communities, demonstration of the common good in a distinctive narrative with distinctive characters is hand-in-hand with development of distinctive virtues. Such descriptions refer to God’s love, reconciliation and forgiveness but could elaborate further with theological descriptions of God’s engagement and reconciliation. How does
revelation and salvation in Jesus Christ manifest and demonstrate love, forgiveness and reconciliation so that there can be good relationships? And why does responding in those relationships conform people to behaviour and virtues that sustain the common good? I argue (in chapters three to seven) that revelation and salvation convey the fullness of divine-human encounter and relationships and people’s consequent transformation. Faith and transformed behaviour can be both concept and practice so that a community supports and demonstrates the common good.

Christian interest in the concept of the common good relies on revelation as well as the significant thinking that upholds the concept of the common good. Aristotle supports the concept of the common good that must include a goal, and for good government to provide the peace in which the common good is explored in practice. Christian thinking proposes that ultimate fulfilment in God extends the possibilities for the earthly common good. More specifically, it is the possibilities for human relationships that extend the common good, also endorsed in natural law and it is God’s revelation that informs the Christian view of natural law. It is God’s revelation in Jesus Christ that engages people to respond in the kind of relationships that ultimately reflect Trinitarian relationships. And it is those distinctive relationships that can form a community that can practically demonstrate the concept of a common good. For Christian communities, engaging with revelation in Jesus Christ directly sustains the concept of the common good.

**Conclusion**

The common good, according to Aristotle, are those measures decided among people so that there can be human excellence. The decisions are made by people for the good of the human community as a whole, for the purpose of humanly achievable fulfilment. However, for Christian thinking, represented most notably in St Thomas
Aquinas, the perspective alters because the human goal is fulfilment in God. There is a common good arising from heavenly communion with God. Consequently, the earthly common good and human achievement is limited and provisional, but is drawn on to perfection. Consequently, Aristotle’s ideas about the importance of friendship in a community and the community nurturing people in virtue to enable a common good have been redirected. The love of God means there is no limit to friendship and virtue is crowned not by self-achievement but by selflessness.

Many advocates of the common good have followed St Thomas Aquinas by contending that discerning the natural law would bring about an awareness of and a consensus concerning the common good. What was good for each person was good for all people, including the ability to recognise sociality in their common good. Christian discernment of the common good from natural law relies on divine purpose and the impact of divine revelation with an emphasis on God’s love and a community that seeks fulfilment in such love.

The common good made known from divine revelation has led to proposals for a divine model of community. Such a community either assures each person of their complete good or exemplifies perfect relationships. The possibility of a divine model and its characteristics are, however, unknown without revelation. I argue (and elaborate in detail from chapter three onward) that God’s revelation has demonstrated and enabled the goodness in relationships that result in a common good.

Relationships that form community, develop virtues in accordance with the community’s narrative, and result in positive action in wider society, are also significantly indebted to Aristotle and Aquinas. I argue that in this narrative, Christian faith expressed as Christian theology of reconciliation in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, can more explicitly express distinctive relationships and community that demonstrate the
common good in concept and in practice. I propose (from chapter three onwards) to show the way God’s goodness in reconciliation gives rise to the common good of a community.

Modern Western discussion of the common good continues to be indebted to Aristotle and Aquinas. But of late, the concept of the common good has not been viewed favourably and has been in decline in Western thinking since the enlightenment period. Modern thinking has instead concentrated on ideas such as individualism, pluralism and a state-centred society. In the next chapter I consider the way these three ideas undermine a Christian conception and demonstration of the common good, consequently making it difficult for Christian communities to envisage and seek the common good.
Chapter 2 — Competition for the common good

Introduction

Beginning with the enlightenment, the concept of the common good that Christians historically supported, has been unregarded, underrated, and undermined in modern Western society. My concern is that contemporary Christian communities have difficulty with their own concept and practice of the common good in this environment. First, I will consider the two principle self-conceptions of modern Western society, using the terms liberalism and civic republicanism, and argue that these ideas compete with each other as they insist on alternatives to the historical common good concept. Communitarian critique of these ideas also has limited traction. Moreover, in the climate of such ideas, relationships, connectedness and community activities have weakened, and with them the experiences that would support the common good concept. Second, in this context, Christian communities are vulnerable to the influx of alternative ideas from a society, which formerly but no longer supports them. Ideas such as liberalism and civic republicanism make it difficult for Christian communities to discover the common good for themselves and to practise it accordingly. I propose that Christian communities need a stronger account of good relationships in mutual, communal support, that extends to wider society, and that demonstrates the common good.

Impact across society

The idea of competing individuals managed by their government undermines or replaces the historical concept of the common good. I examine these predominant ideas in modern western society that provide distinctive perspectives of society, making some trajectories of behaviour more conventional. Social connectedness and community life reduces and with it support for virtues that sustain the common good.
Alternate conceptions of the common good

Two ideas have undermined the common good concept since the enlightenment. One, which may be called liberal idealism, is the source of interconnected concepts about society. Rosenblum (1989, p. 6) provides an overview of liberalism, seen pragmatically as ideas by which people deliberate in government without destructive conflict. These ideas were to protect the individual from coercion, and allow for a plurality of perspectives that would not necessarily agree, but could be debated peaceably until there was a compromise or else one view prevailed (Rosenblum, 1989, p. 6). Those who had the authority to maintain order were only interested in systems, assumedly neutral, that would support this functioning society (Rosenblum, 1989, p. 6). This practical solution to management of society has been seen as the ideal society, best expressing human life (Rosenblum, 1989, p. 5). But use of these ideals, separate from their origin, does not always reflect their intent. The individual becomes solely important; inevitable pluralism becomes beneficial competition of equally valid perspectives; and the government’s neutrality endorses all positions. The common good becomes perpetual competition for individual gain.

The trajectory of these ideas and their moral consequences has been criticised by communitarian thinking that has endorsed the worth of community and recognises people’s interdependence and identity formed in a community (Avineri & de-Shalit, 1992, p. 2). Communitarian ideas have not had much purchase in defending such a common good that is limited to human ends. In the second perspective of society, nationality, emerging with nation-states, provides the focal point for community identity, and nationality is supported by some communitarians as promoting adherence to and affection for a common idea (Miller, 1992, p. 86). In civic republicanism, the apex of

29 Stackhouse (2005, p. 279) identifies these conceptions of society.
community life is citizen participation in the nation, whose government ensures people are inculcated with civic virtue for the resultant common good (Carr & Jones, 2013, pp. 486–487). More typically modern Western societies endorse both liberal and republican perspectives at the same time. The idea of the good community is squeezed between governments assuming a central role in community and the competing individuals they manage.

In the liberal idea, enabling the individual to contribute in a competition of ideas means the individual assumes importance and self-direction. Protection of the individual’s contribution leads to concern for individual rights and liberty (Rosenblum, 1989, p. 5). Moral purpose was not intended to be autonomy for its own sake because the individual had an obligation for self-development and respect for the corresponding dignity of others (Rosenblum, 1989, pp. 5–6). But, if self-development, enlightenment, comes from the self, from within, focus on the self becomes all important. Fulfilment rests with the individual who pursues this self-fulfilment as the ultimate goal in their life. For this self-fulfilment from within, not only is the influence of others unimportant, it is an impediment to clear away in discovering the true self (Williams, 2000, p. 242). If the influence of others impedes individual fulfilment, this perception undermines the benefit of the community. The individual, focussed on their own good, cannot conceive of a common good arising in community.

In the context of people striving each for their own interest, it is unlikely that all interests will coincide. The historical background is sectarianism, majority or minority tyranny or civil war (Rosenblum, 1989, p. 6). There will be parties who believe they possess the only absolute purpose for society (Rosenblum, 1989, p. 6). Given such inevitably irreconcilable differences, it is preferable to accept that there are plural perspectives within society and address the situation without loss of social order.
Consequently, in defence of pluralism, liberal ideas have explicitly rejected the idea of the good held in common. Rawls (1996, p. xxvi)\(^{30}\) observes that liberal ideas emerged from the reformation and the experience of irreconcilable religious positions. He maintains that the co-existence of a number of doctrines, “reasonable pluralism”, is the “natural outcome” of the free exercise of human reason (Rawls, 1996, p. xxvi). Hollenbach (2002, p. 10) contends that tolerance of different positions as an historical outcome cannot be taken as a universal foundation. Hollenbach (2002, p. 14 n19) notes specifically, that when people with differing religious identities are in strife for other reasons, mutual tolerance of identity does not address the conflict. The concept of the competition of ideas can be contested as a concept at odds with people’s benefit from shared ideas and activities. When a predominant idea of pluralism suggests society merely involves the restraint of conflict or such pluralism is thought more truly to reflect the human condition, the historical common good concept is pushed to the margins.

Within a society of plural ideas, managing the resolution of conflict between ideas maintains stability. If the alternative is violent conflict, the ordered competition of individual interests is desirable (S. Holmes, 1989, p. 251). Moreover, this competition protected people in general from an oppressive monopoly (S. Holmes, 1989, p. 250). Conversely, if people’s every desire must be satisfied, rather than considering people’s needs, a fresh tyranny of desire has been created (Hauerwas & Willimon, 1989, p. 32). This seeking for self-satisfaction also detaches people from one another (Hauerwas & Willimon, 1989, p. 32). The acceptance of competing self-interest as the origin of behaviour rather than the means of mitigation means the only restraint is the testable stability within one society; and this does not preclude exporting instability to other

\(^{30}\) An advocate for liberalism with a consensus about pluralism.
societies. Competition as the rationale for social conduct undermines ideas both that people can cooperate and that people can enjoy communal stability.

In a setting of competing interests, no single idea or interest has more importance. The debate does not allow for a moral or religious claim to give greater weight to any position. C. Taylor (1989a, p. 164) indicates that such an idea of social organisation rejects the proposition of a single view of the good life. To agree on a single view would be to discriminate against people who did not hold that view (C. Taylor, 1989a, p. 164). Rosenblum (1989, p. 6) emphasises that institutions are always striving to be impartial lest they impose on people. As there is no promotion of a particular view of what is good, these are left to private decision (Rosenblum, 1989, p. 6). Doubtless, legitimate religious and communal activities inform public discourse without governmental endorsement. In such a society, either there is an unacknowledged interdependency between the public and private spheres or there is a requirement for people to keep the two parts of their lives separate. If the public view is supposedly neutral, conducting debates in which not only all perspectives should be equally heard but all seem equally important has been described by Hauerwas (1981, p. 104) as “vulgar relativism”. No view is more valid than any other which means no view has much merit at all (Hauerwas, 1981, p. 104). Recent (U.S.) media opines “People got out of the habit of setting standards or understanding how they were set” (Brooks, 2015). Everyone can live equally meaningless lives because people’s private views either are irrelevant or are insignificant, in wider society. Not only is there no common good but it is difficult to say there is any good at all!

Where no specific good is advanced, interests prevail because they can. Decisions to manage diverse interests are based on who has the most power (Hauerwas, 1981, p. 79). What is decided is good for those with leverage and not necessarily for all. If the winners are significant then the losers are not (Hauerwas, 1981, p. 82). In an argument
only decided according to who has more or less access to power, Hollenbach (2002, p. 143) notes there is less deliberation of whether the prevailing position is good, even for its protagonists. Walzer (1994, p. 37) indicates that there are many aspects to what is good for each person. Even if a person’s interest is somewhat protected, it may be for only one or few aspects such as wealth and ability (Walzer, 1994, p. 37). Without considering what is good in all aspects, competition can distort the good attained (Walzer, 1994, p. 38). If society simply manages self-interest, some groups are preferred and only for some aspects of life. In this situation, the good cannot be truly common for all types of people and manifest in all aspects of their lives.

Liberal ideas have envisaged a common standard for society despite advocating pluralism against a common good. Dialogue between the diversity of views must conform to certain norms. First, there is an assumption of respect that prevents a society from blocking external views (Fergusson, 1998, p. 145). Second, the discussion can only concern what is tangible; non-tangible reasons must be translated into this language, so that they are rendered second-hand (Williams, 2012, pp. 12–13). Third, those who wish to be part of the dialogue must not be so unreasonable as to want their view to prevail absolutely (Rawls, 1996, p. 61). Moral norms such as freedom, altruism and universalism underpin pluralism, yet the existence of a universal standard is rejected (C. Taylor, 1989b, p. 88). Rawls (1996, p. 163), although he expects no more than an “overlapping consensus” because there are diverse views within society, hopes that the consensus regarding justice as fairness will alter the diverse views in society so that the consensus is strengthened. Consequent to these three points, S. Holmes (1989, p. 245) allows that the government’s position is not neutral because it must endorse this standard of conduct in society. Criticism indicates that liberalism requires a common standard to regulate competition in a diverse society despite rejection of explicit endorsement of a common good concept.
Many of the criticisms of liberalism in the literature are described as communitarian (Taylor, Walzer, Bellah, Miller, and ideas in MacIntyre, Hauerwas and Fergusson). These criticisms reject the idea of the autonomous individual because they advocate the important role of the community in a person’s formation, which gives each the reason for their attachment to their community (Avineri & de-Shalit, 1992, p. 6). Membership of the community gives each person all other goods (Walzer, 1992, p. 66).

Because people exist in mutual dependence and their moral formation is within a community they can consider the community as the focus of their efforts and recipient of their assets — they are committed to a common good (Sandel, 1992, pp. 22–23). As such, the community is always encouraging the members to participate, and the community is effectively an end in itself (Avineri & de-Shalit, 1992, pp. 9,11). Some such as Miller (1992, p. 98) see the more remote, symbolic relationships of a nation as strong enough for a sense of community. At very least the ties are strong enough in smaller communities that will nurture people, to safeguard their existence (Hollenbach, 1987, p. 23). This communitarian advocacy defends the possibility of the common good.

Communitarian advocacy is, however, limited. Regardless of the deficiencies in popular discourse, communitarian ideas have not obviously permeated in the same way as terms such “individual choice” or “competition”. Sympathy with communitarians does emerge in disquiet about the amalgamation, corporatization, and absorption of local businesses, governmental institutions and not-for-profit organisations, but not in a positive form. There is no equivalent meaningful discourse about “community formation”, or “interdependency”. Moreover, advocacy of community and a common good requires not simply a community as an end in itself, but a community, as I discussed for Aristotle and Aquinas, that nurtures community virtues for a specific purpose.

31 The Bendigo and Adelaide Bank community banks with local boards that return some profits to local activities are a notable exception.
Consequently, as I noted in chapter one, it is insufficient for Christian theology to accept a concept of the common good that is only for a human end. Without the hope in God made possible by God’s revelation, the communitarian position does not provide sufficient reason for a Christian community to seek the common good. Good community by itself is insubstantial without good God-given reasons for what constitutes a good community. Finally, communitarian ideas have most currency when they align with concepts such as the “national interest”; these ideas invest purpose not only in the concept of community, but specifically in the national community as the bearer of meaning. Communitarian ideas connected with national community can cause difficulties for the common good concept, as I next discuss.

Modern Western society also accepts a civic republican perspective in which people are explicitly bound together by what they share. C. Taylor (1989a, p. 165) maintains that people willingly work together because they have reason to be attached to each other by something more than an abstract principle to maintain diversity. People have affection for each other because they feel they have affection for the same common object. Miller (1992, p. 87) suggests people most readily recognise the nation as the reason for their common attachment and belonging. Menzies endorsed the monarchy as the common object of Australian affection because it was removed from the nation’s administration but embodied intangibles such as “respect, love” and “national sentiment” (Carr & Jones, 2013, p. 491). People can see themselves supporting each other by working together for and belonging to the same nation. People affirm the benefit of the commonality in their nation. The common good can become equated with the shared good arising from belonging to the nation.

Common nationality powerfully provides people with identity as a reason for the shared good. People belong together because they have done for some time (Miller, 1992,
People are bound by a common history (C. Taylor, 1989a, p. 166). This history is in part manufactured to serve the national identity; either from a culture dominant within a boundary or from a culture created from various contributions (Miller, 1992, p. 90). The foundation myth in turn becomes part of the national character and culture (Miller, 1992, p. 91). The foundation myth need not be consistent as long as people identify with it and thus with one another, although it is healthy if there is ongoing critical debate about the meaning of the past for national identity (Miller, 1992, pp. 91–92). Despite healthy debate, the government of a nation may have a bias towards the national identity supporting its own existence. A modern Western nation can, moreover, exert much influence on the lives of the citizens. The government has, therefore, an overriding interest to maintain a positive, perhaps over-inflated account of the nation (Cavanaugh, 2005, p. 322). Additionally, in boosting loyalty to the nation, local loyalty and diversity is discouraged and difference as a national demarcation is emphasised (Cavanaugh, 2005, p. 327). Any community can be susceptible to exclusivity, but national governments have the power to insist that the common good concept is tied to the identity of the nation.

As the proper focus for the common good, the nation and its government may apparently be the centre of community. The traditional authority for collecting taxes and maintaining stability has the resources to extend its scope to remedial and preventative welfare. Citizens are exhorted regarding everything from responsible driving and recycling garbage to safer sexual practices (Offe, 2012, p. 669). The national government alone can implement comprehensive social change (Cavanaugh, 2005, p. 317). Central governments absorb the networks that were used by more local communities (Nisbet, 1953, pp. 118–119). In Australia in recent decades, there has been increased governmental exertion to direct the delivery of welfare services by consenting community

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32 A Roman Catholic scholar in the U.S. concerned with political theology and economic ethics.
not-for-profit organisations because of their better local connections and to reduce governmental costs (Carey & Riley, 2012, pp. 696–697). Governments are mostly concerned with gathering sufficient information in order to audit precisely, and to allocate flexibly, resources and funding, and much less concerned with community organisations’ perspectives (Gallois, 2008, p. 52, regarding Victorian State policy). Governmental funding and regulation has significantly affected the organisations’ methods, activities and goals (Carey & Riley, 2012, p. 697). What was local, shared, informal and private is not part of the discussion about the national community because it does not fit in (Sacks, 2000, p. 138). National governments offer community, exploiting the sense of isolation as other social connections decline (Nisbet, 1953, p. 33). There is an increasing spiral of centralisation (Cavanaugh, 2005, p. 325). A Government is perceived as the hub of national community that provides the link between individuals (Cavanaugh, 2005, p. 312). Does this national community life serve community life or the national entity? It may be difficult to distinguish between government of this national community for the common good and government of this community for the good of the national entity.

This government of national community for the common good might assume too much. If governments are to direct the common good, the citizens must assume their civic duties and participate; for which they might be encouraged by governmental organisation (Miller, 1992, p. 96). When Menzies advocated governmental promotion of education, it was with the conviction that the nation must create virtuous citizens who would contribute to Australian public life (Carr & Jones, 2013, p. 494). There is a temptation for governments to determine the meaning as well as content of people’s lives. Conversely, Williams (2012, p. 31) objects either to governmental control of all the diverse convictions of meaning and purpose within the population or to the assumption that the

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33 In a discussion of health and social inclusion from the University of Melbourne.
nation embodies all convictions. When some convictions’ contributions are excluded, the government has taken an absolute view of its own significance (Williams, 2012, p. 32). Specifically, where there is exclusion of religion from public discourse, a government has encroached on religious space and assumed a religious role (Williams, 2012, p. 79). If the national government is not solely responsible for people’s purpose, it cannot propose every initiative for the common good. Neither may the common good be synonymous with the good of the nation. Governmental assumption of every aspect of the common good brings difficulty and danger; and if unrecognised, it narrows down conception of the common good to what governments do pursue and attempt.

Modern Western societies encapsulate both the ideas of competing individuals and the common national interest. The government can assume it ensures a national common good by maintenance of norms that allow for diverse interests. The national government as the axis for society has a tendency to try to hold society together as a unity (Cavanaugh, 2005, p. 314). The result is a priority to keep the peace, and to mark out boundaries between interests rather than bring them together (Cavanaugh, 2005, p. 315). In an atmosphere of competition, people cannot recognise that the common good involves their inter-dependencies other than through governmental bureaucracy (Cavanaugh, 2005, p. 325). If the government is the arbitrator between interests, pursuit of self-interest becomes paramount (Cavanaugh, 2005, p. 332). All governments can do is manage between the more and less powerful interests (Cavanaugh, 2005, p. 325). The legislature becomes a place to protect sectional interests, particularly from governmental regulation (O'Donovan, 1999, p. 271). If laws do not appear to uphold some widespread good then the business of government appears simply to be arbitration between interests (Riordan S.J., 1996, p. 91). If laws, however, are enacted for powerful interests, the consensus is reduced that laws are commonly useful, and they may be evaded in general (Lovin, 2005,
People can only conceive of a common good as permission to compete for their interests because they have little trust that their interests coincide with much of society.

The conflicting combination of a national common good administered by a neutral government overseeing competing interests further undermines conception of the common good. MacIntyre (1994, p. 303) draws attention to the inconsistency of governmental apparatus that upholds certain things as good compared to simple provision of services. As the service provider, a government is neutral, as upholder of certain goods it is not. It is conceptually contradictory to hold that a government is both responsible for a national common good and the neutral convenor for conflicting ideas of the common good. A government always favours some interests or a preferred, even if purportedly neutral, national direction. This particularity means the mechanism of government is not neutral and the neutral position is deceptive. Any claim to identify the common good, including a common standard to manage competing interests, is less reliable. At the same time, the government’s subjective position cannot be nor should it be a position on everything for the common good. Governmental institutions must admit that they are, at best, contributors to the common good (Riordan S.J., 1996, p. 103). If governments claim they can seek the common good as a national common good but fail, this too reduces trust that there can be a common good. The perception of national governments having two unreliable positions regarding the common good, which also undermine each other, means that any promised common good is suspect and as such the concept is diminished. Rival perspectives make unsustainable claims for the common good. In the liberal view, people are best suited to competing for their interests. Competition not co-operation is worth preserving in common despite allowing the powerful most sway. Somehow this tradition must continue despite denial that there can be a common good, or a tradition to sustain one, or appreciation for communities that have bequeathed tradition to the autonomous individuals. Communitarian critique has not made much impression on
individual interest in its defence of the common good, but has also endorsed national community and common good. People need to feel joined to and identify with some community and republican ideas endorse that this should be the nation-state. A national government, however, can replace local connections and simply direct the common good to be the good of the national entity. Western societies, maintaining both liberal and republican ideas, endorse the government’s management of competing interests as the national common good. The contradiction of both denying a common good and promising an all-encompassing national common good, further undermines the common good concept.

Both the concept of the autonomous individual and the all-embracing nation have undermined the importance of communities and the relationships of which they consist. The concepts that undermine the common good concept, also, as I next argue, undermine the practice of community that would otherwise make the common good more likely.

**Loss of community experience**

The prevalent ideas of the competitive autonomous individual and the focus of community in national identity have underpinned modern Western culture and made the consequences more acceptable. At every level of relationships — family, neighbourhood, and economic activity — the strength, number and overlap of relationships has decreased. I now consider the way these cultural trends have weakened the ties between people: increasing isolation; decreasing trust and co-operation; and diminishing the importance and experience of community and the common good.

The decline of relationships in community undermines the possibility of the common good and therefore, the idea of the common good. As I discussed in chapter one, good community requires good relationships and such a community can envision the common good. Mount (2005, p. 171) indicates that people conceive of a common good
because they recognise their dependence on and responsibility for a community. I have already discussed (in this chapter) that modern Western conceptions of society do not support the common good because they do not support co-operative community, or common purpose, or try to place these solely in the hands of government. These ideas discourage people when the reality of declining relationships in their lives has also weakened community life.

At the most profound level, the relationships within a family are weakened. Hauerwas (1981, p. 81); O'Donovan (1999, p. 266) express concern that the family is undermined. Fergusson (1998, p. 143) indicates that single parent families provide fewer examples of the extended ties of grandparents, aunts and uncles for the next generation. Hauerwas (1981, p. 81) considers that as individual autonomy is encouraged, family connections are eroded. Sacks (2000, p. 194) indicates the way short-term individual desire undermines commitment and obligation; not only altering marriage relationships, but affecting the partners’ relationships with other friends, relations and children, and the example the partners set. Traditionally, people were identified by their relationships (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 32). Indeed, people deemed themselves satisfied within those relationships (Fergusson, 1998, p. 143). In seeking autonomy, such ties were seen as restrictive in modern Western society (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 32). Whether supporting the autonomous individual in pursuit of their interest or leaving the individual unencumbered for their relationship to the nation, both reduce even the profound experience of relationships in families. People who have fewer experiences of the most probable strong relationships will have fewer expectations of strong relationships altogether. With the decline of relationships throughout society there is less likelihood and less expectation of a common good.
Encouragement of the idea of the unfettered individual has not only reduced relationships but reduced their overlap as well. The family was once part of a community that also provided economic and political ties (Nisbet, 1953, pp. 53–54). Now, people’s suburban experience is live in one place, to work in another, and to procure leisure and necessities in a third location (Putnam, 2000, p. 213). People occupy a series of communities that may not overlap. Australian surveys indicate that an increasing number of people live by themselves and feel less connected to their neighbours (Leigh, 2010, p. 106). The relationships are weaker because only some dimensions of their lives are a common experience within each group. Moreover, as people may now select the suburb, the workplace and the leisure interests that suit them best, they are not exposed to a variety of conditions of people (Putnam, 2000, p. 214). Notwithstanding class stratification, a community once included everybody because of people’s mutual interdependence, but the modern individual does not have to tolerate those they decide are unattractive. As people’s connections to any community decrease, their participation in formal community affairs also decreases (Putnam, 2000, p. 74). Aitkin (2005, p. 193) indicates that a variety of associations once provided a supporting framework in Australian society, including: churches, trade unions, professional or industrial associations, service clubs and long-established corporations. The decline of these associations reflects a decline in social coherence as society has moved to individual choice, mobility, and variable employment (Aitkin, 2005, p. 193). These social trends hinder strong relationships and divide a person’s life between unconnected groups. Even if the common good of one group is considered, it does not involve the whole of a person’s life and this common good is not widely shared. Economic pressures fostered by the concept of competing interests, unsurprisingly, also undermine community life. The workplace provides for most social contact, yet the delocalised aims of the corporation do not provide a focus for the

34 A thorough social analyst of community within the United States.
workplace community (Nisbet, 1953, p. 72). In addition, it suits economic efficiency if individuals are flexible units whose working arrangements can be altered as those economic drivers demand (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985, pp. 43–44). Economic conditions also freely offer people flexibility through individualised technological consumables. Cars enable people’s solitary migration between the segregated parts of their lives (Putnam, 2000, p. 213). Passive consumption of technological innovations, such as television, has also reduced person to person interaction (Putnam, 2000, p. 229). P. Hughes (2006, p. 18) considers that television news replaced neighbourhood gossip and gave the impression of personal connection while local connections were not actually forged. Connectedness through the internet augments relationships already established by person-to-person contact, particularly when direct contact is less possible (Junghee Lee & Hyunjoo Lee, 2010, p. 721). People use the technology that connects to overcome their increasingly fragmented lives. These isolating pressures mean it is harder for people to have many strong relationships. Without those strong relationships, it is difficult for people to envision or experience the common good.

The common good is difficult to envision if isolated individualism is usual and expected. The freedom to satisfy every desire is not only tyranny but turns each person’s attention away from others (Hauerwas & Willimon, 1989, p. 32). If each person respects that freedom in others, then freedom is to be alone (Bellah et al., 1985, p. 23). To be self-sufficient leads to isolation (de Tocqueville cited in Bellah et al., 1985, p. 37). Where people make their choices amongst the plurality of views, from a neutral standpoint, their choices depend only on themselves and their own memories (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 30). Abstracted from a social context, people seem less real — it is a ghostly existence (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 30). Nisbet (1953, p. 31) observed that people want to escape from this isolation. The loneliness, however, is inescapable, and regarding everyone as seeking their own interest, it is difficult to find people to trust (Hauerwas, 1981, p. 81).
Hollenbach (2002, p. 22) concludes that if people “regard each other warily and with suspicion, it would be more accurate to speak of a tense juxtaposition of human beings than of a community.” The emphasis on individuals leads to social isolation and isolation makes it difficult for people to communicate and co-operate. When people behave as isolated individuals they do not experience or expect the common good. With reduced social interaction, and co-operation, people find their experiences and expectations are a downward spiral. If people are captive to their individuality, they simply end up leaving each other alone (Hollenbach, 2002, p. 68). If people do not know much about each other, they are less able to understand each other (Hollenbach, 2002, p. 141). When there is a need to cooperate, it is harder to avoid disputes (Hollenbach, 2002, p. 141). To enable those things that must be shared for sheer survival, there must be some acceptance of and respect for other people (Hollenbach, 2002, p. 70). Respect for competing interests, will not however, drive co-operation (C. Taylor, 1989a, p. 179). Rational self-interest, as in the tragedy of the commons, leads to the decision that co-operative action is not in one’s interest (RIordan S.J., 1996, pp. 35–36). It is rational to undermine the foundations that support society (RIordan S.J., 1996, pp. 35–36).35 There needs to be a level of trust in some shared ideas in order for there to be co-operation (RIordan S.J., 1996, p. 40). The practice of the common good slips away as trust and co-operation recede.

The converse is a society whose nurture enables people’s trust and co-operation. A society does not function efficiently if each person’s contribution is a separately bartered agreement (Putnam, 2000, pp. 20–21). Preferably people contribute without expecting acknowledgement or immediate return — known as general reciprocity (Putnam, 2000, pp. 20–21). Effectively “love your neighbour as yourself” is applied to some degree (Putnam, 2000, pp. 20–21). I would argue that the quality of society is

35 Illustrated by the small decline in immunisation rates in some developed countries. The balance of individual benefits and dangers of immunisation are deemed more important than the communal benefit that actually provides protection.
limited unless reciprocity is seen as more than efficiency and reflects a modicum of concern for the unknown neighbour. Such a society relies on inspiration that leads people to seek the common good rather than solely their immediate interests. Rawls (1996, p. xlvi) expects that people will endorse reciprocity; their natural moral capacity upheld by the doctrinal communities to which they belong. Given concerns that liberal pluralism undermines communities, Rawls is optimistic about natural moral capacity. Hollenbach (2002, p. 146) concurs that society must already have an expectation of interaction, interdependence and co-operation. Once people have the experience of order and trust in society, they learn from these and increasingly contribute (de Tocqueville cited in Bellah et al., 1985, p. 162). People need the idea of a certain kind of community in which all benefit and the behaviour that sustains it. These ideas affect the kind of society that is formed. The experience of these ideas enacted in society enables people to participate more fully in accordance with the nurtured virtues that I discuss in the next section. Envisioning the common good and formation of a community are mutually reinforcing. Because community is undermined so is the common good.

The prevalent ideas in Western society have rendered community preservation unimportant. An individualist approach undermines family relationships; reduces ties to any one neighbourhood community; and drives people to become dispensable and solitary economic units of consumption. People find themselves more alone and less able to trust one another. In a situation where their relationships are fewer and weaker, people are less able to co-operate and do not experience or expect that there can be a common good.

Loss of virtues

Loss of community functions entails loss of virtues that communities uphold. The mutuality of virtues and community underpin the concept and practice of the common good. These virtues depend on a community’s tradition and purpose. In view of the loss
of community, I next also consider the alternative, narrower viewpoint only to manage society without clear purpose, unconcerned with inculcating virtues, and much less whether they support the common good.

A community is necessary to uphold principles, values and virtues (as I noted in chapter one). Among philosophers since the enlightenment, there has been a project to construct a universal basis for ethical principles, which has not recognised the importance of the community. MacIntyre (1981, p. 49) contends that philosophers have sought rationally to prove principles present in a society immersed in Christianity. Fergusson (1998, p. 50) indicates that attempts to prove fundamental principles were doomed because the philosophers did not recognise that the principles originated from communities of faith rather than philosophical logic. I concur that the philosophical project was misdirected because the principles arose in communities that maintained virtues within a tradition of faith in revelation of divine purposes.

The strength of communities relies on such principles and virtues that the communities sustain. Hauerwas (1981, pp. 119–122) asserts that recognition of the virtuous habits learnt in communities results in knowledge of these principles. Even Rawls (1996, p. 142) as an exponent of liberalism and pluralism who only seeks an “overlapping consensus”, still expects that society’s institutions will foster principles, so that people are led to perpetuate and maintain those principles. Regardless, virtues are meaningless unless they are learnt and lived in communities and unless they enable people to maintain community life (Hauerwas, 1981, pp. 121–122). Virtues become irrelevant without the idea of the community (Hauerwas, 1981, p. 122). If communities in general are undermined, the reasons for principles are not sustained, and it becomes hard to say why society should have principles at all (Bellah et al., 1985, p. 282). People’s failure to recognise the importance of virtues that sustain, and are sustained, by a community,
reduces ideas and practices for the common good. The strength of a community rests on learnt and shared communal virtues.

The concept of individual fulfilment (as discussed earlier) dangerously disconnected people from communities as nurturers of virtue. The philosophical project to establish universal principles was associated with individual freedom rather than communal acquisition of virtue. The individual can assert their freedom from tradition and experts (de Toqueville cited in Bellah et al., 1985, p. 148). This leaves a society of isolated individuals seeking approval from the like-minded with whom they are trapped (Bellah et al., 1985, p. 148). In contrast, people involved in a community and having strong commitment to, and knowledge of, their beliefs, are less fearful about conforming and less vulnerable to manipulation (Bellah et al., 1985, p. 162). There is a common good in community nurture of virtue that is lost to the individual in their self-fulfilment.

A community’s virtues are a common good that is necessary when individuals fail in their self-directed principles. The project to uncover universal principles did not consider that people might accept or reject them. If these principles are universal, it is not supposed to be difficult for them to be universally accepted (Hauerwas & Willimon, 1989, p. 101). Contrastingly, Christian communities understand that these principles are not self-evidently available to everyone because the biblical account shows this is not the human experience (Hauerwas & Willimon, 1989, p. 99). Moreover, the Christian perspective includes the understanding that principles may be rejected, but that does not make those people irrational or sub-human (Hauerwas & Willimon, 1989, p. 101). The tradition of Christian communities reminds people, through the same biblical account why some behaviour is less principled although initially it appeals (Hauerwas & Willimon, 1989, p. 99). It is possible to demonstrate that there are a range of such behaviours, and some are more principled than others (Hauerwas & Willimon, 1989, p.
102). Because of their tradition, Christian communities are able both to consider some principles universally applicable and to comprehend that they are not universally applied. Disregard for community life, virtue and tradition has made it difficult for people to address lapses in self-directed behaviour. A community maintains a tradition that fosters virtues, not only upholding principles but sustaining people when principles lapse — manifesting and practising the common good.

Without a purpose, it is more difficult within a community tradition to sustain virtues and therefore the common good. Even within the context of pluralism and the limited aims for a political society, Rawls (1996, p. 202) can still conceive of “justice as fairness” as a purpose that will direct people to beneficial behaviour. This purpose is something that people will have in common, for which they form shared institutions and work together (Rawls, 1996, p. 202). In contrast, MacIntyre (1981, p. 52) doubts that society’s situation and improvement can be examined by rational debate of plural ideas without an end, or *telos*, that the rational debate alone cannot establish. I consider here that community traditions demonstrate a prior and definite purpose. The virtues and their purpose that communities transmit enable people to know why they hold specific behaviours to be preferable. If there is no prevailing purpose then people are left to choose what seems best to them (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 57). People are left to conclude that each other’s actions are driven by self-interest (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 57). Without certainty and sceptical of motives, each individual exerts as much power as possible for their own security (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 107). Where there seems no purpose but their own, there is no reason for interest in the common good.

With no purpose, the common good is sidelined in favour of the best management method. The surviving principles are utilised to choose the best way to achieve any result rather than to choose the best result. If there can be no discussion about meaning then
there is simply competition to deliver one agenda or another (Williams, 2012, p. 75). Whether in governmental bureaucracy or a corporation, the modern manager does not question whether the specific ends are the best, but focuses on means (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 29). Manipulation of people as means to those unquestioned ends is therefore acceptable (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 29). The manager’s skills are supposedly important to deliver a result, so the manager’s exertion to increase power is tacitly overlooked (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 72). MacIntyre (1981, p. 30) argues that by denying common ends, modern pluralism cannot question chosen behaviour. Any behaviour that achieves something might be acceptable because the focus is achievement and not what is achieved. The impact of the behaviour and result on the social situation become unimportant, as does the common good. The manager’s efforts keep society operating where there is no common purpose (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 33). Society is organised like a runaway train that has no destination and does not carry anything, but is applauded because the train keeps moving. In such a society, not all people are treated well — some are run down by the train. Where society’s ends must not be questioned, the virtues and consequent common good directed to a definite end are not accessible.

A community as the source of people’s behaviour has been diminished. Communities provided a common good that nurtured people in virtues for the common good. If autonomous individuals apply universal principles, there is no need for community; individuals can detach themselves from the traditions maintained by communities that teach people virtue. Community tradition teaches not only what is good and bad behaviour but why bad behaviour appeals and how human susceptibility is addressed. Community tradition is for a specific goal, without which self-preservation seems to be the only guide to behaviour. Devoid of a purpose, society focuses on efficient means and does not seek to build up the virtues for the common good.
Impact on Christian community

I have so far argued in this chapter that modern, effectively alternate, concepts have undermined the historical concept and practice of the common good in Western society. Christian theology has provided a significant perspective on such concepts of the common good (discussed in chapter one). Theological accounts understand the common good in the light of the intrinsic virtues and purpose of Christian communities.

I maintain that a robust Christian understanding of the common good is urgently necessary given the pervasive influence on Christian communities of the modern thinking in wider society. In the post-Christendom era, the tide of influence runs most strongly into Christian communities. I examine next how that influence can lead Christian communities to doubt the importance of the common good within their own communities. The same influence may lead Christian communities to accept a distorted vision of the common good for wider society. At worst, when people do not seek the common good for their immediate community, the common good of society has little relevance.

Christian communities unsupported

In the recent past, the relationship between Christian communities and wider Western society was relatively seamless, but wider society no longer strongly connects with, or supports Christian communities. There can be consequences for communities’ self-conception with the continued assumption that communities have the same attitudes as wider society. I conclude that it is necessary for communities to have an independent self-understanding.

Contemporary Western society is described as post-Christendom; Christian communities are no longer strongly connected to wider society. It is a society that has ceased to assume that someone is Christian because they are born into that society (Hauerwas & Willimon, 1989, p. 16). If wider society does not expect people to be church
members, Christian community activities are not expected to connect strongly to other matters of local import (Mead, 1991, p. 25). In the American context there has been experience of a significant divide between the perspectives of those who are active in Christian communities and those who are not (Putnam, 2000, p. 75). Christian communities are far from having significance in wider society, which has ceased to expect that it has the same attitudes and actions. In Australian society as a whole, Christian communities are service organisations whose important tasks include provision for the poor and making church buildings publicly available (Kaldor, Dixon, & Powell, 1999, p. 7). For church attenders, however, offering public worship and giving purpose to life ranked higher than provision for the poor and most other considerations ranked higher than the provision of buildings for public use (Kaldor et al., 1999, p. 7). There is currently only limited correspondence between Christian communities’ traditional attitudes and those of wider society.

Wider Australian society does not understand Christian communities in the way that they understand themselves. The Christian idea of community has become difficult for communities due to the loss of support from society. Western society and Christianity were mutually supportive during what is seen as the Christendom era. O'Donovan (1999, p. 193) indicates that for a long time, Western society was governed with the acceptance of Christian precepts. Even if notionally, society and governments accepted the reign of Christ (O'Donovan, 1999, p. 194). What was done was in the light of Christ’s sovereignty, even though what was constructed and the manner in which it was effected was flawed (O'Donovan, 1999, p. 194). Not only did society accept Christian notions of community and the common good but also endorsed these within Christian communities. Today, Western societies no longer accept nor endorse the Christian understanding of community.
It is important that Christian communities recognise that their idea of community is different. Jensen (2013), when Archbishop of Sydney, speaking on the need for Christian contributions to public discussion, recently proposed that Australian Christians have been complacent about the continued sympathetic support from wider culture. Christian communities can no longer expect wider society to reinforce their view of community. Within society, support for the common good no longer counteracts those competing influences that undermine the concept of the common good. Christian communities must, therefore, expect to understand themselves and the common good independently of the way society understands them and the common good.

Independence from society could be a welcome freedom. Hauerwas and Willimon (1989, p. 18) maintained that society constrained Christian communities. It could be seen that society set the agenda that Christian communities must address theologically (Hauerwas & Willimon, 1989, pp. 20, 21). Christian communities supported the maintenance of Christendom by a critical but helpful attitude (Hauerwas & Willimon, 1989, p. 38). Governments would pass laws to endorse Christian moral behaviour across wider society that Christian communities accepted as civil and secular “Christianity” (Hauerwas & Willimon, 1989, pp. 80, 81). For wider society there was no need for distinctive Christian community activities that are formative (Williams, 2012, p. 16). All that remains for Christian communities to contribute is a propositional moral code (Williams, 2012, p. 16). Christian communities are trapped in a God-free task of merely providing principles that suit wider society (Hauerwas & Willimon, 1989, p. 37). Both Australian church attendees and non-church attendees alike see the primary role of Christian communities is to provide good morals (Kaldor et al., 1999, p. 7). But, can Christian communities sustain themselves in such a shallow and limited role? Bentley and Hughes (1998, p. 118) observe that people who simply expect moral principles are least likely to remain attached to a Christian community. If wider society expects nothing
more from Christian communities than moral principles that it may or may not accept, communities cannot express themselves in full accordance with their faith tradition and goal. To be authentic, Christian communities must be free to embrace their own understanding of community life and the common good.

With the end of Christendom, Christian communities’ expectations about themselves are different from those of a society that no longer implicitly supports them or their concept of common good. The danger is failure to recognise some influences are tilted to oppose Christian ideas, and acceptance of those influences restricts Christian expressions of community. When Christian concepts of community are no longer supported but restricted, it becomes more difficult for communities to hold on to the concept and practice of the common good.

**Christian communities lose concept of the common good**

Aspects of liberal and republican alternatives most tenaciously influence Christian communities; undermining their concept of a wider or even an internal common good. Governmental institutions may seem solely responsible for concepts of the common good and any debate couched in terms that exclude a Christian community contribution. Perceptions of community competitiveness may be a distraction or individual satisfaction may simply outweigh the good of the community.

As the lynchpin of society, the national government may appear the best preserver of society’s values. Either the church in Christendom mode perceives that their role is to support government or that, post-Christendom, faith is a private matter unrelated to secular politics. Perception of governmental responsibility for the national common good, impacts a Christian community’s theological vision. If the world is under divine rule and its creator’s care, then no human agency has total responsibility or total control regarding life (Williams, 2012, pp. 3,4). People cannot create institutions that embody infallible
values (O'Donovan, 1999, p. 20). Christian communities support the concept of the common good but also make no claim to be unfailing (Williams, 2012, pp. 3, 4). Christian communities would, therefore, be most interested in the humility of governments regarding their role and aims (O'Donovan, 1999, p. 219). Communities cannot expect governments to have ultimate responsibility for the common good because as Williams (2012, pp. 3, 4) notes, governments cannot demand unquestioned loyalty. To accept that government has such a complete vision, is to allow it to usurp the divine role, and the nation fulfils Augustine’s vision as a distortion of the heavenly city (Cavanaugh, 2005, p. 329). Christian communities cannot accept a government’s version of the common good as final and need not feel they must either support or be increasingly involved in, the nation’s agenda (Hollenbach, 2002, p. 125). Acceptance of governmental responsibility for the concept of the common good, inhibits Christian communities from holding a divinely revealed vision of the common good.

Christian communities might be discouraged from making a public contribution to the common good concept even if they are not discouraged in their support of the concept. As I have discussed, the concept of the common good is squeezed in a plural society that abides by certain standards of discourse and is managed by the government for a national common good. O'Donovan (1999, p. 219) is concerned because Christian communities cannot fully explain the manner in which they are a community or their view of the common good without giving religious reasons. Stackhouse (2004, p. 291) accepts that there will be plural conceptions of society’s good, but that their expression as effectively public theology is necessary for a co-operative culture. Without faith reasons, Christian communities’ articulation of the concept of the common good is limited. Restriction is reinforced because communities are less able to explore the concept through good external relationships that demonstrate the possibilities of the common good. Governmental regulation of activities, as I noted earlier for Australian not-for-profit
organisation, also limits Christian community articulation of the common good. National government institutions with a preference for national life increase control of communities that seek the common good and mutual collaboration (Cavanaugh, 2005, p. 322). When Christian communities perceive themselves dissuaded from contributing to the concept of the common good, both their own regard for the concept and mutual community support diminishes.

The culture of pluralism and competing interests may influence Christian communities to favour community promotion and preservation more than the common good of society. Black (1991, pp. 3, 4) indicates that there is religious pluralism in Australia. There is no established church and Australia hosts a variety of religious affiliations through migration. Society in the United States more strongly embraces both religious pluralism and ideas of competing interest. From an Australian perspective, D. Watson (2009, p. 167) observed the American entrepreneurial spirit where each brand of religious affiliation competes for adherents. A Christian community can see promotion as the community’s purpose as and expect to carve out a position for the community’s affiliation. Philip J. Hughes (1991, p. 97) observes a “conversionist” attitude in some Australian Christian communities whose principle purpose is to obtain more adherents. Growth in church membership is the dominant consideration in Australian Anglican Churches’ plans (as I explore further in chapter nine). The importance of the community can be to support the members in the expansion of their specific affiliation. The experience in the United States is that churches focussed on their own growth more sharply distinguish themselves from the rest of society (Putnam, 2000, p. 77). A Christian community intent on practices for the common good might also be distinctive compared to wider society. But, the strength of such a community is in members co-operatively reaching out beyond themselves and indicating the worth of all people (Williams, 2012, p. 306). Christian communities would be interested in the common good of the whole
society because they recognise more than their immediate communal interest (Williams, 2012, p. 306). If communities seek security, they may seek to achieve this by competition in society (Williams, 2012, p. 304). If communities focus on attaching members for the growth and security of the community, the communities’ priority maybe to compete rather than contribute in wider society. Competitive attitudes reduce a Christian community’s interest in contribution to a wider common good.

A Christian community can be the setting for endorsing individual importance. The importance of even their own communal good fades for members. O'Donovan (1999, p. 180) is concerned that the Eucharist has too frequently been portrayed as grace for the individual rather than the community joined in communion. The overwhelming majority in Australian Christian communities see the Eucharist as a memorial or nourishing by Christ’s presence and it is a minority who consider that communion is important for the community (Kaldor et al., 1999, p. 49). In a similar way, independent protestant communities have intended to attract members as they strongly emphasise individual salvation (Philip J. Hughes, 1991, p. 97). A Christian community may also endorse consumption of religion by the members rather than their collective formation. Hauerwas (1981, pp. 2,3) is concerned that Christian communities are unwilling to see themselves as places of mutual growth for specific characters and virtues. The reluctance stems from acceptance that each individual decides for themselves in a pluralist society (Hauerwas, 1981, pp. 2, 3). Post-Christendom, it does indeed seem a matter for individual choice whether to opt for religion or not (Philip J. Hughes, 1991, p. 105). Choice extends to how much of a particular religious package is accepted and mixed with selections from elsewhere (P. Hughes, 2006, p. 19). When Christian communities emphasise individual satisfaction, members bring with them their intent as consumers for religious services and their selective use of the commodity. Where the members have less regard for the worth of their community they will be less likely to accept the concept of a common good.
Ideas of individualism and competition and an all embracing national common good assail Christian communities’ conception of the common good. Acceptance that governments set the direction for a national common good undermines communities’ reliance on divine revelation and purpose. The ideas about healthy community are further constrained because the assumed standard of discourse excludes such purposes, and therefore limits a more demonstrative dialogue about the common good. If Christian communities adopt a competitive stance, interested in security through growth, they have less sympathy for benefits across society. Lastly, seeing themselves as people who consume and decide autonomously, the community seems a place to obtain benefits, but like wider society, those benefits are not strongly connected to the health of the community. Christian communities’ concept of the common good withers because they have less trust in divine revelation and purpose; because they cannot share their purpose; because competitiveness displaces their co-operation with society; or because the emphasis on individual satisfaction reduces recognition of the common good even within their own communities. Christian communities, therefore, need to rebut such influences by their own understanding of revelation and purpose, co-operation and community good, for a robust account of the common good.

**Christian communities’ behaviour alters**

Wider society’s influence regarding the common good may not only alter Christian communities’ self-conception but also may change their communal behaviour. Communities can see themselves advising on morals, or endorsing governmental conceptions of the common good because the common good seems to be in the government’s hands. Communities may interact less, seeking safety by withdrawal to a more sharply drawn identity; or are less able to perceive the potential of community activity; and both arise because people experience a more fragmented society.
When Christian communities perceive that governments deliver a national common good, they may expect that their role and behaviour is to influence the outcome. There is concern that Christian communities see themselves as a form of government or an arm of government (O'Donovan, 1999, p. 159); or concern that their community role in society is too focussed on fixing governmental policy (Hauerwas, 1981, p. 85). Church welfare agencies can emphasise their independent evaluation of social needs in order to propose future governmental programs (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012a, p. 37). Alternatively, as I noted earlier, Australian research reflects Hauerwas’s (1981, p. 12) concern that communities see their only purpose is to provide an ethos for the nation. If, as I have discussed, the nation-state is considered the ultimate end for the common good, communities have succumbed to what Hollenbach (2002, p. 125) calls a form of idolatry.

Christian communities have their own God-given purpose that can indicate behaviour for the common good. Communities would consider governments both provisional and humble. Community behaviour is both misdirected and more limited when aimed solely at influence over governmental policy to deliver the common good. Additionally, to place the nation or government before God also results in an exalted view of Christian communities as moral advisors. Hauerwas (1981, pp. 3, 9) indicates that it is difficult for communities to persuade society unless they clearly nurture and demonstrate their own values, because communities recognise that their purpose rests in the narrative of Jesus Christ. Moreover Heuser (2005, p. 26) is concerned that a focus on, and attempts to, coerce society to accept specific measures can generate antipathy for non-members and be divisive for society. When less focussed on asserting their influence, Christian communities are free to demonstrate humbly their proclaimed behaviour in the most widespread and beneficial interaction in society for a common good.
Communities may agree that governments deliver a national common good but simply acquiesce in that provision. The government remains in an elevated position with regards the common good, but the contribution of Christian communities might not be both active and independent. Even if a community is critical of the government, there is a difficulty if the criticism is of governmental choices from an agenda the government determines (O'Donovan, 1999, p. 225). If communities simply react to governmental decisions, the priorities are those set by the government. The government remains the respected sole architect of the common good. When the members attempt to present the Christian community as neutral, they also implicitly support the social structures as they are (Fergusson, 1998, p. 155). Christian communities’ practices and explanations of practices affect their members and wider society. It is impossible for communities to claim neutrality. Hauerwas (1981, p. 3) has indicated great concern for a Christian community’s interaction with government. O'Donovan (1999, p. 224) considers that the greatest unease is when a co-operative relationship between Christian communities and governments endorses political figures. Formation of a consensus with governments will too easily dilute practices for the common good according to governmental requirements (Fergusson, 1998, p. 153). Such is the concern that Hauerwas (1981, p. 3) wishes that all interaction outside a Christian community is by individual members so that the suspicion of political collaboration is avoided. Somehow a community is uninvolved if it is individuals who interact in wider society. But a Christian community’s very definite and distinctive self-understanding, that Hauerwas (1981, p. 10) requires, means that a community cannot be, collectively or through individuals, uninterested. Communities have an impact in wider society, but their behaviour merely reflects ideas of the common good that are widely prevalent or decided by governments, unless communities have their own understanding and practice of the common good.
Christian communities find that they experience the fragmentation of society that I discussed earlier. Communities may reflect competitive or individualistic behaviour in their response.

Some Christian communities adapt by competing in a fragmenting society through identity promotion. Faced with a plural society, Christian communities have more sharply and distinctively defined themselves (Hollenbach, 1999, p. 1). Simply having less in common with wider society would make a Christian community more distinctive. Expansionist Christian communities have particularly sought clearer boundaries with society, as I noted earlier (Putnam, 2000, p. 77). Christian communities with clear commitment and conformity, attractively offer identity and community when society not only admits plural ideas but allows segmentation of individual lives (Philip J. Hughes, 1991, pp. 95, 104). Across the spectrum, Christian communities are overwhelmingly interested in activities for their members (Kaldor et al., 1999, p. 10). Church worship is attractive to those who attend but not to those who do not (Kaldor et al., 1999, p. 57). Christian community members can perceive themselves participating in a more sociable community than wider society although this would make the community an end in itself (Hauerwas & Willimon, 1989, p. 78). Furthermore, if communities lose their collective outward focus, they may find it difficult to be collectively concerned for members who seem not to contribute to identity and sociability. When communities compete in a fragmented society by asserting a strong identity, they can be less sympathetic to those who do not conform to that identity. Community behaviour will not reflect the widest reach of a truly common good when this behaviour does not demonstrate that all people, members or otherwise, are valuable for their own sake.

Christian communities also reflect the fragmented experience in wider society when their behaviour indicates that they are unappreciative of multi-faceted communal
life. Christian community members may participate in public worship, but fail to embrace other communal activities and remain detached in their relationships. As social assistance is increasingly in the hands of Church welfare agencies, the immediate community has less expectation to be active (Kaldor et al., 1999, p. 11). Where community members are still willing to be active, it is more likely to be as part of a separate organisation than directly through the community (Kaldor et al., 1999, p. 70). Dempsey (1991, p. 71) found that people in rural Australia saw voluntary organisations other than Christian communities as more likely to be venues for friendship. Churches were not seen as helpful for the community nor even for sustaining friendships (Dempsey, 1991, pp. 69, 70). The community in which people worship is separate from the community in which people form the best relationships and work together for a wider benefit. People experience each of these groups as a fragment with reduced wholeness of any community life. People may accept these fragmented experiences as simply the outcome of exercising their individual choices, as I noted earlier. It is increasingly difficult for people to perceive that all aspects of members’ lives are relevant in the common good within a Christian community, and much more difficult to relate community life to a wider and common good.

Christian communities’ behaviour concerning the common good alters when they either rely too greatly on external influences or have too little expectation of their internal or external communal experiences. The community’s behaviour can reduce to acceptance of governmental decisions for the common good. Either the community narrowly focuses on influencing governmental decisions, and attends more to the community’s moral opinion than their behaviour, or the community is insufficiently independent, and accepts society’s definitions in a supposedly neutral stance. In the fragmented society, competitive Christian communities might attend to their identity and sociability but withdraw from a wider common good. At worst, Christian communities are unable to recognise their own common good through whole of community welfare and good
relationships. Christian communities’ behaviour reflects both their lack of confidence and certainty in a God-given common good. In this situation, communities have a need to conceptualise and decide for their practice of the common good.

Conclusion

I consider that two major ideas of modern Western society have eroded the historical concept of the common good. The liberal idea is that there can be no one common good, even though there is a common standard in which individuals compete. The civic republican idea is that the national common good is an overriding consideration. Both these ideas undermine the historical account of the common good. Communitarian critique particularly of liberalism has had limited impact and is also limited to a human end, sometimes giving greater support to a national common good concept. All these ideas contradict as they reject each other’s view of the common good. As such, together they more powerfully undermine the common good as a reliable concept.

In the context of these ideas, it is more difficult to defend good community. Community formation has suffered from the loss of more concentrated local relationships. The loss of good community also reduces people’s character formation within a tradition with a purpose. As people’s ability to form good community through relationships has reduced, so is the ability of the community to form people. The community is more difficult to maintain and with it the experience and possibilities of the common good.

In this environment, Christian communities struggle with the common good concept. Wider society no longer identifies with Christian communities and no longer tacitly supports Christian ideas of community. The danger for Christian communities is for the difference in ideas to be unrecognised. Communities cannot have a high regard for their concept of the common good if they accept only governmental decisions for the common good; if they believe they must compete with other groups; or conceive only of
facilities for individuals. Christian communities cannot be confident or decisive concerning the common good if community behaviour simply supports government by active criticism or claimed neutrality. Neither can communities have a definite and balanced idea of the common good if their behaviour is concentrated solely on an internal common good, or does not even recognise the worth of multi-faceted communal life.

Christian communities are intentional communities. It is dangerous if communities are unable to use the considerable resources of their tradition for a definite idea of a good community and the common good. Such an idea is not confined to governments but envisages the common good inside and outside the community. Amid the plurality of ideas in wider society, Christian communities could be confident in the priority of divine purpose. Consequently, affirmation of the common good would rebut ideas of competition between individuals solely directed by bureaucratic purposes. There can be an expectation that divine revelation provides a Christian theological understanding of individuals who are people situated amid the personal connections of good relationships and community. I argue that it is urgent and necessary for there to be a fresh theological elaboration of the common good, arising from God’s revelation, which I propose in subsequent chapters.
Chapter 3 — Jesus Christ: who reveals God’s relationality for humankind

Introduction

A theological account of the common good requires some discussion of knowledge of God. In the method of canonical narrative theology there is expectation of a coherent story about God made apparent in Jesus Christ. This method is particularly relevant in the context of cultural pluralism (Graham et al., 2005, p. 78) because this narrative equips Christian communities to address the impacts of pluralism (that I discussed in the previous chapter). Karl Barth has been strongly influential as the origin of a particular narrative theology (Graham et al., 2005, p. 79). Barth is prominent in modern theology36 in his insistence that the knowledge of God is wholly provided by God (1975, CD I, 1, p. 305). For Barth and his interlocutors, what God announces is an unexpected encounter that has not eventuated from a human search because the revelation relies on divine initiative. This encounter with God’s self-disclosure introduces the possibility of a dynamic initiative for God’s engagement with humankind that makes possible participation in knowledge of God. A theological concept of the common good is dependent on this revelation, encounter and participation.

Barth not only insisted on the exclusively divine origin of God’s disclosure, but also he was innovative in proposing the way revelation discloses the nature and character of God.37 Barth (1975, CD I, 1, p. 296) proposed that the doctrine of the Trinity is a starting point for knowledge of God because revelation is the activity of the Triune God. God’s self-revelation discloses the very character of God. The common good not only

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36 Ford (2005, p. 2), in his survey of modern theology proposes that Barth is a leading representative of the self-description of the Christian community among such notables as: de Lubac, Balthasar, Torrance, Mackinnon, Ramsey, Williams, Jungel, Jenson, Gunton, John Paul II, and Lash, as well as much of entire categories of theology.

37 Nimmo (2017, p. 29) comments that in a break with contemporary theology, Barth determined that the doctrine of the Trinity must be the start of dogmatics because the revelation of God is given in the Christian focus on Jesus Christ, which involves Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
relies on divine revelation as an initiative to engage but also relies on the eternal relationships of God’s life that gives rise to the initiative. The common good arises because of the human encounter with, and response to divine relationality.

Ultimately the common good rests on the way divine revelation unequivocally involves human life. Barth’s viewpoint provides a strong Christological emphasis that points to revelation being — not simply presented to or even engaging with creation — the person of Jesus Christ who reveals the eternal election of human life for relationship with God (Barth, 1957, CD II, 2, pp. 105–106). Knowledge of God thus addresses all dimensions of human life in relationships, which are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. This Christological emphasis provides for divine foundation for a human common good because humanity participates in what God has revealed. As I explore in later chapters, God’s revelation enables the transformation of people’s relationships with God and each other, giving rise to a community (as I noted in chapter one) that can practice the common good.

**God’s dynamic self-disclosure**

A theological account of the common good rests on God’s self-revelation. Barth insists on divine freedom in his modern account of revelation that avoids human constraints. Scriptural witness to Jesus Christ, through the Spirit, indicates that people both receive and respond to revelation. Williams has concerns that Barth’s account restricted revelation, although both Williams and McIntosh see possibilities in the trajectory of Barth’s thought for the continued and inexhaustible engagement of revelation, so that people respond in relationship with God. A community both depending on and responding to this revelation attests to divine relationality, so that people can conceive of and practice the common good.
This theological account of the common good begins with God’s revelatory activity. For Barth, revelation of God is a movement entirely from God. Barth (1975, CD I, 1, p. 305) insists that there cannot be other criteria for deciding that God’s revelation is in fact revelation, as he states:

[... ] God’s revelation has its reality and truth wholly and in every respect — both ontically and noetically — within itself. Only if one denies it can one ascribe to it another higher or deeper ground or try to understand and accept or reject it from the standpoint of this higher or deeper ground.

To use other criteria would be to apply a human construct to and a constraint upon what God has revealed (CD I, 1, p. 305). Barth (1975, CD I, 1, p. 306) argues that the New Testament account of events does not follow any recognised human plan. Jesus’ mission does not reflect the pattern of his religious contemporaries (Barth, CD I, 1, p. 306 citing Mt. 7:29). Paul (Gal. 1:11–12)\(^{38}\) rejects the suggestion that his message derives from a tradition (CD I, 1, p. 306). In the Acts of the Apostles (16:6–9) the missions of the nascent church are changed in accordance with the inspiration of the Spirit (CD I, 1, p. 306). If there is no human construction of divine revelation, there is certainly no successful quest to discover God who has chosen when to be hidden and when to reveal (CD I, 1, p. 315).

Additionally, Barth (CD I, 1, p. 330) notes that the experiences of God’s self-disclosure, recorded as Christian scripture, portray patriarchs, prophets and apostles who are not always willing to receive frequently surprising and initially hidden revelation.\(^{39}\) I concur that there is consistent witness to knowledge of God provided by divine revelation that arrives from outside human categories. Knowledge of God that may lead to the common good is, therefore, dependent on this divine self-revelation.

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\(^{38}\) Where a cited author alludes to the biblical narrative but does not refer to an exact reference, the biblical reference is provided separately.

\(^{39}\) Abraham did not expect his initial call and further disclosure came later (Gen. 12, 15); Jacob does not recognise with whom he wrestles (Gen. 32:22-32); neither Moses, Isaiah nor Jeremiah, is an enthusiastic recipient of God’s call (Ex. 3:11; Is. 6:5; Jer. 1:6); Peter does not understand the import of Jesus transfigured (Mk. 9:5-6); and Paul persecutes Jesus’ followers before his encounter with the risen Jesus (Acts 9:1-9).
The common good is dependent on divine disclosure, so disclosure is not dependent on the existence of a common good. There is no reason prior to God that requires God to commence revelation. Barth defends God’s freedom to be hidden, so the initiative for revelation is entirely with God. Not even the revelation that God has chosen can constrain the Holy and invisible God (Barth, 1975, CD I, 1, p. 299). As Williams (2007, p. 109) explains, Barth works with a concept of God who is hidden so that it is completely God’s freedom to reveal Godself. God is inaccessible unless God chooses to bridge the gulf with God’s creation (Williams, 2007, p. 111). Barth (1975, CD I, 1, pp. 166–167, citing I Cor. 1:18–2:10), indicates that humankind cannot even recognise God’s revelation unaided, much less seek knowledge of God by themselves. Consequently, divine self-disclosure does not merely validate, but gives rise to an entirely dependent theological account of the common good.

The common good relies on divine revelation, so is dependent on the scriptural witness to revelation. Barth (1956a, CD I, 2, p. 7) states that the one certain exegesis from scripture is that God has made Godself known to humanity; scripture is not an argument constructed from a proposition about the existence of God. F. Watson (2000, p. 59) comments that studying human experience and the discovery of the transcendent does not take the Bible seriously. God acts towards the world as known in the person and history of Jesus who addresses God as Father. McIntosh (2008, p. 62) elaborates that the life death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit is the turning point. Without Jesus Christ people do not understand the meaning of creation, or know God, or grasp what it is to be truly human (McIntosh, 2008, p. 62). The presence of the scriptural account provides the material for a means of theological explanation. Scripture attests to revelation by God of God on which theological common good conceptions depend. Moreover, the presence of the scriptural account provides the first indication that revelation is something to which people respond. The concept of the common good
depends upon both the nature of revelation and that there is a human response, as I discuss later.

In Barthian terms, divine revelation is not under human control, but neither is it so esoteric as to be incomprehensible to people. The common good is very much the possibility of the created order. Nimmo (2017, pp. 33–34) observes that at the incarnation, Jesus Christ, the Son of God becomes truly human within history. For Barth, the work of the Spirit enables people to receive, recognise and acknowledge the revelatory signs (p. 35). Williams (2000, pp. 131–132) maintains that these events must be recognisable to, and have their impact upon human lives. Because revelation is the encounter with the history of Jesus Christ present in current human life, God’s action and presence in these events constitutes meaningful involvement in human life. Consequently, people consider and seek the common good because of the impact of revelation on creation.

God intends people to receive the revelation they have encountered. Just as God’s power and mercy are present in the history of Jesus Christ, he is made known by the same means (Barth, 1958, CD IV, 2, p. 40). By the grace of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, God is revealed (1958, CD IV, 2, p. 40). Barth, Nimmo (2017, p. 29) notes, refers to God’s Self-unveiling in the Son and that this revelation is a concrete historical event that in the power of the Spirit, people may hear, believe and obey. God ensures that God is “the object of human contemplation, human experience, human thought and human speech.” And God is the One to whom people can pray (1975, CD I, 1, pp. 315–316). A theological account of the common good therefore, depends not only upon God imparting Godself but also upon God enabling people to receive.

What people receive is an ongoing possibility of participation that can lead to their conception and practice of the common good. What God imparts is neither fixed nor static. Barth commences with concrete matters of faith before moving to possibilities
(Nimmo, 2017, p. 37). Barth (previous paragraph) talks about the faithful reception of God’s revelation as definite and real, so that there can be no human speculation. I think human experience of God’s revelation can be both certain and evocative, rather than simply fixed. Williams (2000, p. 134) would prefer revelation to be generative; to introduce possibilities rather than final knowledge. As such, the finality of revelation may not be known (Williams, 2000, p. 142).

Concern that revelation is too tied down to discrete knowledge is connected to concern that Barth has revelation irrupt into history only at specific points that are arbitrary from a human perspective (Williams, 2000, p. 133). What concerns Williams (2007, p. 114) is that the relationship of the creator to the created world may be closer than Barth has suggested. If the history of Jesus involves the context of his life then God has more to do with human history than simply from the incarnation to the ascension (Williams, 2007, p. 114). Ironically, it maybe that Barth has so defined God’s freedom and what is thus entailed in revelation as to leave rather less freedom for the possibilities of God’s involvement with the world. Divine intention cannot simply be defined by the limitations of human concepts when revelation takes place in world history. God is always encountering; enabling and evoking faith. The concept of the common good may commence with God’s dynamic, widespread and common action in creation.

God’s revelation intends and generates a distinctive response. While God is prior to human questions, God’s free creativity and nurture invite a response in humanity (Williams, 2000, p. 145). The plurality of divine life revealed in the Son through the Spirit does not simply impart knowledge but is a life that invites humanity into its internal exchange (Williams, 2007, p. 133). While humanity is not completely responsible for their own consciousness, the reception of revelation is not completely passive (Williams, 2000, p. 135). Although, Hart (2000, p. 49) notes, Barth describes human capacity as
given by God, it is to give people possibilities that were not otherwise envisaged. If, as Williams (2000, p. 135) maintains, revelation is always inseparable from a human response, I think this is because of the nature of revelation and God’s intention. God reveals by engaging humankind through mutually engaging divine life. God’s revelation is in and through relationship in which human life responds. Divine revelation invites a response that corresponds to the One who undertakes the consequences of relations with the human creature. The common good is dependent therefore, on the kind of responsive relations that God reveals and evokes.

The encounter with God’s character elicits the corresponding human response. And Jesus Christ reveals the character and nature of God’s involvement with human life within creation. God’s revelation in Jesus Christ is a human encounter that embraces and graces the human condition. God engages with people spiritually, emotionally and rationally so that their response in both understanding and behaviour can be through caring relationships. The common good concept, which depends on this revelation and response, is dependent on the encounter in and with Jesus Christ. God’s character is truly and inexhaustibly to engage humankind through the fullest human meaning. First, Barth (1975, CD I, 1, p. 297) is concerned with knowledge of God but also with an encounter with the very existence of God. Nimmo (2017, p. 31) explains that Jesus of Nazareth, is the true revelation of God the Father; not only Lord of creation but the restorer of human relationship with God. Second, McIntosh (2008, p. 29) proposes that Jesus Christ is the thought of God without reservation. Jesus is “the human expression of divine meaning”; “bearing all the significance and meaning” that humanity has (McIntosh, 2008, p. 34). In the most profound human meaning, God’s meaning is revealed (McIntosh, 2008, p. 34). People do not merely observe God’s meaning with detachment. For McIntosh (2008, p. 35) knowledge means participation; the Spirit that enables the incarnation also enables humanity to encounter God. Third, Williams (2007, pp. 134–135) suggests that Barth’s
thought was developing (and Church Dogmatics remained unfinished) in a more pluralist direction in which the Spirit presents the relation of Father and Son but not a finite relation. God takes on the gulf with sinful humanity, and through the Spirit, inexhaustibly brings people in faith, to new life with Christ (Williams, 2007, p. 135). Consequently Williams (2000, p. 141) also refers to divine creativity that includes: acceptance, refusal to condemn, assurance of abiding relationships, and “unprecedented fulfilment” for the creatures. The Son and the Spirit reveal divine creativity as gratuity in love rather than “untramelled power” (Williams, 2000, p. 141). To conclude, God’s intention to unstintingly encounter humankind discloses God’s character. Divine existence itself is concretely known to humanity in the human life of Jesus Christ, and all human life may respond to and participate in his life. The invitation and the corresponding response denote the accepting, generous and faithful relationships that underpin the common good.

A community that forms in response to this revelation and relationships can reflect the source of the common good. Christian communities talk about God because they must continually reflect upon the reason for their formation (Barth, 1975, CD I, 1, p. 4). God has provided the identity and character of such communities (McIntosh, 2008, p. 11). These communities are a finite sign of God’s intention (McIntosh, 2008, p. 11). Each community is, therefore, known by their loyalty to Jesus Christ and by being a people reconciled to God and one another (Hunsinger, 2000, p. 105). God’s intention is for ongoing life with human community that forms in response to reconciliation. People are dependent on this community for knowledge and experience of revelation and reconciliation. People may know that they receive revelation and they respond to reconciliation within a community.

What God has revealed forms and transforms a community. In that transformation, the common good is possible. The Word of God is never without effect
(Barth, 1975, CD I, 1, p. 143). A community does not just know about God — people live in the encounter with God’s revelation. McIntosh (2008, p. 10 citing Rom. 8:11) indicates that the same Spirit that raised Christ gives life to people. A community may, therefore, be joint heirs of Christ (Rom. 8:17 cited in McIntosh, 2008, p. 11). Williams (2000, p. 119) concurs that the Spirit brings adoptive sonship, the life of Christ, and the gifts and virtues of that life. Significantly, what the Spirit brings is the eschatological reality of the judgment that has occurred through the Son for all humanity (Williams, 2000, p. 119). Thus Christ sends the Spirit to bring the convincing truth of Christ and the believers’ reception of the Spirit leads to forgiveness of sins in a community (Jn. 16:7–15; Jn. 20:23 cited by Williams, 2000, p. 119). Believers know forgiveness and can be transformed and live in relation to God (Williams, 2000, p. 120). Experiencing the Spirit’s gifts as reconciled heirs enables life together. The community experiences divine revelation taking place in transformational relationships. People can therefore expect transformation and the possibility of the common good as part of this community.

I conclude that theological concern for the common good begins with divine self-revelation. Knowledge of God can lead to the concept of the common good without prior human expectation. Scriptural witness to revelation indicates a human response as people receive and take up revelation and the possibility of the common good in human life. This is dynamic knowledge of God that ripples through the created order, encountering and inviting people to participate through Jesus Christ. The character of God is fully and faithfully to embrace human life, thereby designating the nature of the resultant relationships. A community forms in response. Such a community is transformed through being forgiven and reconciled to God. The theological origin of the common good is divine revelation, the ever-widening encounter with and response to which can be a transformational community of restored relationships.
If divine revelation is seeking and enabling a response, this is a revelation that the very divine nature entails relationship.

**God discloses relationality**

God has revealed God’s relationality. Not only revealing Godself by relating to creation such that humankind can respond, but also disclosing God’s self-differentiation in the Trinity, which is understood to be the true life of God. I next consider the implications of God who truly, reliably, consistently and in unity, reveals; God who also reveals communally. Not a closed communion, but one in which divine relationships have reached out to disclose God to creation. People may truly relate to God whose relationality has these attributes, and the consequent relationships can enable a common good.

The encounter with and experience of God has given rise to a description of the being of God. Once the divinity of the witness of Jesus and the Spirit is accepted, they point to God being in such a way (McIntosh, 2008, p. 119). Jesus at prayer (Jn. 17:1–5) is constituted by a particular relationship with God the Father, the same is also true on the cross (Mk. 15:34) and in the resurrection (Jn. 20:17) (McIntosh, 2008, p. 113). The Trinity as a whole is involved in the resurrection (Rom. 8:11); what God has done in Jesus Christ and the Spirit leads to recognition of God as Trinity (McIntosh, 2008, p. 65), and not simply by the objective examination of data. The Holy Spirit subjectively fulfils the objective experience of Jesus Christ (Barth, 1956a, CD I, 2, p. 1). Consequently, Barth (1975, Vol. I,1, p. 296) is emphatic: It is God who reveals; what is revealed is God; and it is through God’s action that God is revealed. As the God who is free is free to reveal God who is hidden, this self-differentiation is no surprise; the hidden God has become other than hidden in God made known (Barth, 1975, CD I, 1, p. 316). Significantly, the God who is Trinity intends to be known to the human creatures. A theological origin of the common good is dependent on this description of God.
It is truly God who is revealed; the Trinity is not merely a mechanism for God’s disclosure. There can be no separation between what is revealed and the manner of its being revealed (Barth, 1975, CD I, 1, p. 296). The Old Testament tradition was of one God who needed no semi-divine assistants (McIntosh, 2008, p. 119). Similarly, church tradition fought for a divine Son who could truly reconcile humanity to God. It is also important that God has no necessity to, but is free to reveal (Williams, 2007, p. 132). If God is free then human experience is not a projection of who God is because God can freely and truly reveal God (Williams, 2007, p. 132). God is radically creative and cannot be contained in human language, but Jesus who exhibits “generative power” and defines human existence can be described (Williams, 2000, p. 139). It is the memory and presence of Jesus who provides the experience of God (Williams, 2000, p. 139). It is the “same radical renewing energy” of God’s Spirit that constantly reorients a community to the presence of the Son (Williams, 2000, pp. 140–141). God truly encounters humankind; this is truly God with whom people may live in reconciled relationships. The true character and nature of God will give rise to the relationships that people experience. God, truly known, is the origin of relationality that enables consideration of the common good.

The common good relies on the relationship with one God truly known. Recognition of God as Trinity in Father, Son and Holy Spirit does not lead to disparate sources of relationship. Scriptural witness and Christian tradition refer to one God. Jesus himself makes relationship with the one God the centre of faith (Mk. 12:29 cited by S. R. Holmes, 2009, p. 87). Paul’s description is of one God and Father even as he asserts the Lordship of Jesus Christ (I Cor. 8:4–7 cited by Plantinga Jr., 1989, p. 23). The New Testament generally refers to God as the Father and this is reflected in Greek theology where the Father is the source of divinity, even though Son and Spirit are fully divine

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40 A reformed scholar and teacher of systematic theology.
Thus, the Father is the single source of divinity. Moreover, the creedal form affirms God as the consistent nature of the divine persons (N. Jacobs, 2008, p. 342). There is a single being of God, *homoousia*, which means there is unity (N. Jacobs, 2008, p. 346). Finally, God refers to the entire Trinity, of which there is only one (Plantinga Jr., 1989, p. 31). There is relationship with only one God with one divine nature. The common good is dependent on this one source of relationship, one source of good, common to all, that brings unity to all relationships.

The common good is also dependent on God’s mutual life of sustainable relationality. C. E. Gunton (1991, p. 8) contends that contrary to traditional Greek ontology if Jesus Christ is “of one being” with the Father, God is not alone in God’s being. And the Holy Spirit is included in this communion (C. E. Gunton, 1991, p. 9). Jesus says the Son responds to and correspondingly acts to reflect the work of the Father, who loves the Son, so equal honour is due to both (Jn. 5:19–23 cited in Plantinga Jr., 1989, p. 25). The Father sends the Holy Spirit to testify to the Son, whom the Spirit will glorify and fully declare to the disciples (Jn. 15:26; 16:14 cited by Plantinga Jr., 1989, p. 25). There is complete co-operation in divine life and therefore relationship. There is unity in the communion of the divine persons, but not by the modalist emanation of the persons from a single divine substance nor by the ontological subordination of the Son and Spirit to the Father (Plantinga Jr., 1989, p. 34). The being of God is plural and includes co-operative and constructive relationships. This is the being of God to which people relate. The common good is possible for people who respond to God’s fully co-operative relationality.

The relationality of God is reliable. The common good is dependent neither on temporary divine relations, nor on divine relations only as a phenomenon of revelation.

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41 A scholar of philosophy and Christian thought.
If God truly reveals, God reveals the relational God. The Divine life is always plural; N. Jacobs (2008, p. 350) notes that rejection of Arius was rejection of the idea that the begotten Son and proceeding Spirit were created and subject to temporal change. The relations of origin are eternal. Moreover, the relations of origin are of the divine nature, neither involuntary nor contingent on the Father’s will (N. Jacobs, 2008, p. 350). Gregory Nazianzen (d. 390 / 1893, XXIX, II) emphasised that neither the Son’s begetting nor the Spirit’s proceeding, is involuntary in divine life — as if divine life were uncontrolled. Begotten (Jn. 3:16) and procession (Jn. 15:26) are simply what is known through scripture (Gregory Nazianzen, d. 390 / 1893, XXIX, II). Finally, each divine person is distinct because they are either unbegotten, begotten or proceeding (N. Jacobs, 2008, p. 351). The Father is distinctly the Father of only this and no other Son (N. Jacobs, 2008, p. 351). The eternal, natural and essential distinctions of the divine persons within the Godhead always encounter creation in divine communion. The common good in human life, may therefore, rely on encounters with the eternally relational God.

The relatedness of God is distinctive to God as God. John of Damascus commenced with unity when he considered the relationship of the divine persons (Louth, 2012). John worked from Gregory of Nyssa’s catechetical oration, began with the Father and explained the manner in which the Son and Spirit are distinct (Louth, 2012). John emphasised that the persons were one in essence, goodness, power, will, energy and authority (John of Damascus, d. 749 / 1898, I, 8). The divine persons are as closely related to each other as they are to themselves but differ in relations of origin (I, 8). Unlike humanity, their wills, power and judgment are not separated (I, 8). Without intermixing, however, the persons have their being in one another described as perichoresis (I, 8). The scriptural account is of God who is revealed in action, so perichoresis is best described

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42 Louth writes on later eastern developments of the Trinity.
in divine action, “Every divine person is and acts as itself and yet the two other persons are present and act in that person” (Volf, 1998, p. 409). Nevertheless, Volf (1998, p. 409) also emphasises that the distinction between the divine persons cannot be lost. Only in their distinctiveness can the persons indwell one another, otherwise they have simply dissolved into something else (Volf, 1998, p. 409). The divine relations are intense but their mutual indwelling never leads to confusion about who they are (Tanner, 2010, p. 68). This divine life is distinct from human life, as I discussed in chapter one, where there must be boundaries to avoid loss of selfhood (Tanner, 2010, p. 68). But when divine life encounters humankind, God’s revelation affects people. The effect of divine life is to reveal, encounter and invite response, because as I now consider, those distinct relations are not only inward looking.

The common good has a theological origin because the communion of divine life overflows and is outward looking. The nature of divine communion has revealed the goodness of God in relationship with humankind. Knowledge of God has not simply been imparted but the division with humanity overcome by reconciliation (Flett, 2010, p. 248). In the restoration of relationships, God has revealed what kind of relationships they should be and the way they are to be restored (C. E. Gunton, 2003a, p. 17). Humanity is invited into relationship with God who relates in this way. Barth (1960, CD III, 2, p. 220) proposes that the way Jesus Christ is for humanity reflects Trinitarian relations, as I noted in chapter one. Because God has created, people are present to be in relationship with their creator which corresponds, analogously, with relationship in the Trinity, comments Nimmo (2017, p. 81). God intends humankind to be covenant partners with God and the pattern of both relationships is divine freedom and love (p. 89). The activity of the divine life is to reach beyond the divine relations to “embrace” “godless humanity” (Volf, 1998, p. 417). The self-giving love of God in Jesus Christ, culminating on the cross, as described in the farewell discourses, gives glory to the Son and reflects the Father’s glory (Jn. 17:1–
People are caught up in the glory of this self-giving love for eternal life with God (Volf, 1998, p. 418). The movement of divine life is to bring creation into divine life — the believers united in relationship with God just as the Son is to the Father (Jn. 17:20–21 cited by LaCugna, 1991, p. 228). The divine life reveals an intention for ever growing relationships with humanity that demonstrate the kind of relationships that God intends and is. The common good rests on this divine embrace by divine communion that has revealed the kind of relationships intended for humanity.

The common good depends on fulfilment in life with and like God. Volf (1998, p. 404, citing Eph. 4:24) proposes that humankind is created to have communion with God and is baptised in the Triune name to be in the likeness of God. If people are created to be in the image of God it would be expected that they would seek to be more like God (p. 404), although description of that likeness is limited by the difference between creator and creature and human language (p. 405). Earlier in this chapter, I advocated that God intends to reveal to humanity and for humanity to respond. In subsequent chapters I discuss that God both reveals and enables a response that reflects the divine likeness. It is the way God has revealed that first makes it possible to consider the divine likeness. The divine intention for people’s fulfilment in the embrace of the divine life becomes known as people respond to that embrace. Fulfilment in relationship with God becomes the goal orienting all human relationships. The human response, arising in and reflecting the relational life of God, seeks fulfilment in such a relational life. I argue that within such good relationships people can approach the common good.

God has revealed the Triune life of God. The common good depends on this true life of God and not simply upon a mechanism of revelation. The common good is also dependent on a single life of God from which one common life arises. This divine life acts in communion, so co-operative relationships underpin the common good. This
co-operative divine life can be relied on as both genuine and eternal, without contingency. While the divine life is distinct from human life, the divine communion overflows, as the goodness of God is revealed in relationship with humankind. People may seek fulfilment by responses to the presence of divine life in these relationships and the character of these relationships enables the common good. This theological account of the common good depends on the eternally reliable communion of God as it overflows to embrace human life.

The common good may not only rely on the reliable relationships of God truly encountering humankind, but that through Jesus Christ, human life is truly included in the life of God. I next consider that an account of the common good relies on a common human life enabled through Jesus Christ.

**God’s revelation includes humanity**

A theological account of a human common good is possible because God’s revelatory action involves the human creature in the relationality of God’s life. God’s free intention for creation is an assurance that creation will be fulfilled for good. God’s concern involves humankind in divine life to the extent that there is human participation in restoration of good relationships. Not only does God reveal so that there is a human response, and in revealing discloses that God’s relationships overflow; but also, the human life of Jesus Christ involves humankind in the disclosure of, and restoration of, fellowship with God. Because of Jesus Christ, all people may participate in this goodness of God that makes a universal common good possible.

God is free to create, so the common good is not inevitable but rests ultimately on God’s gift of creation. Relationship with God is not necessary for God. The cosmos is not a sop to divine loneliness as though God were incomplete without creation (McIntosh, 2008, p. 163). If creation arises from divine freedom and not from necessity, then the
depth and strength of divine affirmation for creation is assured (Flett, 2010, p. 203). I concur that God is free to be God and humankind free from responsibility for a divine necessity. As with divine self-differentiation, God has created because that is the character of God. And it is the character of God to be concerned for what has been created. God has positively elected for relationship with creation. The common good depends on the good that God wills, which becomes apparent in divine election and affirmation.

Divine affirmation means that creation will be fulfilled for good. The common good is possible because God intends renewal for good for the entire created order. God who has created many different forms (I Cor. 15:39–41) will renew creation in new bodies (I Cor. 15:47–49). Jesus Christ has initiated a new creation, demonstrating the consistent intent for creation (I Cor. 15:22–23 cited by C. E. Gunton, 2003a, pp. 29–30). The character of God affirms creation despite how humans behave. God has serious concern for creation and what was always intended for the human creature. Creation will not be left to its own devices (Barth, 1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 98). While divine rejection of human sin is unstoppable, Barth (1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 98) indicates that there is also a positive divine invitation. Moreover, God has always intended to affirm creation; reconciliation in Jesus Christ is God’s eternal purpose (Barth, 1958, CD IV, 2, pp. 31–32). The glory of God always is intention for fellowship and for action that makes fellowship possible (Barth, 1960, CD III, 2, pp. 208–209). The positive affirmation of creation indicates the steadfast character of God and the depth and strength of concern for divine-human fellowship. For the common good to depend on this divine-human fellowship, it will reflect this strength of concern and the determination for renewal for good, despite the despoliation of God’s gift.

The depth and strength of divine concern leads to unprecedented divine engagement with creation. The divine decision exposes God to the inconsistency of
humanity. God’s love is steadfast but human love is fickle (Brümmer, 2005, p. 93). God takes a risk with humanity (McIntosh, 2008, p. 165). God could be described as vulnerable (Brümmer, 2005, p. 93). The election of Jesus Christ means that God has chosen something about God (Williams, 2007, p. 131). Divine concern for the creature is such that something of creation is taken into Godself (Williams, 2007, p. 130). What God does is not externally applied to creation but by the Holy Spirit, God’s life is brought into people’s lives (Balthasar, 1989, p. 390). I think God, generously, has taken this risk so that creation may enjoy the fullness of relationship with God. Despite the vagaries of human relationships, within the fullness of relationship with God, people can envision the quality of relationships that make possible the common good.

Jesus Christ reveals the election by God of the person Jesus Christ, thereby revealing the divine-human relationship. A decision has been made by God for the human creature who has been elected in Jesus Christ, the Word of God (Barth, 1957, CD II, 2, p. 101). God’s self-determination is to enter into relationship with Jesus of Nazareth and thereby with the people represented in Jesus, as Nimmo (2017, p. 65) explains. Additionally, Barth (1957, CD II, 2, pp. 104, 116) emphasises that Jesus Christ is both God who elects and humanity elected; not subordinate but creator who elects as well as elect creature. Without exclusion, the Son of God elects the whole of the Son of man (Barth, 1958, CD IV, 2, p. 34). Nimmo (2017, p. 68) comments that Jesus Christ is both elected and elector because he is the reconciliation between God and humankind and active from the beginning. Jesus Christ is a unique person who is involved in every sense with divine and human life. The nature of the deep and profound relationship between God and humankind is central to the common good.

43 A protestant theologian concerned with personal and relational relevance in Christian theology.
The election of Jesus Christ has two closely related implications. The Son of man is elected for fellowship with God (Barth, 1958, CD IV, 2, p. 34), and the whole of humanity is considered for election through Jesus Christ (1957, CD II, 2, p. 94). The first implication is that Jesus Christ represents and reveals the human life with God. The election of Jesus Christ envisages and enables the human relationship with God that reflects God’s goodness. If the common good relies on such relationships, this quintessential relationship presents the possibility of the common good and is therefore, dependent on Jesus Christ.

The election of Jesus Christ is also the possibility of the election of all humanity. God wills that many may be conformed to the image of God in Jesus Christ, who presents and represents the true image of humanity, so that he is the first-born of many brethren (Rom. 8:29–30 cited by Fee, 2007, pp. 249–251). Moreover, Jesus Christ is eternally the Son of God, so God has eternally chosen humanity (Eph. 1:4 cited by Fee, 2007, p. 344). As I noted earlier, the one elect, Jesus Christ, is the authority through which all people may be elect. The promise in Jesus Christ means that those who respond in faith participate in his humanity (Barth, 1956a, CD I, 2, p. 362). The Holy Spirit reveals that those who respond, God graciously includes in divine sonship (Barth, 1956a, CD I, 2, p. 362–363). Indeed the Spirit enables the response so that people may, like Jesus, relate to God as Father (Rm. 8:15–16 cited by McIntosh, 2008, p. 11). People may be brought into a life like Jesus Christ; the man for others whose entire life is positively for humanity (Barth, 1960, CD III, 2, pp. 208–209). The relationship, therefore, that underpins the common good may be truly common to all. Additionally, it is a relationship concerned with the good of others. The election of Jesus Christ ensures the election of many, so that there is a new people in good, generous relationship with God who may form the community of the common good.
God has established a relationship with humanity in a distinct way. There is a separation of God and humanity, which God has overcome through reconciliation (Flett, 2010, p. 180). Through the resurrection, God has declared there is a partnership with humanity (Barth, 1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 95). McIntosh (2008, p. 165) indicates the graciousness of the Triune God who undertakes to establish the relationship. The common good rests not only on common relationships initiated by God but on the quality of those relationships founded in God’s goodness. Consequently, it is significant that God has established relationships with humanity, overcoming the divide between the creator and the sinful creature, and ensuring the freedom of the creature for the relationships that God intends.

The relationship of God and humanity is mediated through Jesus Christ. First, The possibility of people knowing God is given only in the reality of Jesus Christ (Christoph Schwöbel, 2000, p. 32). Moreover, people are awakened to knowing God and being known by God; people become aware that they are more than detached observers of revelation. Second, Jesus Christ represents humanity in God’s action (Barth, 1958, CD IV, 2, p. 33). In his human nature he is “the first-born from the dead” (Col. 1:18 cited by Barth, 1958, CD IV, 2, p. 33). Humanity is not simply a passive audience, but Jesus Christ mediates humankind’s involvement in divine activity. And the activity is not incidental but the act of reconciliation. Thirdly and finally, Jesus Christ mediates in reconciling people to God. Through Jesus Christ, humankind is included in the reconciliation of all things to God (Moo, 2008, pp. 134–136, referring to Col. 1:20). People being alive with Christ and being forgiven by God are inextricably linked (Moo, 2008, p. 208, referring to Col. 2:13). Similarly, people are urged to conform to reconciliation established by Christ; in their compassion, kindness, gentleness, humility and patience, so that they bear with and forgive others (Moo, 2008, pp. 277–280, referring to Col. 3:12–13). I maintain that
God’s forgiveness through Jesus Christ initiates relationships that give rise to the common good.

Jesus Christ is also the response that God intends for humanity. People reconciled to God through Jesus Christ can also respond through and like him. God desires that people will see themselves as covenant partners, as faithful servants, friends, and well-loved children (Barth, 1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 95). Nimmo (2017, p. 88) observes that Jesus Christ demonstrates the way humanity is for God because he is also for humanity. Jesus is the example and enabler of the kind of response that God seeks in the relationship with people. People’s response to the relationship demonstrated by Christ is the basis of the relationships in which they will seek the common good.

God’s intent for this relationship and people’s response, therefore, impacts human life more widely. The demonstration of the kind of relationality revealed in Jesus Christ opens possibilities for human behaviour. If people can respond to the divine invitation in a Christlike manner, they can also attempt the same responses with other people. Revelation is not for personal satisfaction but leads people to a multitude of good relationships. I discuss in chapter five that the contours of people’s response to God conforms their behaviour to the good of their fellow man and woman. What God has revealed is entirely relevant when such behaviour directs and enables people to seek the common good.

Divine revelation to and engagement with creation is not necessary. It is simply the nature of God to create, to create what is good and so strongly to affirm that creation; and even to take on the risk to enter creation in the incarnation. Jesus Christ reveals that God has chosen the human creature, chosen for relationship with God, and chooses eternally all people. Jesus Christ involves human life in revealing God’s life, so initiating a new possibility for human life. The possibilities of God’s goodness are apparent in the
kind of relationship mediated through Christ. People are reconciled to God, are forgiven and can humbly forgive others. The human earthly common good depends on these good relationships revealed and mediated by Christ, and the possibility that these relationships can be common to all.

Conclusion

Theological discussion of the common good begins with divine self-revelation. God brings knowledge of God and scripture is witness and response. Jesus Christ is the divine revelation within the created order that people are enabled to receive. Divine revelation dynamically encounters, not only imparts, so that people respond to God’s character. A community forms that witnesses to people’s response in transformational relationships. The origin of the common good is divine revelation that gives rise to a community of transformed relationships.

The common good relies on revelation of engaging relationships that truly reveal the divine relationality. The Triune relationality of God’s life underpins revelation. The common good depends on this revelation of one, common, relational life that is eternal and without contingency. The divine communion overflows into relationship with human life. People aspire to fulfilment of this relationship as revealed to them in Jesus Christ. The common good rests on human fulfilment in relationship with divine life.

Ultimately, the earthly common good arises because humankind participates in the divine engagement. God has freely originated and affirms a good creation such that God risks embracing creation in the person Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, people are chosen for the most deep and profound relationship with God, and this new possibility of relationship extends to all humankind in earthly life. Jesus Christ mediates this good quality relationship in which people are reconciled with God. Jesus Christ is also the example and enabler of transformation in people’s response to God and one another.
These relationships and the possibility that they can be common to all gives rise to the common good.

In the next chapter, I consider the way in which God’s reconciliation and forgiveness have demonstrated the nature of the relationships that God intends. Jesus Christ reveals the goodness of God in these relationships, which enable people to seek and enjoy a common good.
Chapter 4 — Jesus Christ: who reveals God’s relational goodness

Introduction

The common good is dependent on good relationships that are dependent on the goodness of God. The common good relies on good co-operative relationships (as I indicated in chapter one). Salvation can be depicted by the metaphor of reconciliation, which most strongly evokes God’s intention for good relationships. Not only does God intend a relationship with humankind, but the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ reveal and accomplish an irreversible change in that relationship. God addresses the human need to be reconciled to God.

I consider the emphasis on a framework of relationships to describe reconciliation in Brümmer and Fiddes. I continue to work with Barth’s primary motifs that humankind is dependent on the total and complete initiative of God that is outside human conception or endeavour. Additionally, Barth alludes to a restored and reconciled relationship — including his exposition of the parable of the lost son.

In and through Christ, human life has new hope of true, complete and lasting fulfilment in their goal and end in relationship with God. God is good precisely because God’s generosity is beyond human expectation. This generous, surprising, reconciliatory and reliable goodness of God is the foundation and demonstration of good relationships. From this theological perspective, divine provision leads to the characteristic qualities and concept of the common good.

What God does for God’s creatures who receive as objects, theology has called “objective salvation”. God’s goodness in reconciled relationships is the objective aspect of the common good. In this chapter, I discuss God’s objective goodness that enables the vertical relationship between God and humanity. There is also subjective human
experience of participation in the reconciled relationship with God and consequent horizontal dimensions in human relationships. I demonstrate in the following chapter how participation in God’s objective goodness is a shared experience that can be manifest in the common good of all humanity.

The common good and a relational view of salvation

The common good relies on good relationships. I consider next how reconciliation is the best relational metaphor for God’s goodness in salvation. God’s goodness in reconciling people to God describes and enables the relationships that enable a common good.

The common good by definition involves human co-operation. Regardless of whether the result maximises everyone’s individual good, people contribute to some good from which everyone is deemed to benefit. To enjoy that good will require participation; to use the bridge even if one had no hand in building it. The more widespread or complex the good, the more likely that more people have contributed to bring it about. Production and enjoyment of a material good requires the good of people’s participation and co-operation. No other good can be envisaged unless there is the good of human community. It might be that the common group is a minority that exploits the majority of the population. Nevertheless, that common group exercises the good of co-operative relationships for what they deem to be the common good (as I described in the discussion of Aristotle in chapter one). The wider the reach of good co-operative relationships, the harder it is to treat people as resources to be exploited. Consequently, the common good relies on the goal or end that enables the greatest extent of good human relationships.

God’s engagement with God’s creation is considered to be for the good of the creature. In the Christian tradition, the scriptural witness to revelation, history and experience provides understanding of God’s engagement and interaction with humanity:
revelation in Jesus Christ encompasses the relationship. In this relationship, God reveals concern with the welfare of humankind. The ultimate good or wellbeing of people is termed salvation (C. Gunton, 2000, p. 144). Salvation is viewed eschatologically as fulfilment of the end of human character (C. Gunton, 2000, p. 144). Salvation can variously emphasise incorporation into the life of God and the transformation of the character so included (C. Gunton, 2000, p. 144). Aspects of incorporation and transformation can include human life in the present. God has revealed in relationships what is proximately and ultimately fulfilling and the greatest good for humankind. I demonstrate in this chapter that the good God imparts is found in the nature of God’s relationship. Consequently, what is good for humanity arises from the best of relationships. The relationships God reveals are the most reliable indicator of the common good because they lead people towards absolutely good and fulfilling relationships. Therefore, God’s relationality reveals God’s goodness that leads people to the common good.

Salvation is described biblically by a number of metaphors. Fee (2004, pp. 51, 54) refers to the use of metaphors in Paul’s writings as: redeeming (freeing) slaves, adopting sons (children), atoning sacrifice, reconciling, and justifying. If through Jesus Christ God’s engagement for people’s good is revealed, then the various metaphors are descriptions of Christ’s saving action. Jesus Christ heals; commits the just act; conquers and liberates; ritually sacrifices himself; or mystically unites people with God (McIntosh, 2008, pp. 68–78). Paul in particular uses more than one metaphor, sometimes in the same sentence, to convey different aspects of salvation in human terms (Finlan, 2005, p. 36). If a number of different metaphors are available, it remains to be seen which most helpfully illuminate the goodness of God’s relationships that give rise to the common good.
Some metaphors for salvation are more about relationships than others. Many of the metaphors (such as freeing, healing, justifying, even sacrifice) evoke the idea that something is done for humankind. Although all aspects of the divine-human relationship rely on God, people need to know and experience themselves as part of the relationship. For there to be a relationship between God and humankind, divine engagement must lead to and involve a human response. As I shall shortly describe, reconciliation is the metaphor about active engagement of parties for a better relationship. Fee (2004, p. 60) notes that although Paul has used a social and diplomatic term, reconciliation is almost no metaphor because it most nearly describes the outcome of Christ’s saving action. I intend to use reconciliation as the metaphor for salvation and as the most helpful metaphor to describe God’s good relationship and, therefore, the foundation for a common good.

Reconciliation is the closest English translation to Barth’s title for salvation or atonement (Bromiley & Torrance, 1956, CD IV, 1, p. VII). When Barth (1956b, CD, IV, 1, pp. 273–274) expounds at length using a single metaphor, he actually uses “four concepts taken from the sphere of law” because this metaphor or concept has “a particularly good basis in the Bible.” Barth (1956b, CD IV, 1, pp. 274–282) considered that there are other concepts and briefly re-considered his legal terms as those of priest and sacrifice. Barth’s account is described by Nimmo (2017, pp. 116–117) as penal, using the terms of judge, judged and judgement, although the illustration of priest and sacrifice was intended to demonstrate that the account need not be tied to particular terms. Consequently, I can only refer to Barth when the terms of reconciled relationships are prominent in his detailed account, because I maintain that those terms provide a foundation for the common good.
Reconciliation has certain characteristics. It is noticeable that Paul dramatically reverses his contemporaries’ expectations of reconciliation (Aletti SJ, 2004, p. 105). It is God, who has not failed the relationship, who initiates restitution and takes on the cost (Aletti SJ, 2004, p. 105). It is this unexpected form of reconciliation, which Paul used to shed light on what God has done, that has informed the Christian idea of reconciled relationships. Brümmer (2005, p. 42) explains that reconciliation involves the free forgiveness by the offended party and the free repentance by the offenders. Forgiveness and repentance must be free otherwise they are payments in an agreement that does not require ongoing personal interaction (Brümmer, 2005, p. 42). There must be both forgiveness and repentance, otherwise one party is not regarded well by the other (Brümmer, 2005, p. 43). When relationships are restored and upheld in a conciliatory way, the other party is better understood, is considered worthy, and the connection to others is more important than the cost (Brümmer, 2005, pp. 43–44). In the New Testament, it is asserted by or through Jesus that God forgives — in the Lord’s prayer (Mt. 6:12, New Revised Standard Version), when the paralytic is healed (9:6), at the last supper (26:28), and people in response can simply admit their need and freely repent — in the Baptist’s proclamation (Lk. 3:3), in the forgiveness of repentant believers (17:3), at Peter’s witness to the high priest’s council (Acts 5:31). It is God’s intention through Jesus Christ that people are in a reconciled relationship with God (Rom. 5:11). The New Testament also indicates that reconciled relationships are the aim amongst people, so people should exercise utmost forbearance in order to be reconciled (Mt. 18:15–35). Reconciliation with God is tied to reconciliation with one another: knowing oneself to be forgiven and to forgive (Mt. 6:12; Eph. 4:32). The common good, that relies on God’s good characteristics of reconciliation, depends on forgiveness and repentance.

44 The norm was for the offending party to ask for reconciliation and to be forgiven. Those who have broken the relationship were expected to be responsible for initiating restoration and to bear some consequences (2 Macc. 1:5; 7:33; 8:29 cited by Aletti SJ, 2004, p. 108).
Reconciliation is also a most suitable metaphor because it describes what is good for the entire cosmos. All relationships in creation become important (Cristoph Schwöbel, 2003, p. 23). Human response can be considered not only for each individual with God or another but for one group with another (Cristoph Schwöbel, 2003, p. 23). Paul uses reconciliation, together with justification and adoption, to describe the social effects of salvation (Finlan, 2005, p. 8). A person may be reconciled with their community, and one community with another. De Gruchy (2002, pp. 53–54) refers to God’s electing to have a covenant with creation, that all is under Christ’s reconciliation. A community may consider whether behaviour to the rest of creation reflects conciliatory behaviour among humankind. If other people are not exploited and impulses for reparation are restrained, then other creatures can also be given space for existence. If a more harmonious life with others that gives them worth is important, then human interaction with the rest of creation can also seek to integrate human life rather than impose. God’s goodness described by reconciliation can be viewed as completely common.

Reconciliation is also a helpful metaphor because it encompasses a dynamic, ongoing relationship. Emphasis on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that has completed humanity’s reconciliation with God, means people are not set an impossible task of completing restitution themselves (Cristoph Schwöbel, 2003, p. 29). But God’s action in Jesus Christ is not simply confined to the past, any more than human response is confined to the present (Fiddes, 1989, p. 27). Through Jesus Christ, humankind is present on the cross and in the resurrection (Fiddes, 1989, p. 27). The same Spirit that raised Christ also acts for each person’s response (Rom. 8:11 cited in Cristoph Schwöbel, 2003, p. 20). There is, therefore, continuity of a relationship, restored and continuing, in Jesus Christ, for Christian communities. Cristoph Schwöbel (2003, p. 24) points to God’s

45 A German systematic theologian writing here on the theology of reconciliation.
46 A South-African scholar particularly concerned with reformed theology and reconciliation.
creative plan for the possibilities of communion. God’s intention is for a relationship that continues. Reconciliation describes the restoration of relationships. Additionally, a conciliatory approach to relationships is the way they are more likely to be maintained. Estrangement is less likely if others have worth, are understood, and relationship with them is more important than seeking reparation. The common good relies on good relationships that continue; for the current generation and the nurturing of the next. God’s saving goodness described as reconciliation indicates a foundation for a continuing common good.

The common good is and requires good relationships. God’s goodness in salvation through Jesus Christ is present in effective relationships with people. Reconciliation best describes these relationships that involve forgiveness and repentance and are far reaching and dynamic. Such good relationships are the foundation for a truly common good.

I discuss, in the remainder of this chapter, how Jesus Christ effects the reconciliation between humanity and God. In the discussion, I emphasise the characteristics or qualities of God’s goodness in this relationship. These qualities demonstrate and underpin the fulfilment of human life. Such good qualities give rise to the common good.

**Jesus Christ: who reveals positive intent for relationships**

Jesus Christ reveals the extent of God’s intention to engage with humankind. I consider next how this engagement demonstrates the generosity of God’s goodness in the relationship between God and people. The lengths God has gone to engage with humanity are significant. God the creator as God the Son has entered creation and was incarnate in Jesus Christ. Barth (1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 3) describes God as embracing the human cause in Jesus Christ. If God is with us, God has neither attacked nor abandoned humanity (CD IV, 1, p. 6). Hunsinger (2000, p. 142) observes that the Son of God dying the death of the
sinner is the “nadir of his humiliation for our sakes” but it is also the basis of the zenith of the exaltation of the Son of Man. God in Christ has taken on the lowly state of humankind to act for their highest fulfilment; denoting how deeply God intends to be involved with humanity. As I observed in the previous chapter, Jesus Christ is for humankind because God has always intended life in relationship with humankind. Simply, that there is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ uncovers the extent of God’s intent and generosity to ensure that people are reconciled to God, so that there can be a lasting relationship. Jesus Christ reveals not only the extent but the nature of God’s intent for the relationship with humanity. In Christ, God is both generous in being and in acting. Jennings (2009), discussing the atonement, usefully describes the ways in which Jesus engages inclusively with all types of people. Jesus ignores religious barriers to suffering by engaging with a woman who haemorrhaged and with lepers; Jesus is not defiled but they are restored (Lk. 5:12–14; 8:40–48 cited in Jennings, 2009, pp. 90–91). Jesus ignores the religious barriers of moral status and thus gives honour and welcome to those otherwise rejected (Jennings, 2009, pp. 86–87). It is a scandal when Jesus accepts the woman of doubtful repute who washed his feet and proposes to eat with Zaccheus the tax-collector (Lk 7:36:50; 19:1–10). Jesus did not enforce repentance as a prerequisite to his friendship, so he does not explicitly condemn people by their exclusion (Jennings, 2009, p. 87); Jesus eats with the Pharisees even as he criticises them (Lk. 11:37–52). Jesus does, however, positively commend when he praises faith and hope and humility and change in behaviour of those healed or labelled sinners. Additionally, Jesus teaches that right use of the law both avoids harmful behaviour and does not set up barriers between people. For example, abstention from murder means abstention from murderous thoughts, which in the end means reconciliation with those who are enemies (Mt. 5:21–26). Effectively Jesus rejects exclusive behaviour that has disregarded the powerless. In his examination of reconciliation, Volf (1996, pp. 114–115) notes that Jesus’ rejection of
coercion by the powerful also means rejection of desire for a vengeful reversal of roles by the powerless. Jesus’ inclusion demonstrates God’s generous concern for everybody that overrides human demarcations. It is a concern to remove barriers in human relationships that necessarily follows from removal of barriers to people’s relationship with God.

Ultimately, God’s intent for a relationship with humankind extends to removal of the barrier to that relationship. God’s generous goodness is unlike human behaviour, called sin. Such human behaviour is a barrier to people’s relationship with God (in the next section I shall discuss the way in which sin is a barrier). The same divine generosity is intent on removing the barrier. God intends for humankind to be fulfilled and to engage accordingly with God and one another. Jesus Christ, therefore, reveals God’s purposes as he preaches and demonstrates forgiveness and repentance. Jesus forgives sins; whether it is the assumed sins of those who suffer or the sufferers’ own guilt, such as that of the paralytic (Mk. 2:1–12). Jesus also teaches that people need to recognise their sins and repent as in the humble tax collector and the religiously correct Pharisee (Lk. 18:9–14). When people freely repent, they can accept the forgiveness of others. Jesus reveals that God’s generous goodness extends to forgiving sin, removing the barrier to relationship, so that people can be reconciled to God.

The positive intention for the divine-human relationship is literally embodied in Jesus Christ. God so engages with the creation to be born a human being. This person, Jesus, demonstrates that the divine intention is to engage all humanity. This engagement at the same time demonstrates that God intends people to be reconciled to God and with one another. It is Jesus Christ who reveals, demonstrates and lives the divine intention. What is revealed is the extent to which God intends to relate to creation; revealing God’s
generous goodness; and the way such out-of-this-world generosity impinges upon human life. This generosity to sustain relationships is a quality indicative of the common good.

The generosity of God not only results in God’s positive engagement with people in Jesus Christ, but also manifests when God addresses the barrier of human estrangement.

**Jesus Christ: who withstands the human distortion of relationships**

God’s intent for relationship exposes the human distortions that Jesus Christ removes. God’s selflessness confronts human wrongdoing, which is laid bare in every opposition to Jesus’ life and ultimately in his death. Further, such opposition indicates human incapacity to overcome divisions with one another and with God. Ultimately, Jesus’ meekness, the resurrection and God’s forgiveness withstand and thereby expose, the magnitude of sin because God’s goodness has overcome the estrangement.

Jesus Christ reveals what sin is and that it is in opposition to God’s goodness. Jesus Christ, an innocent, good and generous person, antagonises people, who find him unbearable. Some cannot bear the implicit judgment of his life on theirs (Fiddes, 1989, p. 177). Marshall (2003, pp. 82–83) proposes that the Roman and Jewish leaders’ general malice and specific self-interest display rejection of the reign of God. Pontius Pilate washes his hands of Jesus’ death (Mt. 27:24), yet represents Roman authority, which alone can execute Jesus, and to whom Jesus is handed over by Jewish leaders who clamour that the sentence be carried out (Jn. 18:31, 40). The leaders jointly prefer their own power, and reject the possibilities of Jesus’ behaviour. Opposition to Jesus’ life exposes sinful human behaviour that leads to his death.

Jesus Christ also reveals the failure of human pretentions to absolute judgment. Fiddes (1989, p. 85) indicates that the New Testament describes Jesus as innocent. It is not that both Jewish and Roman authorities were unable to bring charges against Jesus
for defiance of both Mosaic and Roman law, rather that Jesus questions the religious and civil institutions because they are relative to the will of God (p. 85). These laws may assist human life by declaration of what is right and censure of the guilty but neither religious rules for relationship with God nor secular regulation of peace, could claim to be absolute (p. 85). In following God’s will Jesus is innocent (p. 85). I think any human claim to enact absolutely what is right, or God’s law, indicates a failure to perceive the distortions of sinful behaviour. These distortions mean people themselves cannot address and resolve their own wrongdoing. Jesus’ life has not only exposed the problem, but that people cannot correct it.

Doubtful human judgment divides everyone from God. What was opposite to Jesus’ life was not only present in a few individuals. Even Jesus’ disciples are not perfect when they try to oppose Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem (Mk. 8:32–33) or flee his arrest (Mk. 14:50) or deny knowing him (Mk. 14:66–72). Bonhoeffer (2009b, p. 148) helpfully describes the way all people are affected regardless of individual behaviour; illustrated by the Israelite community’s attempt to control the law. Bonhoeffer (2009b, p. 148) proposes that Israelite society was divided between those who claimed they are right and those whom they condemned as wrong. There will be further division in any society due to different conceptions of who is right, particularly if human judgment is imperfect. Regardless of who has done what, there is strife and antagonism across all of society. Due to their imperfect relationships, human society cannot as a whole relate to God, and no one is unaffected. Jesus has no interest in identifying specific perpetrators and isolating them from society; much more, he urges all people to repent and recognise their sin (Bonhoeffer, 2009b, p. 149). If what people do divides them from each other and from God, then reconciliation with God involves recognition of what they do and will also restore community life. The common good, in which good relationships are important,
therefore relies on people’s recognition of their sin and the way it has divided them from God and one another.

If division from God is clear from opposition to Jesus’ life, how much more clear when Jesus Christ brings God’s forgiveness and people are reconciled to God. In later sections I discuss the way in which there is forgiveness in Jesus Christ in which all people can share. At this stage what is significant is that God has gone so far to declare forgiveness by raising Jesus Christ from the dead (in Paul’s proclamation in Pisidian Antioch, Acts 13:37–39). Barth (1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 309) indicates that God’s love for the world is made known by the resurrection; that humanity is given new life, which they did not deserve. Volf (1996, p. 126) investigates this further by proposing that the behaviour of his accusers does not define Jesus’ behaviour in life and death. The resurrection declares strongly not only that this human behaviour is rejected but that there will be no similar behaviour in retribution, only forgiveness. God in Christ has embraced the offenders (Volf, 1996, p. 127). If the sheer scale of forgiving human sin has resulted in the resurrection, then opposition to reconciliation was indeed great.

Jesus Christ brings not only understanding of the extent of God’s engagement with creation but understanding of the enormity of the opposition to a reconciled relationship. Jesus exposes and withstands not only opposition but the failure of human pretensions to rectify their own situation. This opposition divides all humanity from God, not just individual sinners, to such an extent that when God forgives, Jesus Christ is raised from the dead. The extent of human failure means that God alone can bring about reconciliation. People are dependent on God’s reconciliation for good relationships that can enable a common good. To understand this reconciliation, I next discuss how Jesus Christ enables forgiveness.
Jesus Christ: in whom God accomplishes reconciliation

Jesus Christ demonstrates God’s surprising generosity and reconciliatory approach to relationships. I next consider how reconciliation is accomplished in Jesus Christ both through his solidarity with humanity to admit human sin, and through his divine forgiveness.

Jesus Christ demonstrates that God initiates reconciliation with humanity. It is a mark of the relationship that God will be conciliatory even though humanity has divided itself from God. Barth (1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 68) notes that people cannot initiate renewal of the relationship, which they have not maintained and have effectively rejected. Reconciliation is effected in Jesus Christ, while people are still estranged from God (Rom. 5:6–11 cited by Barth, p. 74). Consequently, Barth (1956b, p. 74) emphasises that humankind does not enter into a bargain with God. Jesus Christ is God’s reconciliatory presence not in response to human initiative but so that there can be a response from estranged humanity (I discuss people’s response in the next chapter). Jesus Christ reveals that God will initiate reconciliation, although humankind is the offender. Jesus Christ supremely demonstrates that good relationships are conciliatory, and restoration can be initiated by the wounded party.

In Jesus Christ, humankind is also deeply involved in reconciliation. Jesus Christ, Son of God can initiate and effect reconciliation and Jesus Christ who is human can act for humanity (I consider how in the next section). Barth (1958, CD IV, 2, p. 23, citing Lk. 15:11–32) explains that the actual history of Jesus Christ makes plain the parable of the lost son. The Son of God travels far from the Father into the situation of lost humanity (Barth, 1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 158). As a person, Jesus is able to participate in human life, which is estranged from God (Barth, 1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 75). By this participation,
humankind is involved in God’s reconciliation. People can be part of the restored relationship with God.

Jesus Christ represents the admission of human sin as he participates in the human, sinful situation. From his baptism in response to John the Baptist’s call for repentance to his crucifixion between two criminals, Jesus identifies with ordinary human sin (Barth, 1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 165). When Jesus dies, he dies the death of sinners, sharing peoples’ situation (Martin, 1981, p. 100). Jesus, like other people, experiences unfair human behaviour, which leads to suffering and death and ultimately the sense of God’s abandonment (Jennings, 2009, pp. 139, 141). In the metaphor of reconciliation, Jesus represents human admission of estrangement from God. Jesus bears witness to and discloses human sin as a human being. For humanity’s sake, Jesus Christ undergoes the pain and horror of awareness of the extent of human sin. Barth (1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 216) indicates that Jesus Christ of all people is most fully aware of the human crisis. I propose here that Jesus Christ undertakes the shame of admitting people’s sin on their behalf. Jesus Christ embodies the pain of confessing. As part of conciliatory relationships (as I have noted), people were and are called to repent, to respond to reconciliation with God. People can repent and be reconciled with God in Jesus who undertakes the human situation. Through Jesus Christ, people are enabled to confess what causes relationships to be broken. By participation in this reconciliation, people are open to the possibility of truly reconciled relationships.

When Jesus Christ represents human sin, God enters the consequences of sin. God has allowed the consequences of humanity turned away from God, suggestive of Rom. 1–2 (Barth, 1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 174). But God has entered into the chaos of creation in the turmoil of those consequences (1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 175). From a human perspective,

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it is remarkable that God is willing to take the risk of entering into this chaos. Barth (1956b, pp. 72–73, citing Jn. 3:16) indicates that this is the greatness of God’s selflessness for creation. God’s reconciliation in Jesus Christ is self-giving beyond human expectation of such risks. Such reconciliation not only relies on God but demonstrates that reconciled relationships have a quality of taking risks and acting unexpectedly.

Reconciliation in Jesus Christ is also surprising because God has been willing to bring what is flawed into the Divine life. Jesus Christ was obedient as Son to the Father and thus able to enter into the full consequences of human sin (Barth, 1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 223). There was complete confidence of the Father with the Son through the Spirit. The representative of humankind whose relationship with God was unbroken undertook the experience of estranged humanity. Jesus is as the lost son who returns (Barth, 1956b, CD IV, 2, p. 21). Jesus’ return means that his alienation has been embraced in the Divine life (Balthasar, 1989, p. 533). The extremis of the human situation has been placed within the unbroken divine relationships of which human life is now a part. It is entirely unexpected from a human perspective for God graciously to accept what is unacceptable. It is beyond human comprehension that God’s flawless goodness is willing and able to encompass the taint of flawed human life. God’s goodness is astonishing in the embrace of what is opposite to God.

God in Jesus Christ has forgiven humankind, which astonishes people. While God is the party from whom humanity has turned away and become estranged, God has freely initiated forgiveness so that people can be reconciled with God. Brümmer (2005, pp. 40–41) proposes that forgiveness is costly because it involves acceptance of hurt in a loving relationship. In such a relationship, another’s interests are treated as one’s own (Brümmer, 2005, p. 38). Another’s interests are not simply served, as that would be a disinterested...
contract for one’s own benefit (Brümmer, 2005, p. 38). Neither can there be bestowal that is heedless of needs; hollow gifts that coercively control the recipient (I Cor. 13:3 cited in Brümmer, 2005, p. 39). In a disinterested or exploitative relationship, a failure by another can be ignored or some repayment demanded (Brümmer, 2005, p. 40). In a loving relationship, it is in the best interests of the one who failed to be accepted again. Because the other matters, their failure has caused hurt that must be absorbed rather than demanding reparation (Brümmer, 2005, p. 41). Particularly as the one who forgives another must recount the hurt that they forgive (Fiddes, 1989, p. 173). Paul declares that in Christ, there has been reconciliation with God because of God’s costly love of God’s enemies (Rom. 5:6–11 cited in Constantineau, 2010, p. 111). God has, therefore accepted the cost of forgiving humanity.

The cost to God of forgiveness is Jesus Christ’s death on the cross. Jesus has emphasised forgiveness in his life and teaching and with finality on the cross (Volf, 1996, pp. 121–122). Jesus accepts the extreme effects of human sin. All that is laid bare by Jesus Christ is forgiven through him. The Son of God undergoes the painful cost of forgiving all that is made plain. Brümmer (1993, p. 201) says:

On Calvary God reveals to us the cost of his forgiveness. Christ’s suffering is the direct expression of God’s suffering forgiveness [. . .]. Christ’s attitude and purpose toward us sinners is a direct expression of God’s attitude and purpose.

People are reconciled to God because God has borne the cost of forgiveness. The reconciled relationship revealed in Jesus Christ involves bearing the cost of forgiving others.

Humankind cannot achieve reconciliation with God by themselves. But God in Christ can bring humanity into restored relationship with God. In Christ God deals with humankind as lost in a far country (Barth, 1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 11). By the power of the Spirit, Jesus Christ returns to the Father through the resurrection and ascension (Balthasar,
People are forgiven through Jesus Christ and their reconciliation is assured because Jesus Christ lives with the Father.

Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Man, undertakes the costly experience of human life estranged from God. In that cost is both the shameful exposure of the human situation and the suffering as God forgives what is exposed. In all this, God astonishingly embraces and accomplishes reconciliation with chaotic humanity. People are reconciled as human sin is both confessed and forgiven in Jesus Christ. People are part of this reconciliation. In this reconciliation, God’s goodness is shown to be reconciliatory as well as generous and surprising. This is the way God saves and as the best way to restore and maintain good relationships, indicates that such conciliatoriness is a foundation of the common good.

People are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, but also, as I next discuss, people participate in reconciliation through Jesus Christ.

**Jesus Christ: in whom humanity participates in reconciliation**

In Jesus Christ, people are involved in reconciliation with God. The way Jesus shares in human life makes new relationships possible for people, that reflect God’s reconciliatory goodness.

People’s reconciliation with God is not only effected and demonstrated in Jesus Christ, but also people are included with Christ in their reconciliation. Not only does Jesus Christ representatively change what is possible for humanity but also, he is the beginning of this new humanity that others can inherit. First, as I have discussed, Jesus Christ has shared in the consequences of human sin. Just as Christ has shared in humanity, so people can share in the right disposition and relationships of Jesus Christ (II Cor. 5:21 cited in Campbell, 2012, pp. 186–187). Consideration of people’s unity with Christ leads Campbell (2012, p. 29) to describe such union as participation, identification and
incorporation. Campbell (2012, p. 351) later concludes that while Paul recognises that Christ is the representative and substitute who achieves what humanity cannot, nevertheless, Paul believes that people benefit from what Christ has done and so are included in reconciliation with God. Second, Jesus Christ by his death and resurrection is the progenitor of a new humanity (I Cor. 15:44–49 cited in Fee, 2007, p. 517). Christ has begun a new humanity just as Adam did the old, so people can inherit from what was begun in Christ. God will graciously adopt people as co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:16–17). Consequently, Jesus Christ represents humanity in reconciliation with God; representing a new beginning for humanity in their reconciled life. Balthasar (1989, p. 397) considers that humanity is now in the same position as the eternal Son and people may return to home with God in their true humanity. God forgives people just as the Father has always been ready to embrace the Son; people are able to respond just as Jesus Christ responds to the Father. People are reconciled to God and are enabled to be in a reconciled relationship with God. People are enabled to be fully human and to sustain relationships that constitute a common good.

The reconciliation in which people participate also defeats coercive forces. In their estrangement from God and consequent division (as I discussed earlier), people rely on coercion. Coercion is possible because people initially fear retribution and ultimately death. Martin (1981, p. 41, citing I Cor. 2:6,8) proposes that the contemporary rulers assumed that death was defeat for Jesus. But the rulers are mistaken and exposed because the cross is delivery of humanity from coercion (Martin, 1981, pp. 40–41). Marshall (2001, p. 65) considers that Christ triumphs over coercive behaviour without equivalent divine retribution. I consider here that Jesus selflessly exposes divisive coercion and his undaunted stance removes the force of human retribution. People may be incorporated into Jesus Christ’s disclosure, forgiveness and disarmament of coercive retribution. People know the effects of the defeat of coercive power because they are reconciled in
Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:37–39). People lose their fear of retribution and can in Christ admit sin and be embraced because they know forgiveness. Ultimately, for people estranged from God, death is an absolute end that overshadows human behaviour. When people are reconciled with God, death no longer determines human behaviour (Dunn, 1998, p. 223), because people can share in a death and resurrection like Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:5–11). Death no longer overshadows, and coercion is undone. Without the divisive threat of force, human interaction may consider positive engagement for the common good.

People reconciled in Jesus Christ also share in his freedom. As a community estranged from God, people are isolated from one another yet bound together by guilt (Bonhoeffer, 2009b, p. 145). Where people’s selfish acts had repercussions that separated them, Christ’s selflessness restores communion with God and thus removes both their guilt and ensuing loneliness (Bonhoeffer, 2009b, p. 146). People are enabled and set free because their guilt is removed. In Jesus’ life he is the friend of sinners; people’s indebtedness, obligation and guilt was removed by his action; and the same power enables people’s response in Christ’ death and resurrection (Martin, 1981, p. 36). Paul writes that through Jesus Christ, people are redeemed as though they are slaves and set free by the generosity of God (Rom. 3:24; Gal. 4:4–7 cited by Martin, 1981, pp. 39–40). The goodness of God has freed people to know they can be in relationship with God and one another.

Reconciled in Jesus Christ, People may share in his selflessness. Reconciliation in Jesus Christ means people share in the defeat of coercion in which he was self-giving and share in freedom from estrangement in which he was selfless. On the cross, Jesus gave away himself, yet this freedom to give is worth more than any human treasure (Balthasar, 1989, p. 391). This selflessness reveals the glory of God (Balthasar, 1989, p. 390). The Spirit ensures people are able to participate in such selflessness (Balthasar,
People are freed from selfish love to the same selflessness and attendant loving relationships (Balthasar, 1989, p. 391). Reconciliation in Christ is not for individual selves but frees people to participate in selfless relationships. These selfless relationships are the good relationships that make up the common good.

People are reconciled with God in Jesus Christ who is their representative and the beginning of the new humanity. In Jesus Christ, people are able to respond to God, dismiss the obstacles of estrangement and be freed from their guilt. Like Christ people are freed for the selflessness that characterises reconciliation in him. Jesus Christ has not only revealed this reconciliation but enabled people to be a party to it. Consequently, people can engage in the most fulfilling reconciled relationships with one another. Jesus Christ has led people to form the common good.

**Jesus Christ: whose resurrection affirms reconciliation**

The unforeseen goodness of God in the resurrection affirms reconciliation with God. I discuss next the way the resurrection sets aside human conceptions of punishment, coercion, despair and guilt. New relationships are possible and people are empowered to participate.

The death of Jesus on the cross cannot be understood without the resurrection. The significance of the cross is radically changed after the resurrection. Gleeson (2009, p. 3) describes the earlier meaning of Jesus’ degrading death as a disgraced criminal because he was a failed messiah. Furthermore, Hengel (1986, pp. 179–180) describes crucifixion as publicly shaming; the naked loss of dignity and condemnation reserved for the lowest and criminal classes. By itself the cross could indicate that God abandoned Jesus (Fiddes, 1989, pp. 193–194). Subsequently, there is astonishment, even shock, that Jesus is raised from the dead. The gospel accounts end with the “great astonished joy of the resurrection” (Balthasar, 1989, p. 532). If Jesus is raised then his death on the cross
did not end in disgrace and defeat (Williams, 2000, pp. 269–270). The resurrection alters people’s expectations because what has happened on the cross does not lead the witnesses of the crucifixion to anticipate the resurrection. Barth (1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 302) indicates that the resurrection is the work of God alone without human decision or action involved in it. The work of God in the resurrection alters the understanding of God’s action on the cross. As God has acted singly in both the cross and resurrection, so both events must be understood as a unity.

The resurrection demonstrates to people God’s surprisingly different judgment. The death of Jesus is a not the final judgment. Sin, death and nothingness have not been given all power over creation (Barth, 1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 306). If the cross only signifies such punishment then God’s forgiveness cannot be known (Brümmer, 2005, p. 76). To restore a relationship requires forgiveness rather than exaction of a penalty merely indicating a broken agreement (Brümmer, 2005, p. 40). If the breach is satisfied by punishment, reconciliation through forgiveness is unnecessary. Jesus’ death, however, is not the final result, so God intends something other than allowing punishment. God has not abandoned humankind in delivering God’s verdict: God intends a reconciled relationship instead of merely settling accounts (Barth, 1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 308). The resurrection reveals God’s intention to restore relationships.

In the light of the resurrection God has forgiven humanity. Death is not a weapon of coercion for God, as it was for people who attempted to wield it, and found their power removed (Williams, 2002, p. 17). Neither is there retaliation; the risen Jesus will recognise and meet his friends, including Peter his denier (Mk. 16:7 cited in O’Collins SJ, 2012, p. 102). God, in Christ, has been shown to be with all powerless sufferers, who may be with him in restoration (Williams, 2002, pp. 9,10). Likewise, the excluder is not rejected; if their excluding action is overcome in the resurrection, their humanity and God’s love for
them can also be discovered (Volf, 1996, p. 124). Consequently, the resurrection reveals that God restores humanity. God has affirmed Jesus’ life and proclamation to all by raising him to new life (Fiddes, 1989, p. 53). Restoration is through the person of Jesus Christ (as discussed earlier) as the risen Jesus demonstrates when engaging positively with people. Restoration is for reconciled relationships. Repentance and forgiveness is offered to all nations — in the resurrected Jesus commission to his disciples and in Peter’s witness to the assembled nationalities at Pentecost (Lk. 24:47; Acts 2:38 cited by O'Collins SJ, 2012, p. 112). The risen Jesus demonstrates that God always intends to forgive, reconcile and restore. This kind of reconciliation is the way God intends relationships to be.

The resurrection means that not only coercion and revenge are set aside but also despair. There can be despair that reconciliation is impossible because all relationships end in death (Williams, 2002, p. 17). People who believe that they alone carry responsibility, can believe the created world is only fit for destruction (Williams, 2002, p. 17). The resurrection means that God has not abandoned people; that people cannot bring about an absolute end (Williams, 2002, p. 17). Reconciliation is possible because death does not end relationships. The resurrection casts aside despair not only for individuals but also for their and all humankind’s relationships. There is also despair in people’s guilt that they only deserve punishment. Paul saw himself (retrospectively) as one who had been an enemy of God but was not treated in exact repayment for his behaviour (Volf, 2000, pp. 165–166). When Paul becomes an apostle of instead of persecutor of the church, God’s grace enables Paul to be something else that would not have been possible through punishment (Volf, 2000, p. 166). People no longer need to feel guilty because they cannot themselves rectify their condition; their existence now has meaning because God forgives (Brümmer, 2005, p. 52). People have purpose, both
individually and collectively, rather than darkness because through the resurrected Jesus they encounter God’s forgiveness and are reconciled to God.

Reconciliation with God means that the resurrection not only reveals God’s forgiveness but assures people of God’s ongoing relationship. As discussed earlier, people participate in Christ in this reconciliation. Jesus Christ is the first of a new humanity whose life with God cannot be severed (I Cor. 15:20–23). Barth (1958, CD IV, 2, p. 24) in discussion of the return of the prodigal son, says that Jesus leads the way for people as their king and is the way for people to be able to be in fellowship with God. Jesus has lead the way from humiliation of lost humanity because he alone recalls the intended condition of humankind as life with God and God’s readiness to forgive (Barth, 1958, CD IV, 2, p. 22). There is celebration when the son returns because people have always belonged to God (Barth, 1958, CD IV, 2, p. 23). God has never abandoned humanity; in Jesus Christ God always intends and makes possible people’s fellowship with God. God wills and assures people that the reconciled relationship will continue. This kind of relationship in Christ, with God and among themselves is what is intended for people.

The significance of the resurrection is that God puts the relationship with humanity first. To be in fellowship with humanity is given worth beyond people’s behaviour. Balthasar (1989, p. 533 citing Lk. 15:7, 23, 32) proposes there is “mystery in the heart of God himself” because there is more joy in heaven when sins are forgiven. That those lost can be recovered is more significant in the Divine life than the causes of their profligacy. God willed to undertake the cost so that people could be in fellowship with God (Balthasar, 1989, p. 533). The relationship with God is not based on people’s behaviour or an attempt to account for it. Additionally, the grace of God is not weakness when faced with human behaviour because grace freely offers another possibility where
neither party maintains the relationship based on a balance sheet of repayment (Volf, 2000, p. 171). Consequently, Barth (1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 309) states that the resurrection means that in Jesus Christ people are accepted and loved by God and in God’s “sheer goodness” are drawn into relationship with God. God’s goodness is a marker of fulfilled human relationships, which are more important than evaluation of behaviour.

Reconciliation, finally, is demonstrated in the resurrection as life beyond the offences. It is not so much that people’s behaviour should be forgotten but that it does not rule the relationship. Before there is forgiveness and repentance, reconciliation and hope, the painful past must be recalled (Williams, 2002, p. 30). When people truly forgive, they do not keep reminding the other of the past offences. And when people truly repent, they can live with their past offences, not racked by them, knowing them to be forgiven. They are in one sense put aside and blotted out but we cannot pretend they never took place. Volf (1996, p. 136) is concerned that the past should not haunt us. Haunting memories are a problem if either perpetrator or sufferer continues to gnaw at the offense, not relinquishing their grievance or guilt. Williams (2002, p. 26) indicates the way in which the risen Jesus is life-giving because he forgives rather than being overcome by others’ failings. When Jesus continues to offer Peter his friendship on the Galilean beach, it is a new beginning out of betrayal rather than exact restoration of things as they were before (Williams, 2002, p. 30, citing Jn. 21:15–17).49 The resurrection of Jesus Christ demonstrates the new life of reconciled relationships. These relationships hold people together despite their failings. God has affirmed these good relationships that make the common good.

49 Volf cites Williams concerning the removal of offences but Williams emphasises that forgiveness in Jesus Christ outweighs the offences and transforms the one forgiven rather than simply erasing the offences.
The resurrection is new and unexpected within creation. God intends to forgive, sweeping aside coercion, despair and guilt. When Christ is raised, God’s goodness assures people of their reconciliation, enabling them to be part of reconciliation, and enabling them to be conciliatory as they are restored. People are assured of their ongoing relationship which is built anew. The resurrection means that people are enabled to be part of the reconciliatory goodness of God and thereby enabled for the common good.

**Jesus Christ: who brings trust and hope to relationships**

The common good can depend on the good relationships brought about by Jesus Christ because there is a future of reliable relationships. First, I discuss that God in Jesus Christ has wrought a relationship with people that brings hope like no other to human relationships. Second, the way God’s faithfulness makes hope in Christ reliable. And third, how hope-filled relationships change the present and future for people.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ brings hope to human life because something new happens in human life. The resurrection is a revelation for which no human explanation can be provided from within the created order (Barth, 1956b, CD IV, 1, pp. 355–356). The cross by itself is not self-explanatory, as discussed previously, so resurrection is not foreseen and is truly new (Lorenzen, 1995, p. 206). Resurrection was never expected after crucifixion, yet clearly the risen Jesus is recognisably a living person who has new life (Moltmann, 1996, pp. 28–29). Furthermore, as I have already noted, it is a new life beyond the constraints of sin and death (Barth, 1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 350). The New Testament witnesses to this new life that Jesus has (Lk. 24:13–25; Jn. 20:11–28). The risen Jesus still cannot be predicted from within the confines of human behaviour and the expected course of human history, so his life is completely new. This new life brings hope

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50 A theologian and Baptist minister concerned with the resurrection and God's promises.
51 A significant German Reformed theologian concerned here with the implications of God's promises for the future.
because it does not depend on what humanity can achieve by themselves, but is dependent on the goodness of God.

The new life of Jesus Christ brings hope because he is the representative of humankind who are able to share in what he has revealed. I have already discussed people’s participation in Christ their reconciler, and the same participation is made possible in the new life in Christ. Jesus Christ is the original risen life (Lorenzen, 1995, p. 212, citing Acts 3:15). God who raised Christ will raise others (Barth, 1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 305). People are promised new life and to be raised to be alongside Christ as they participate with him (Rom. 6:3–11). Human life has hope focussed on this life of Jesus Christ; to have a life like Christ because of Christ’s life.

The hope of sharing this new life in Jesus Christ also means hope in the ongoing relationship with God. The new life in Christ is like Christ’s new life, so people can expect to relate to God in a similar way to Jesus Christ. Jesus prays that the disciples will know God’s love as he does (Jn. 17:26). Barth (1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 330, citing Gal. 3:29; 4:7; Rom. 8:17) indicates that people are adopted children and heirs with Christ. If people are children of God, then they may relate to God as Jesus Christ does, as Paul suggests, crying “Abba! Father!” (Gal. 4:6). There is hope in this relationship that will be lived in this new life in the living Christ.

Hope in this new living relationship is also sustained because Christ lives. The living Christ has ascended to heaven and remains in the presence of God (Heb. 9:24–28 cited in Kärkkäinen, 2013, p. 359). Christ is the continual representative of humanity reconciled to God (Barth, 1956b, CD IV, 1, p.314). Christ’s eternal presentation of humanity reconciled to God upholds people’s life and relationship with God in Jesus Christ. Hope is in a relationship that has not only been established but sustained by God.
in Jesus Christ. There can also be hope for the common good that arises from this good relationship.

Hope in Jesus Christ may be relied upon for the present and the future because God is trustworthy. God has repeatedly made covenants that demonstrate God’s concern (Lorenzen, 1997, p. 9). In Jesus Christ, God has sent the Son so that there can be an eternal relationship with God (Barth, 1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 72). God has reconciled people to God when they were estranged and opposed God (Rom. 5:10 cited in Martin, 1981, p. 142). The restoration of the relationship was begun and completed by God, therefore God will reliably and willingly continue the relationship that is promised when Jesus is raised (Martin, 1981, p. 142). In Christ’s presence, now and always, sin and broken relationships have been and will be rejected (as I indicated earlier) and there is always hope of forgiveness and reconciliation. The goodness of God is present in such faithfulness to creation (Barth, 1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 308). God’s good and faithful relationships will therefore sustain the common good.

The presence of God’s Spirit assures people of their hope in the new and ongoing relationship in Jesus Christ. In Luke (Acts 2) the resurrection is proclaimed and made accessible at Pentecost (Lorenzen, 1995, p. 148). In John (Jn. 20:21–23), the Spirit is received directly from the risen Jesus (Lorenzen, 1995, p. 149). In both cases, the Spirit of God will make the resurrection known (Lorenzen, 1995, p. 149); in Luke the disciples speak to assembled nationalities while in John the disciples are sent. In Luke, the Spirit declares God’s salvation through forgiveness and repentance; in John receiving God’s Spirit brings peace and a ministry of forgiveness. The Spirit makes it possible for a witness to any people of new life in Christ in which there is reconciliation and peace with God. Consequently, people are brought by the Spirit into the hope revealed as

The relationships that God reliably sustains are the best hope for humanity, and they can also sustain the common good. Negatively, a person without hope lives for every kind of self-indulgence without restraint, and with no concern for relationships. Positively, with hope in their reconciliation with God, people are able to reflect those kinds of relationships with one another. A community with these kinds of good relationships sustains people, but without hope the good of such a community is not common to all generations. A common good sustains the current generations and their children because there is a future that depends on reliable hope in God. As the best hope, God-given good relationships set out the future in which the common good is present.

Hope in Christ in the present has an impact for the future or rather the new future in Christ changes the present. Moltmann (1996, p. 25) describes the way a future constructed within creation is always consumable. A future in time that comes out of the past is already known and that past is devoured and dies (Moltmann, 1996, p. 25). There is no hope in a future that is predetermined but then destroyed (Moltmann, 1996, p. 25). But the resurrection and the life of the world to come alter the possibilities for people if there are no longer only dead in a past that disappears (Moltmann, 1996, p. 26). The present is qualified as people are converted to this new possibility rather than only determined by the past (Moltmann, 1996, p. 26). The resurrection is that new possibility where “new creation sheds its lustre into the present” (Moltmann, 1996, p. 28). Moltmann’s explanation suggests that people’s reconciliation with God is made ever present, offering conversion oriented to the fulfilment of God’s kingdom. 52 Hope is not so much for a goal but in an encounter in which people are changed.

52 In his survey of eschatology, Schwarz (2000, pp. 149–150) observes that Moltmann expects so much change to take place in this life that the future seems entirely in human hands. He also acknowledges that
Hope changes people’s present for a new future. The common good is a possibility because the course of history can change. All promises are affirmed in Jesus Christ (II Cor. 1:20 cited in Lorenzen, 1995, p. 202). Lorenzen (1995, p. 201) indicates that God is not tied to certain fixed outcomes and therefore can make promises for the future. In a similar way, people can accept promises in Jesus Christ when they are open to the fulfilment of those promises in their current lives (Lorenzen, 1995, p. 202). In Christ, there is hope for what might be possible and the opportunity to be grasped as people’s lives transform. Reconciliation is fulfilled by God, but this possibility means human struggles for peace can continue (Volf, 1996, p. 110). The modern idea of a process that makes the future risk-proof gives way to the shocking idea that there can be risky selflessness (Volf, 1996, pp. 27–28). Future possibilities need not be limited to try and fend off human failure because God has opened up a new future where people can be reconciled after failure. As people change and lives are changed by the presence of the coming Christ, the future is oriented to the fulfilled future in Christ. A common good can be envisaged that relies on the best relationships made possible in Jesus Christ. In the next chapter, I consider the character of people’s response to reconciliation with God. Here what matters is that reconciliation in Jesus Christ brings hope and that hope impacts the present and thus the future.

God brings hope to the relationships that make the common good possible. There is hope in Jesus Christ because his rising is a new possibility for human life. There can be human relationship with God sustained by the living Christ. God’s faithfulness assured by the Spirit means this hope and relationship are reliable. God’s goodness means God will reliably sustain the best relationships, and so support the common good, from one

Moltmann identifies the God-given nature of any future (p. 294). It is pertinent to this thesis that God intends a particular fulfilment for creation which impacts the present and therefore alters the future. Revelation and salvation in Jesus Christ make the idea and pursuit of an earthly common good possible. But fulfilment of creation is outside human competence, remaining in God’s hands.
generation to another. As people encounter the future in Christ, hope can transform present life, so they can increasingly envisage a common good.

Conclusion

God’s salvation brings fulfilment to humanity. Reconciliation describes salvation in terms of the restored relationship with God. Reconciliation, which involves free forgiveness and repentance, denotes dynamic relationships that are free to embrace the cosmos. God’s saving goodness can lead people to these fulfilling relationships and enable their co-operation for the common good. Reconciliation with God is the foundation for a common good.

Jesus Christ embodies the generous goodness of God as he engages with humankind. The good revealed in Christ is in stark contrast to human sin. In Jesus Christ, the human condition is admitted and is forgiven by God. People’s estrangement from God is overcome and they are reconciled with God. God is startlingly generous to embrace what opposes God. Jesus Christ represents humankind such that people participate in reconciliation with God and can inherit the new humanity that Christ reveals. The resurrection reveals and is assurance of reconciliation. God’s goodness, therefore, provides reliable hope for ongoing relationship with God. In this encounter, people are enabled in the present to respond to a fulfilled future in Christ.

Jesus Christ reconciles people to God and makes plain God’s goodness as generous, unexpected, reconciliatory and reliable. Through Jesus Christ, people are enabled and fulfilled in their relationships that reflect this goodness. These good qualities enable forgiveness and repentance and the best relationships that constitute a common good. These good qualities can enable people to envisage and contribute to a common good. Jesus Christ leads people to this common good.
When Jesus Christ reveals God’s relationship to people, they are able to know that God engages them and be aware of their engagement as they respond. I explore in the next chapter the human response to God’s goodness in reconciled relationships that constitutes a common good.
Chapter 5 — Jesus Christ: in whom people respond for the common good

Introduction

Reconciliation in Jesus Christ leads to a human response that makes the common good conceptually and practically possible. People need to know and experience that they are participants in a relationship with God, even though the divine-human relationship is reliant on God. In this chapter, I consider that the way people can respond through increasing, and increasingly good, relationships leads to comprehension and action to pursue the common good.

Barth and his commentators point to God’s revealed intention for people’s reconciliation with God. In such a reconciled relationship, Barth’s treatment of people’s response provides important insights. I also engage with Fiddes, whose work emphasises human response as a present reality in salvation as reconciliation. In addition, I consider the emphasis on the social dimension of reconciliation with God by Constantineanu, a New Testament scholar.

Reconciliation is God’s initiative, so human response is precisely that. In this chapter, I discuss people’s response to what God has initiated and effected prior to and without people’s contribution. Recognition that Jesus Christ reveals and effects God’s forgiveness can lead people to respond positively, and experience transformation that reflects God’s goodness. Enabled and assured by God’s Spirit, people’s focus is the example of Jesus Christ. The qualities of God’s good relationship are reflected in people’s relationship in Christ with God and with one another. I conclude in this chapter that because people respond to God’s goodness in these good relationships, they can be willing and able to form the common good and consider it truly common to all.
The viewpoint of God-given human response to reconciliation

It is important for Barth that God accomplishes reconciliation, including people’s response. It is God’s initiative in Jesus Christ, deeply involved with human life, that accomplishes forgiveness and provides the foundation of human love. Similarly, the Holy Spirit enables a human response fit for the relationships that God has established.

Humankind does nothing to initiate the response because people have not paid attention to the relationship God intends (Barth, 1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 68). Barth refers to the prodigal son, who has abandoned his place with the father, indeed rejected his place, so humankind is in a country far from God and like the son (Lk. 15:19), no longer feel themselves to be God’s children (CD IV, 1, pp. 11–12). People failed to keep the covenant with God, yet the Son of God is sent to demonstrate the covenant will be kept (CD IV, 1, p. 72). There can be, therefore, no negotiated agreement by equal partners (CD IV, 1, p. 73). That God intends enemies to be friends is not conceived by humankind (CD IV, 1, p. 221). But God is the creator, so enables human love as something new in creation (CD IV, 2, p. 776–777). God gives in abundance and does not demand a contribution; God loves in freedom, so the relationship is not for God’s need, nor does God only love if people love (CD IV, 2, p. 777). It is God’s initiative, without equivalent reciprocation that enables people’s active response.

God’s concern extends to acceptance of the limitations of humanity and the proximity of their imperfections; Jesus Christ is the humble servant of humanity (CD IV, 1, pp. 158–159). God regards human life to the extent that, in Christ, the Son of God is willing to experience estrangement from God so that humanity is restored to God (CD IV, 1, p. 172). God is so much for humanity that they are included in the life of God (CD IV, 1, p. 215). Being itself is in relationship with humanity (CD IV, 1, p. 40). In Christ
the relationship is eternal (CD IV, 1, p. 314). It is God’s love that gives people their worth (CD IV, 2, p. 767). God’s loving involvement is the context for people’s response.

For Barth (1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 54) people respond in joy at the atonement that removes sin and its consequences. Most interestingly, as I shall discuss in this chapter, Barth (1981a, p. 30) describes people’s response as “free gratitude”. People respond to the “command” of “God’s free kindness” (1981a, p. 30) or to God’s grace or to God’s love (Barth, 1981a, p. 35). Barth (1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 15) describes people activated to gratitude by the extent of God’s grace as a rescue from disaster. If Barth refers to gratitude, I infer that this is a human response that denotes willingness to engage in relationship.

Barth (1958, CD IV, 2, p. 777) says the love of Jesus Christ is the basis and strength of human love for God. People’s love for God is an analogy or reflection of God’s love (CD IV, 2, p. 752). Barth (1958, p. 760) says:

Called and impelled on the basis of His action to us, our Christian love arises and takes place as the human act which answers and corresponds to His act. Only His act can be the basis of ours.

This selfless Christian love is in conflict with possessive love while both are present in human behaviour (CD IV, 2, pp. 741, 744–745). God’s love is therefore creative, waking a loving response as something new within humankind (CD IV, 2, p. 777).

When considering people’s response to God’s goodness and mercy, Barth (1958, CD IV, 2, p. 728) asks:

What can and should and must be done by the man to whom it is given in the quickening power of the Holy Spirit to accept the fact that God is for him in this way?

The Holy Spirit enables people to be aware of and involved in reconciliation with God (CD IV, 1, p. 645). People gratefully receive the direction of the Holy Spirit whose power was present at the resurrection (CD IV, 2, p. 402). The Spirit, moreover, witnesses to
people that they are children of God and can participate in the relationship of the Son to the Father (CD IV, 2, p. 778, citing Rom. 8:16). The Spirit gives people freedom to correspond to God’s love (CD IV, 2, p. 779). And it is the freedom to love as human beings and not to have to assume divine capacities (CD, IV, 2, p. 785). People’s response is enabled by God’s Spirit.

The only option, Barth (1956b, CD IV, 1, p. 43) proposes, is to act in accordance with the relationship with God as God has established it. Christ’s love is even for those who are at enmity with him and for whom he goes to the cross (CD IV, 1, p. 244). The response therefore to Christ is to surrender completely in love (CD IV, 2, p. 730). Christian love is to be concerned for others without expectation of response; to have the freedom to allow others to be whole without indebtedness; and to no longer be in control of the responses of others or the impact to self (CD IV, 2, p. 733). If the enemies are loved, there are no enemies to confront and interactions that rely on force are abolished (CD IV, 2, p. 550). God’s glory is revealed in the humility of Christ in human weakness and suffering (CD IV, 1, pp. 177, 188). If people trust God’s care, they need not fear force and cannot use it (CD IV, 2, p. 549). People may, in the strength and foundation of Christ’s faithfulness, respond to the loving relationship with the Father (CD IV, 2, p. 776). God establishes the kind of relationships with which people’s response is involved.

Barth focuses on God’s activity. Barth indicates and expects human response that God enables, but his emphasis does not tend to examine systematically the human response to God within a framework of reconciled relationships.

Aspects of human response to reconciliation with God

In contrast to Barth’s focus on divine activity, Fiddes has emphasised people’s need to respond as human beings to relationship with God. Objective salvation can only be the work of God, but people are subjectively involved in salvation when they respond
(Fiddes, 2009, p. 3). He describes reconciliation as forgiveness and repentance, which is the context for people’s conciliatory responses.

Fiddes (2009, pp. 9–10) discusses conciliatory human relationships, in which people respond to forgiveness with repentance; hence, it is important that people respond to God’s forgiveness, in their reconciliation with God. Both forgiveness and repentance are freely given. God’s freedom is apparent when Jesus Christ succumbs to weakness, ignominy and death, and overturns human expectations of divine power (Fiddes, 1989, p. 32). Christ’s self-giving power that takes him to the cross makes no demand upon people (p. 148). Similarly, Fiddes (1989, p. 111) notes people’s repentance is not a price paid to God who can only be moved to forgive on receipt of the payment. Fiddes (1989, p. 159) suggests that divine freedom, which has allowed humanity into the life of God, receives the human response to God’s love. Without receiving human love, divine love of creation would indeed be coercive as it would prevent people from participating in the relationship (p. 159). People may freely participate in repentant response to God’s forgiveness.

The Son of God incarnate can engage people in response because, as Fiddes (1989, pp. 180, 182) explains, he has complete knowledge of people’s confusion with the extent of human responsibility. God in Christ understands the endless doubt of whether all sin has been forgiven, and the guilt felt by more trivial social taboos (pp. 179, 181). Christ on the cross has not resorted to the usual machinations of human self-preservation and people’s pretences at self-estimation are undone by Christ’s generosity (p. 148). As people are included in Christ’s reconciliation, they are transformed to respond like Christ (p. 99). Jesus Christ both understands people and demonstrates how they can respond.
The Spirit can enable humankind to respond because of this divine knowledge of the human condition (Fiddes, 1989, p. 178). Fiddes (1989, p. 168) indicates:

that there is a movement within the being of God that is always opening up the hidden depths of fellowship. In the same way, the Spirit in scripture is associated with the future, breaking open history with the challenge of something new.

The Spirit’s creative encounter can enable people’s response.

Reconciliation always has a communal context; from the beginning of his ministry, the conciliatory presence of Jesus changed people to form a distinctive community (Fiddes, 1989, p. 162). Reconciliation in Christ also addresses people’s collective action in estrangement from God that took Christ to the cross (p. 197). Reconciliation is for people’s response in communal life.

Reconciliation and peace are central to human response. Fiddes (1989, p. 186) emphasises that free forgiveness is not a means to coerce people with reminders of their guilt. To try to understand why the opponent has their attitude is to work out how they can receive forgiveness (p. 174). Where there are none present who can directly forgive, people can be assured of the forgiveness of Christ (p. 185). Forgiveness for the opponent is to name the offence and forgive it, knowing that the opponent is not blameless (p. 173). Forgiveness includes resistance to the opponent’s outrage at needing forgiveness rather than the forgiver needing to admit their own offence (p. 174). And forgiveness includes resistance to the outrage by the opponent because they are asked to repent of the named offences that have been forgiven, rather than what the opponent thought was necessary to admit (p. 183). Yet, just as forgiveness is freely given, repentance is the free response (p. 172). Forgiveness awakens people to what is wrong and there can be mutual repentance in response to mutual forgiveness (p. 185). In the manner of Christ, divisive situations may be confronted, but the consequences of confrontation are accepted (pp. 205–206). Peacemaking can arise from people’s response in reconciliation.
Fiddes’s approach describes an identifiable human response to reconciliation with God. This response, demonstrated by Christ and enabled by the Spirit, provides possibilities for people’s interaction and for the nature of relationships. I am also interested in Constantineanu’s study that, like Fiddes, examines the involvement of the Spirit both in reconciled relationships and in the resultant community.

**Ideas of human community in response to reconciliation with God**

In his study of Paul’s writings, Constantineanu indicates that the Holy Spirit both brings the presence of God’s reconciliation and enables people’s response. In this context, he also describes people’s interaction in a community conditioned by that response.

Constantineanu (2010, p. 136, citing Rom. 8:9) states that it is God’s Spirit who enlivens people with Christ’s presence. Reconciliation is with and through Christ who is alive; whom the Spirit raised; whom the Spirit makes present; thus making reconciliation present for people (p. 94). People are united in Christ by God’s Spirit and are part of the Son’s continual life with the Father, in an attitude of submission and obedience, selflessness and reconciliation (pp. 135–136). There are ethical imperatives worked out from life in Christ, God’s love is both the basis of reconciliation and the criterion for conduct (Constantineanu, p. 152, citing Rom. 12:5). People moved by the Spirit are expected to act in sincere, Christ-like, faithful obedience (p. 138).

Paul declares that by the Holy Spirit people have hope in God’s peace through Jesus Christ (Constantineanu, 2010, p. 85, citing Rom. 5:1, 4). Constantineanu (2010, pp. 83–85, citing respectively Rom. 5:1; Is. 56:1–2; 59:8) proposes that Paul echoes Isaiah — restoration, righteousness, reconciliation and peace go together. More than individual tranquillity, God’s salvation involves social and political responses. Peace with God to which people are brought by God’s Spirit is also constructive peace with one another, not simply absence of conflict (pp. 84–86).
The foundation for Christian social behaviour for Constantineanu (2010, p. 74, citing II Cor. 5:16–17) is denoted by Pauls’ new perspective because he lives in Christ — open to Christ and others. Paul, therefore appeals to the Corinthians to behave in a conciliatory way towards others if they have accepted reconciliation in Christ (Constantineanu, p. 81, citing II Cor. 6:1–2). Christ has welcomed all in reconciliation with God, so Paul indicates that this is the model to imitate in Christian communities (Constantineanu, p. 105, citing Rom. 15:7). God has loved and forgiven everyone as enemies, so no discrimination can be made when encountering people (p. 105). If people are included in Christ’s life, then reconciliation extends between people, not only between people and God (p. 143). Paul, therefore, calls for mutual service, love and welcome on the basis and example of Christ (Constantineanu, p. 153, citing Rom. 15:3–8). Members should commit to mutual appreciation and esteem for their Christian community (Constantineanu, p. 158, citing Rom. 12:1–8). Paul warns against making distinctions between people based on their behaviour (Constantineanu, p. 173, citing Rom. 14–15). Unity does not mean uniformity and exclusion (p. 173). Consequently, Paul argues at length for reconciliation of Jews and gentiles and for some role for Jews as a whole (Constantineanu, p. 146, citing Rom. 9–11). Inclusion means to practise conciliation (Constantineanu, p. 173, citing Rom. 14:19). Even to refrain from helping opponents when they need it, is vengeance (p. 162). A Christian community not only acts in mutual love, but treats all people with blessing and peace, without vengeance, and repaying evil with good (Constantineanu, p. 154, citing Rom. 12:14–13:7).

Constantineanu considers that the response to the actual presence of Christ’s reconciliation is necessarily communal. People respond both because through the Spirit they live in the power of the living Christ and because it is imperative that their behaviour sincerely corresponds to Christ’s faithful, obedient and reconciliatory life.
The divine initiative and resultant Christian community are the context for people’s participation in reconciled relationships with God from the various viewpoints of Barth, Fiddes and Constatineanu. Such God-given good relationships can give rise to the concept of and activity for the common good. In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss how people’s responses give rise to these good relationships.

Christ’s completed reconciliation is the context for human response

Human response might appear to be a necessary contribution to reconciled relationships with God. As Barth indicates, a lack of human anticipation of God’s surprising freedom suggests otherwise. People respond to reconciliation complete in Christ rather than attempting their own initiative or contribution.

Human responses to God-given relationships, which give rise to the common good, preclude a human origin — response is participatory not contributory. Barth contrasts the human perspective with God’s persistence in restoring the relationship — there is no negotiated agreement between partners. Barth can point to humanity, who is far from marshalling resources to respond, and like the prodigal son hardly thinks the relationship is possible. I think that what people expected of Jesus’ life and death and their surprise at his resurrection indicate that people only envisage a limited capacity for themselves. God’s revelation lights up human life because reconciliation with God and the resultant good relationships give people understanding and enables them beyond human fallibility (as I discussed in the previous chapter). If people’s response to reconciliation with God is beyond their conception, the common good is dependent on relationships established in Jesus Christ rather than their own endeavours.

The surprising creativity of God’s good relationships removes people’s constraints (as I discussed in the previous chapter). Barth points to God, who as creator has freedom to enable something new. Fiddes indicates the unexpected when human
perceptions of divine power to impose or escape suffering are overturned as Jesus Christ succumbs to weakness and death. But divine power is revealed when the risen Christ promises anew for all creation. I infer that people, therefore, can respond without addition to this creativity in new life. Barth additionally indicates that God loves in freedom without needing the relationship or people’s contribution, so the generosity of God’s goodness means people do not have to despair about their contribution. Williams (2000, p. 248), moreover, notes that God does not defend a position, demanding to be appeased if slighted. Jesus offers relationship without discrimination in which he does not demand people compete for identity, status or security (Williams, 2000, p. 247). Lastly, Fiddes points to God forgiving unconditionally, without forgiveness that depends on people’s response. God is free to receive people’s response and therefore gives people freedom to respond within a relationship, without imposing. Because of God’s freedom for surprising creativity, people are consequently freed to respond and approach God.

Human response is not to complete what God has begun but to express confidence in what Christ has completed. Paul fulminates against those who would persuade the Galatian church that something extra of their own was needed besides their faith in Christ (Gal. 4:8–11; 5:2). Reconciliation in Christ is said to be complete (Rom. 5:19 cited in J. Webster, 2003a, p. 117). Paul in his own conciliatory efforts, therefore, responds to the claim of Christ’s reconciliatory love (Rom. 5:14 cited in Victor Paul Furnish, 1984, p. 326). Redemption is already accomplished, and people are awakened to what Christ has done (McGrath, 1985, p. 209).53 People are free in Jesus Christ to respond as partners in God’s covenant because they have been reconciled to God in Jesus Christ (Nimmo, 2017, p. 187). People can respond confidently to their reconciliation reconciled in Christ.

53 McGrath is a Northern Irish Anglican theologian who has taught extensively on historical theology.
People are recipients of the initiative of God to which they can only respond. While people do respond, they are unable to anticipate salvation and cannot add to what is complete in Christ. But people need not be constrained by what they cannot achieve. Rather, God has given with such freedom that people can have confidence in the new possibilities open to them.

The possibilities of God’s freely loving relationships enable people to respond to reflect God’s reconciliation. People’s reflection of God’s goodness can lead to the concept and activity for the common good. I next discuss that God’s free, good and generous relationship has given people their self-worth and directs their response.

**God in Christ gives people their worth**

God has given people their worth. People’s existence is worth-while. People are therefore able to express themselves aware of their human worth. The way people respond (that I consider in the subsequent section) depends on God cherishing people and considering their response worthy.

The goodness of God has expressed such a care and concern for human life that God gives humankind worth. Barth describes the way God in Jesus Christ has become completely involved in human life, and accepts human limitations, even the experience of estrangement from God. Christ thereby serves humanity and includes people in the life of God. God’s forgiveness and reconciliation means God’s relationship with each human life is important and this makes each person worthy simply as themselves.

God gives people worth in the way they have freedom to respond. Barth states that God gives people the parameters of existence, universality and eternity in which they can participate in the relationship. God’s goodness is such that it places no limits on the relationship with humanity. People have worth because as Williams (2000, p. 249) notes, they are given time and space to participate in the relationship. I note that Jesus lives in
earthly time at an earthly pace that establishes a relationship with the first disciples. This same time and space is given to people to respond to the relationship God has initiated.

God regards people well, so they have self-worth. People are considered in the same way the Father considers the Son, so people are given identity, meaning, and purpose (Jenson, 2003, p. 166). Moreover the resurrection of Jesus gives people joy because of the eternal worth of human life (Balthasar, 1989, pp. 534–535). Barth states that the love of God enables people’s self-worth. Augustine (d. 428 / 1991, IV.1.2) said that people needed to know that God loved them. Whether or not they were confident about themselves, people need to know about their worth to God rather than in their own estimation. Consequently, the gift of self-worth does not flatter people but directs their response as recipients of God.

The way in which God has conducted the relationship with humankind directs people to the conduct of relationships for the common good. God has esteemed people, therefore, the common good is found when all people are esteemed. The common good arises from people having worth prior to, not as a result of, a quest for the common good. The common good is not an ideal that gives people worth as their lives are expended on it. Rather, the common good is expressed in the regard for each person’s worth. Similarly, a quest for the common good does not constrain the time and space for people to respond in relationships. Finally, since God bestows worth such that people have a sense of self-worth then analogously, the common good results when people can rely on a sense of others’ endorsement of their own worth.

The gift of such worth by God, does not, however, lead to hubris. I next discuss how people respond genuinely when they accept this sense of self rather than their own

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34 An ecumenical Lutheran systematic theologian, Trinitarian and Barth scholar.
construction. This response to the goodness of God indicates the character of the relationships in which people seek the common good.

**God’s goodness is the foundation of human response in Jesus Christ**

As God gives people their worth, they respond distinctively. Barth’s emphasis is on God’s action and not focussed on human response, although, he does identify joy, gratitude, and the reflection of God’s love as individual aspects of human response. Fiddes is concerned with people’s involvement in God’s forgiveness through repentance. I will consider people’s joy, humility, gratitude and repentance as they respond, recognising their reconciled relationship in Jesus Christ. People do not simply acknowledge God’s goodness, but as people respond, they are changed to reflect that goodness. Where people can recognise their response to God’s goodness, they can recognise the possibility of relationships and the outcome in the common good.

In considering the metaphor of reconciliation for salvation, which I discussed in the previous chapter, my interest is in both God’s initiative and human response that involves forgiveness and repentance in reconciled relationships. Barth is focussed on God’s action, so he does not systematically explore the human response within such relationships. It is Biggar’s (1993, p. 141) observation that Barth is so suspicious of the susceptibility of human delusions that he preferred to keep discussion of human activity at a distance rather than embark on the discussion with careful qualification. As I have discussed, God undoubtedly initiates reconciled relationships with humanity. I continue, therefore, with people’s response to God’s goodness within those relationships that lead people to reflect the qualities of God’s goodness in all their relationships. Reconciliation in Christ leads to transformative relationships that reflect the goodness of God and make for the greatest possibility for the common good. God’s disclosure of relationship with humankind is the launching place for considering how the impact of those relationships
leads to the common good. Biggar (2000, p. 219) notes that for Barth there is mainly an expectation that people reconciled to God move from dependence to trust. Although, there are some more detailed insights, such as joy, gratitude and reflection of God’s love. I intend to place more emphasis on this human transformation within a theme of reconciled relationships.

I am interested in reconciliation with God and the human response as situations people can recognise. Reconciled human relationships involve both forgiveness and repentance. Fiddes, therefore, presses the importance of people’s response to God’s forgiveness, so that they participate in a recognisable relationship with God. It is impossible to determine impartially people’s autonomous contribution to salvation in their response, but the limit of people’s contribution does not preclude their response. Fiddes is concerned that the revelation of salvation in Jesus Christ becomes too objectively detached from peoples’ current lives. I think the human encounter with Jesus Christ, in all his qualities that people recognise, enables an understandable human response. While sustained by God, people engage with the possibility of a recognisable human response. I find it is most significant that when people are genuinely and knowingly involved in their response, there is a possibility of people’s transformation. As people reflect the goodness of God in all their relationships they are enabled to envisage and form the common good. My discussion, consequently, continues with aspects of human response arising from reconciliation with God.

Jesus Christ brings joy to people. People’s assurance that they are reconciled with God lightens their hearts. Fiddes describes Jesus Christ’s complete knowledge of human responsibility, doubt and worrying guilt. Moreover, people can identify with Christ’s perfect response to reconciliation with God, regardless of their own capability or understanding (Rae, 2003, p. 105). Barth indicates that people respond to the atonement
with joy because they could not claim to remove the estrangement of sin by themselves. Rae (2003, p. 105)\textsuperscript{55} points to people’s joy and gratitude for reconciliation that people could not achieve. God ensures people have worth as those in reconciled relationship with God, because God in Christ, in solidarity with people has done what they cannot. There is joy, because it is God who has given people such worth. God’s goodness has been revealed in Christ and can be enjoyed as people are reconciled in Christ.

In Christ, people are humble. People humbly respond in their reconciled relationship with God because they have a sense that their self-estimation is limited and ineffectual. The extent of God’s self-disclosure and interest in humankind means people recognise their God-given worth, and this recognition actually engenders humility (McIntosh, 2008, p. 6). Fiddes indicates that Christ does not resort to human self-preservation and freely acts for humankind without demanding a contribution. People recognise that Christ’s generosity shows up their own self-estimation. Moreover, God’s mercy extends to all so no individual or group may feel exclusively chosen (Rom. 11:20, 32 cited in Moltmann, 2010, p. 148). People are humbled as they recognise the limits of their self-sufficiency and the extent of Christ’s generosity. People are able to respond to relationship with God, joyfully, humbly and gratefuly.

Jesus Christ brings joy and invokes gratitude. Barth describes people responding freely with gratitude because God has freely encountered them with kindness, grace and love. Barth talks about a command expressed in kindness that leads to human obedience expressed in gratitude, and fellowship between God and humankind. The nature of the command and obedience that Barth describes is not divine compulsion, but reaching out without constraints so that people can similarly respond. The worth and self-worth that God bestows on people can never be matched by them, so they can only respond

\textsuperscript{55} A New Zealand theologian interested in Christology in the contemporary world, Rae here writes on the importance of the community in Christ’s reconciliation.

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gratefully without any obligation to attempt to repay God. In addition, Barth describes God’s self-giving love evoking self-giving human love that God wills possible for human nature. This self-giving love is quite distinct from self-satisfying human love. Barth considers that both selfless and controlling loves are simultaneously present in people. Furthermore, in his study of human motivation and capacity for affection, Lewis (1960, pp. 146, 147) proposes that people recognise that they willingly receive and selflessly give love. Lewis (1960, p. 148) also proposes that God enables people to recognise the extent of their human need to give and receive love without calculating desert. I consider that people respond in gratitude because they receive God’s love, but also because they are able to respond as God intends. People are grateful because God evokes and fulfils human possibilities for relationships. God counts people worthy of such relationships, so calls forth their response as grateful recipients.

The love of Christ both evokes and enables a response. Barth stated that the love of Jesus Christ is the basis and strength of human love for God. Barth describes human response to God as a reflection or analogy; reliant on, evoked by and called to God, people respond with the kind of self-giving love that God has for them. Response to and correspondence with divine love is new and unexpected in the world (Nimmo, 2017, p. 162). As people participate in Christ, as the new humanity, they are able to respond to and reflect God’s love and the attendant good qualities.

To respond to the love of Christ people must know they respond. Cristoph Schwöbel (2003, p. 32) describes revelation as fully known when people respond in their reconciled relationship. There must therefore, be a balance, Kärkkäinen (2013, p. 369) notes, between the work of Christ as complete and that people need to respond. The objectivity of God’s act should not be divided from the subjective human response (Cristoph Schwöbel, 2003, p. 31). To be the kind of relationship that Brümmer (1993, pp.
158–159, 161, 163–165) describes as personal, people are neither controlled nor interchangeable, and will actively participate in the relationship with God. People humanly comprehend the love and gratitude to which Barth refers, even as Jesus Christ enables people’s participation. Consequently, for people to participate in a relationship, they must knowingly and freely respond. People know they love God because they respond in their reconciled relationship with God.

People can respond in the relationship with repentance because they know they are reconciled by God’s forgiveness. God in Christ undergoes the pain of forgiveness and admission of the sin forgiven (recalling the previous chapter). By participation in Christ people can respond. Moreover, people respond subjectively as they recognise Jesus Christ in the human situation. Fiddes indicates that the presumption of forgiveness by another, imperfect person, feels like an accusation. But when Christ forgives, there is no presumption to cause offence because Jesus Christ has not contributed to human sin. Yet at the same time, Jesus Christ has identified completely with the consequences of human sin, so human sin is made plain. People can knowingly and willingly repent because they have no reason to be offended and have every reason to recognise what God has forgiven.

In Jesus Christ, people respond to participate in a distinctive reconciled relationship. In Jesus Christ, the characteristics of God’s goodness in such a relationship (from the previous chapter) are shown to be creatively generous, faithful, innovative and conciliatory. When people humbly receive God’s forgiveness and affirm their repentance they engage in conciliatory attitudes. God’s generosity evokes self-giving behaviour because people humbly recognise the worth bestowed on them. In their joy for God’s surprising creativity, people can be lifted creatively beyond their expectations. People’s grateful reach beyond themselves can lead to commitment, trust and faithfulness. God’s goodness enables the reconciled relationship that God intends (as I discussed in the
previous chapter), and in their new humanity, through Jesus Christ, people reflect God’s goodness. People therefore willingly respond in relationships characterised by God’s goodness. In their response in such a relationship, people trust God and are open to God’s creative generosity; people know that relationships can be mended because God is self-giving. Because of God’s goodness, people respond within and are oriented to a generous, conciliatory, creative and faithful relationship.

People’s response to and in Jesus Christ means their behaviour changes accordingly. When people respond to God’s faithfulness and rely on this relationship, people are more reliable in their relationships with others and treat them less circumspectly. If God is creative, then people can be open to what is brought to them in others. Acceptance of God’s generosity opens people’s selflessness for others. God in Christ forgives people; enabling people to be humble and repentant. People can recognise their own failure in relationships towards others, show the same repentance, and be willing to forgive other people’s failures. Constantineanu (noting II Cor. 5:16–17) proposes that Paul perceived that he had a new perspective because he was oriented to life in Christ. Therefore, noting Paul’s appeal to the Corinthians to reflect the reconciliation they have accepted in Christ (II Cor. 6:1–2). Fiddes (as noted earlier) maintains that people who share in reconciliation through Christ also share in Christ’s relationship with the Father and corresponding behaviour. Paul has discovered people are enabled by and respond to reflect Christ’s love—a self-giving life (II Cor. 5:14–15 cited in Cole, 2009, p. 192). People’s behaviour within relationships changes as they respond to God’s goodness and reconciliation; and thereby their character and disposition reflects God’s goodness.

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56 An Australian Anglican theologian, Cole is here writing on the significance of Christ’s reconciliation.
To sum up: people not only respond to God’s goodness but respond to reflect God’s goodness. People are overjoyed to find they are considered of such worth. People feel humbled because God’s selflessness has touched them and caused honest reflection on their self-sufficient lives. People recognise their own failings, so are grateful for God’s generosity to creation. Subjectively people know themselves to participate in a relationship in which they freely respond to God’s forgiveness and love. Objectively, people through Christ are included in the new humanity in which they respond to reflect God’s love. As people participate in a reconciled relationship they respond to God’s forgiveness with repentance. The goodness of God in this reconciled relationship has the characteristics of generosity, creative innovation, reconciliation and faithfulness. As people participate in the relationship with God, they are transformed to reflect these characteristics and are changed in their relational behaviour and thus in their characters. It is this transformation to conform to the goodness of God that enables the spread of God’s saving relationships in people’s lives with one another. Based on such relationships, response to the goodness of God can enable the conception and demonstration of an ever more common good.

While God allows people to respond freely and relationally to God’s reconciliation, people do not act in isolation. I consider next that God’s goodness means that God sends the Holy Spirit to enable people’s response.

**God’s Spirit enables response in Jesus Christ**

The Holy Spirit brings the transformative presence of Christ. Barth’s emphasis is that the Spirit enables people to participate in relationship with God. I discuss how the Spirit makes reconciliation in Christ continuously present to people, and thereby enables a Christlike response. Constantineanu indicates that consequently people live in reconciled relationships with God and one another in Christ. Such relationships are
characteristic of the goodness of God, and through the Spirit, they extend as the common good.

People live in the present life and reconciliation of Jesus Christ. Constantineanu (noting Rom. 8:9), indicates that God’s Spirit enlivens people with Christ’s presence. This is the same Spirit that raised Christ that brings life to people (Rom. 8:11 cited in Cole, 2009, p. 159). C. E. Gunton (2003b, p. 169) proposes that through the Spirit, therefore, people receive Christ and are empowered as Jesus is. Consequently, Constantineanu maintains that people who are united in Christ through the power of the Spirit, are part of the Son’s continual life with the Father and the attendant good qualities of the relationship. I think the Spirit demonstrates power that harmoniously both brings the divine presence and enables the relationship. God’s Spirit by whom people live in Christ’s presence, enables them to approach a corresponding life.

The Spirit brings the presence of Christ and makes people present to reconciliation in Christ. The Spirit was with Jesus, the Son of God, as he undertook the human condition. God knows humankind inside and out. Fiddes indicates that with the same closeness to humankind, the Spirit can enable people to respond. Barth considers that the Spirit that declares the resurrection also enables people to be involved in Christ’s reconciliatory act. The Spirit not only enables Christ’s presence with people but also enables their participation in reconciliation with God.

The reconciled fellowship of the Spirit continues. The goodness of God results in reconciliation completed in Christ and results in the Spirit’s continual inspiration of people’s response to Christ (Rae, 2003, p. 94). Fiddes describes the Spirit as waking unexpected depths of fellowship and challenging history with what is new. In this way the Spirit always anticipates the reconciliation of all things (C. E. Gunton, 2003b, p. 170). I observe here that the sending of the Spirit is an open-ended promise in people’s lives
and for their relationships. God’s goodness invites people into relationships that have a trustworthy future.

The Spirit enables a response like Christ’s for those who live in Christ’s presence, and who are continually invited into reconciliation with God. It is participation in Christ that enables imitation of him (Hunsinger, 1998, p. 83, commenting on Barth). Williams (2000, p. 124) describes the Spirit urging people, like the Son, to a relationship with the Father, so that knowing the Father’s and love and acceptance, people may live a vulnerable and selfless life. Consequently, the reconciled relationship that people experience through the Spirit also enables them to be conciliatory (J. Webster, 2003a, p. 120). Barth notes that the freedom given by the Spirit to imitate and correspond to God’s love is also freedom to be human without the requirement to assume divine capacities. God’s goodness through the Spirit enables people to imitate Jesus the Son of Man in their relationships.

The Spirit brings Christ among all of people’s relationships. Constantineanu proposes (using Rom.14:10) that self-giving service and love for one another marks people’s lives. Moreover (noting Rom. 5:1, 4), by the Spirit people trust in God’s peace and therefore expect a constructive peace with one another. The Spirit inducts people into generous and loving relationships that reflect God’s goodness. The Spirit of God brings Christ and therefore God’s goodness into all of people’s relationships. People’s response to God in Christ means that God’s good relationships are the basis for every relationship. The common good arises and relies on the foundation of the widest spread of these relationships.

God’s Spirit, through whom Jesus Christ was raised to life, brings the presence of Christ, who lives and reconciles, into people’s lives. The Spirit promises the future in that presence. Awakened by the same Spirit, people respond in the reconciled relationship in
growing fellowship with God and one another. The Spirit has enabled people to participate in these relationships that reflect the goodness of God and, therefore, lead to the common good.

The Spirit brings Christ into people’s lives, which I have already suggested means conciliatory and generous relationships. Jesus Christ is the complete exemplar of God’s goodness, so I next discuss how the goodness of God, in Christ, enables and characterises people’s response in these relationships, which leads to the common good.

**Jesus Christ is the exemplar**

People are living in Christ who lives. People reconciled through Christ are led to reflect the humble obedience and love of Christ in their faith, reconciliation and service. People’s lives are enabled to be Christlike in the goodness that Christ reveals as selfless, forgiving and faithful, and that confounds human definitions. Barth and Williams notably describe the way Christ’s behaviour differs from human expectations. I will argue that as people’s relationships reflect the goodness of God revealed in Christ, people respond to be a Christlike community that seeks the common good.

Life in Christ means living like the Christ who lives. Jesus Christ who lived a human life is raised (Lorenzen, 1995, p. 218). Jesus Christ leads a new humanity in the risen life that people may share, as I indicated in the previous chapter. As Christ was raised for humanity, so people may now live for him and through him in a new era (II Cor 5:15 cited in Thrall, 1994, p. 412). It is the life like Jesus’ earthly life that people now share in the risen Jesus (Lorenzen, 1995, p. 218), therefore is a life where the cross is also still present (II Cor. 4:8–10 cited by Lorenzen, 1995, p. 217). Christ has gone to the cross because he led an unexpectedly selfless, forgiving and faithful life. It is this kind of life in which people share. Because Christ lives, people may live in Christ in a Christlike way.
People live like Christ reconciled with God through Christ. The same goodness of Christ (as I discussed in the previous chapter) establishes the relationship and empowers people to participate — adopting Christ’s goodness. The strength of Christ’s work is his humble, selfless, faithfulness in obedience to the Father. As I have discussed, people are humbled and grateful for what God, in Christ, has done and Barth indicates that gratitude leads to obedience. The strength of Christ’s humility enables people’s relationship with God through their own humility. In awe-filled respect, in response to the gift that discloses the limits of self-sufficiency, people willingly and faithfully seek to behave as Christ reveals and as God wills. Moreover, gratitude for God’s goodness leads people to seek the same kind of relationship, in Christ with the Father (as I have noted previously). Reconciliation through Jesus Christ means that people are able to respond in the same kind of reconciliatory relationships (Cristoph Schwöbel, 2003, p. 31). It is ultimately, a response to the person of Christ. If Christ’s love has a claim on people, they are claimed for life with Christ (II Cor. 5:14 cited by Victor Paul Furnish, 1984, p. 325). Paul says he is “beside himself”, not acting to expected norms; because of God he is acting in his right mind for others; living for Christ means no longer living for oneself (Victor Paul Furnish, 1984, p. 325, citing II Cor. 5:13, 15). In Christ’s love, people are restrained from selfishness and urged on to service (Victor Paul Furnish, 1984, p. 326). Life in Christ means to live responsively in the reconciled relationship with faithful obedience, reconciliatory love, and surprising selflessness — reflecting the goodness of God.

Christ’s selflessness reveals God’s goodness. Williams (2000, p. 254) indicates that Christ is an example of selfless regard for others. Barth describes Christ’s love in which he is selfless for his enemies; the appropriate response is surrender in offering love.

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57 Constantineanu has this as more of an imperative to act in accordance with the character revealed by Christ. He indicates that God’s act of reconciliation is the basis for people’s conciliatory behaviour but does not investigate the way in which people’s behaviour transforms in response to God’s reconciliatory goodness.
Such selflessness means concern for others, accepting the impact to self without controlling other’s responses. To imitate Christ and the generosity of God’s goodness means to act outside of self.

Christ’s life also demonstrates God’s goodness in reconciliation. God’s love is unstinting and demonstrates God’s concern for all regardless of whether they consider themselves to have good relationships with God — bestowing sun and rain to all (Mt. 5:44–45). Jesus describes God’s willingness to forgive at the end of the Lord’s prayer (Mt. 6:14–15 cited in Williams, 2000, p. 258). Jesus therefore, urges people to act to others as God does. Jesus Christ has demonstrated God’s forgiveness and reconciliation by taking the non-violent and suffering path, serving and acting inclusively for others (De Gruchy, 2002, p. 63). Paul (Rom. 15:7), notes Constatineanu, encourages people to imitate Christ’s reconciliatory welcome. To be Christlike is always to intend to reconcile; to forgive others as the good God does.

The life of Christ was unexpected, revealing God’s goodness has unforeseen potential for human life. Williams (2000, p. 121) notes that Jesus rejects the coercive power enslaving the world. Barth states that God’s glory is revealed in Christ’s humility, weakness and suffering. Weakness and powerlessness undoes the power of the world. Barth says that trusting in God people neither fear nor use force; rather than destroy relationships, those who were enemies are loved and coercion fails. Nor, Williams (2000, p. 122) notes, do people avoid encounters, open to the hurtful world, they accept humiliation and suffering. To live in Christ, like Christ, is to live with the reversal of expected attitudes, unpicking barriers to relationships, and receptive to God’s creative goodness.

In all of Christ’s self-giving, conciliatory and unexpected life, he is faithful. Jesus faithfully responds to the Father, rejects alternative options (at his temptation, Mt. 4:1–
11) and maintains the commitment to the bitter (in Gethsemane, Mt. 26:39) and bitterest (his forsakenness on the cross, Mt. 27:45–50) end. It is Christ’s faithfulness that not only is an example but changes the situation for everybody else (Cole, 2009, p. 112). Christ’s faithfulness that brings people hope (Heb 3:1–3 cited by Cole, 2009, p. 110) makes God’s goodness reliable. Christ’s faithfulness, notes Barth, is the strength in which people respond to God. The faithfulness of Christ enables faith in Christ to be Christlike. God’s goodness forms people for faithful relationships that follow the example of Christ.

To live like Christ is to be part of the community that forms around him. Fiddes indicates that from the beginning of his ministry, the conciliatory presence of Jesus changed people to form a distinctive community. Jesus was inclusive in his relationships, actively receiving and forgiving people, and accepting their change of heart and behaviour — the healed paralytic (Mat. 9:2); Matthew the tax-collector (Mat. 9:10–13); and the Canaanite woman (Mat. 15:21–28). People’s relationships with one another change to be like Christ. People behave inclusively, they interact, accept, and reconcile with one another, and thus form community. The risen Christ invites people to be a community of those reconciled through him (Mat. 28:19–20). People can be conciliatory because of reconciliation in Christ; to make peace because in Christ they have peace with God; and to welcome strangers because in Christ they are welcomed by God (J. Webster, 2003a, p. 120). The goodness of God, revealed in reconciliation in Jesus Christ, leads to formation of a community held together by reconciled relationships that reflect the goodness of God. Such a community will seek the most widespread common good because these relationships are expansive, endeavouring to include people in God’s goodness.

I have considered that people respond to the living Christ whose life denotes the reconciliation of humankind with God. Response to Christ’s example is not, therefore, a human decision to choose a passive exemplary template. Response to Christ’s example is
to respond to the conciliatory qualities that first made response possible. The strength of Jesus Christ’s obedience enables people to respond in awe and obedience to God’s gift. Jesus Christ reveals those selfless, faithful, creative and conciliatory qualities in human life in human relationships, and people follow Christ’s example as they seek the same kind of qualities. Consequently, people respond to Christ’s example in their robust and ever-expansive community. The common good relies on these relationships and the community that forms. The goodness of God, revealed in Jesus Christ, demonstrates and makes possible a community that seeks an ever-expansive common good.

So far, I have considered that people respond knowingly and willingly to participate in the reconciled relationship with God. God’s Spirit enables people to participate in the presence of Christ. As people respond they are transformed to be more like Christ’s example of the goodness of God. Reconciled relationships are possible, as is participation in an ever-expansive community that seeks and demonstrates the common good. In the final part of this chapter, I consider how God’s goodness manifests in community and what kind of common good arises.

In Jesus Christ response is always communal

Reconciliation in Jesus Christ can transform people to seek the best relationships with one another and form community. I next examine how universal reconciliation in Jesus Christ leads people to engage with and treat every other as worthy. What people do intentionally in the resultant community blesses all members and other communities regardless so that there is a common good. In such a community, seeking the common good is more important than competition and status. As both Constantineanu and Fiddes indicate, this Christian community can and needs always to endeavour to be reconciled, seek peace and reject conflict. I will consider that this is the work of the community that seeks and demonstrates the common good.
In Christ, God has reconciled the world, so the relationship with God is for every person. The Christian community tradition is to include prayers for everybody, regardless of membership, because God has reconciled them all (Rae, 2003, p. 107). Christ brings universal reconciliation, so all people may share the same reconciliation (II Cor. 5:19 cited in Thrall, 1994, p. 436). The love of Christ makes a complete claim for all (II Cor. 5:14 cited by Victor Paul Furnish, 1984, p. 309). Constantineanu indicates that if God has loved and forgiven estranged humankind, people cannot discriminate as they encounter each other. I consider here that God offers and enables the same relationship to each person. God’s equal regard is the basis for people’s mutual engagement. If God includes all, there need be no limit to reflection of reconciliation with God in every human relationship, and therefore seeking a truly common good.

As Christ is for all humankind, people respond by being Christlike for all. Constantineanu proposes that if people participate in Christ in reconciliation with God, reconciliation extends between people because Christ’s life is present among them. Paul can therefore call for mutual service, love and welcome based on Christ’s example (Rom. 15:3–8). Moreover, De Gruchy (2002, p. 93) indicates that the Holy Spirit enables people to live this conciliatory life together. Indeed we cannot regard ourselves as isolated in our relationship with God because what we do affects others whether intended or not (Rae, 2003, p. 101). I concur that reconciliation with God can lead to treating others in a Christlike way through reconciled relationships that God’s goodness invokes. There can be an environment of relationships that are trustworthy and nurture everybody. Treatment of all encountered in conciliatory and selfless relationships, best places people to seek the common good together.

The common good arises in such conciliatory communities because people discover other people’s worth. As I have discussed earlier, people’s response to the
reconciled relationship with God transforms them to reflect God’s goodness and love. People’s response to love God will also change them to love others (McIntosh, 2008, p. 6). God has treated everybody as worthy, so each person should recognise their own and each other’s worth (McIntosh, 2008, p. 6). I think that openness to God’s surprise and creativity leads to discovering the other person. As people discover and accept the worth of others, people can change and respond generously. The generosity and creativity of God’s goodness energises human life together. People benefit from transformations that are not part of their immediate exchanges. People can discover the extent to which they depend, not on themselves, nor on specific individual repayments, but on the general goodness and good will in a community. There is a common good in these benefits as people respond to one another out of God’s goodness.

The common good is also founded on people’s discovery that others consider them worthy. People know that God loves them and experience this in the love of their neighbours. People know themselves through their relationships in which their responses are disclosed and nourished (De Gruchy, 2002, p. 91). Human flourishing comes from knowing oneself cared for and from caring for others; knowing that this love is from God and of God, from neighbours and for them (Volf, 2011, p. 72). As I discussed earlier, human relationships include the need for love and to reach out in offering love. Just as people respond joyfully, humbly and gratefully to God, other people’s expression of their worth leads people to delight in each other, and humbly, gratefully and willingly to respond to one another. The human appreciation of the goodness of God is, therefore, effective through relationships with others. Whether it is the direct benefit of a good relationship or the overflow of indiscriminate nurturing, the goodness of God nourishes people. There can be discovery of the extent of people’s dependence on such communal nurture. Regardless of individual contributions, this goodness of God is the common good that everyone enjoys.
The common good depends on community formed by conciliatory relationships that reflect the goodness of God. The common good relies on this deliberate kind of common life and the abundance that flows from it for everybody and anybody. To be in Christ means loving and serving the neighbour (Gal. 5:6, 13–15 cited in Victor Paul Furnish, 1984, p. 328). To be in accord with Christ is to be concerned with what is best for the neighbour (Rom. 15:1–6 cited in Victor Paul Furnish, 1984, p. 329). Response in Christ to God’s goodness, as I noted, leads to generous, conciliatory, faithful and therefore, mutual service. “Christian service has the character of worship and [...] offering of love to one’s neighbour, is to give glory to God” (Rae, 2003, p. 105).

Reconciliation with God leads people to accept they are living as the community of “God’s reconciling love, forgiveness and grace” (De Gruchy, 2002, p. 93). I affirm that a community is formed from these conciliatory and self-giving relationships that trust in God’s creative and surprising innovation. As with each individual response, people are conscious that they are forming community, with these kinds of relationships, arising from the goodness of God. Furthermore, God’s goodness is surprising and creative, so that such communities can provide benefits that overflow because people are collectively generous, trustworthy, hopeful and conciliatory; providing a surplus nurturing for anybody. There is a common good because a community formed from reconciled relationships works deliberately for people’s good, and because of their response to God’s goodness there is an overabundance to be enjoyed by everybody.

Communities formed by God’s universal reconciliatory goodness can only seek reconciled relationships with and the common good of other communities. Each person is reconciled with God, but people also need collective reconciliation. As I discussed in the previous chapter, people’s individual estrangement means there is also collective estrangement from God. Fiddes notes that participating in reconciliation in Christ also addresses people’s collective action in estrangement from God that took Christ to the
I concur that God forgives people’s contribution to collective separation from God. People need forgiveness for their part in separating not just themselves but others from God. If God can forgive collective identification with some other cause that separated the community from God, then the causes that divide people into separate groups can also be reconciled. Reconciliation in Christ has meant that identification with nation, culture, ethnicity or race is secondary (Cristoph Schwöbel, 2003, p. 37). Consequently, Constantineanu notes that Paul argued at length (Rom. 9–11) for reconciliation of Jews and gentiles. A community as a whole, reconciled to God, can seek the common good for all other groups encountered. This common good arises from reconciled relationships that reflect God’s goodness and the abundance that flows there from.

I maintain that God’s goodness is manifest in deliberate communities whose benefits overflow, exhibiting the common good. People’s transformation in response to God and one another, enables them to recognise and work for such good communities. In these communities, I next consider how the common good will take priority over competition and status. Such inclusive communities can seek the common good as they work to restore relationships and intend widespread peace.

In seeking the common good, there is no need for competition. First, as Williams (2000, pp. 247–248) indicates, Jesus Christ sustains others rather than posing a threat by his self-promotion. People act differently to others when unconcerned with defence of their status, (p. 244). As I have argued, people are able to respond to Christ’s non-threatening goodness with selfless, trustworthy, creative reconciliation. People can live in a community of mutual generosity and trust without fear of or attempts to preserve their status against others (p. 245). Second, redistribution of goods reflects a community not tied to security and self-regard in possessions (Moltmann, 2010, p. 162, citing Acts 4:32–37). Because God gives generously, people need not be anxious about
self-preservation (Mt. 6:25–33). Third, the common good does not entail coercive relationships as these are rejected by the cross and resurrection (Fergusson, 1998, p. 58). Relationships are intended without fear of or the desire for power (Fergusson, 1998, p. 58). Additionally, Williams (2000, p. 259) indicates that people need not seek revenge for their loss of power, but accept their vulnerability. I infer that if people no longer seek moral prestige, social status or control, people can give of themselves. People need no longer defend themselves by status, security or power, but can act vulnerably for each other within their community. The common good is present because in response to God’s goodness, people are trustworthy and selfless.

There is a common good because inclusion in relationships comes before this competition for status. Jesus frequently taught the doubtfulness of seeking honour (when James and John request preference, Mk. 10:35–45; in the parable of the Pharisee and tax-collector, Lk. 18:9–14) and bewildered his disciples by his consideration of the lowly (the children brought to him, Mk. 10:13–16; the demands of the blind man at Jericho, Lk. 18:35–43). Williams (2002, p. 6, citing Mat.7:1–2) considers that Jesus taught that making these judgements left out both excluder and excluded. Furthermore, Constantineanu maintains that Paul warns against distinguishing between people based on their behaviour (Rom. 14–15); unity does not mean uniformity and exclusion. No clear line can be drawn around those who are correct, so no one can be abandoned in disgust (Volf, 1996, pp. 83, 85). To treat all people as worthy and to put good relationships with them first means exclusion is rejected and the common good can be most widespread.

The more a community is inclusive, the more likely the differences between people; to reflect God’s goodness is always to look to reconcile differences. Intentional effort is necessary and the pain exemplified by Christ may be present as people seek and demonstrate a truly widespread common good.
To reconcile relationships for the common good, necessitates offering forgiveness. As I have discussed (in the previous chapter), forgiveness is offered without any demand for repayment from those forgiven (Cristoph Schwöbel, 2003, p. 35). Therefore, Fiddes notes, forgiveness is not a means of leverage by reminding people of their guilt. And Constantineanu considers that even neutral behaviour to struggling opponents is vengeance. Indeed, the humanity of oppressive opponents can be discovered and the love of God imitated, because such opposition to Jesus Christ does not end with the triumph of force (Volf, 1996, p. 124). Further, Fiddes considers that if the opponent’s attitude is understood, the way they can receive forgiveness is also understood. To feel understood, releases the opponent’s response. And Christ’s forgiveness can assure people where none present can directly forgive. I think a community needs always to look for mutual understanding so that they reflect the goodness of God. By continually offering forgiveness, relationships improve and the common good is more tangible for the community.

To seek the common good is to accept the pain of forgiveness. Fiddes describes forgiveness as naming offences to opponents who are not blameless and resisting their outrage because the forgiver also has faults. There is a risk that generosity will be rejected (Volf, 1996, p. 26). Sometimes, after forgiving, all the parties can do is part from each other (Volf, 1996, p. 126). Nonetheless, recognising the opponents outrage and forgiving them provides healing both for the opponent and for the forgiver, whose own behaviour contributed to the opposition (De Gruchy, 2002, p. 170). There is pain and effort in naming offences and resisting people’s recoil. The effort of forgiveness to maintain and restore relationships is to work for the common good.

To undertake the effort of repentantly responding to forgiveness is also to work for the common good. Repentance is possible because God has forgiven (Volf, 1996, p.
The recipient of forgiveness needs to repent to be fully aware of what they receive (Brümmer, 2005, p. 41). Furthermore, repentance is hard, one admits faulty behaviour to people who are themselves less than perfect (Volf, 1996, p. 119). Fiddes indicates that repentance specifically addresses what opponents forgive, rather than what people wish to admit. I note that repentance is to allow oneself dependently to receive the forgiveness of those thought to be opponents. Like freely given forgiveness, repentance is a free response that Fiddes describes as waking people so that there can be mutual repentance in response to mutual forgiveness. The effort of repentance means recognition that people’s interdependence and the maintenance of relationships are most important. The effort for the best, reconciled, relationships is the effort of working for the common good.

To seek the common good by working for the best relationships brings an overflow of peace. Christian communities not only act in mutual love, but Constantineanu notes (Rom. 12:14–13:7), they are urged to treat all people with blessing and peace, without vengeance, and repaying evil with good. Seeking peace can mean not only avoiding strife but actively opposing structures that divide. If reconciled relationships are fundamental to the common good, then seeking the common good means peaceable opposition to situations that impede reconciliation. Fiddes indicates that in the manner of Christ, divisive situations are confronted, but the consequences of confrontation are accepted. For example, the cleansing of the temple and the parable of the vineyard antagonises the religious leaders and authorities, but Jesus accepts his arrest (Lk. 19:45–48; 20:9–19; 22:47–53). There is no reason to respond in the same way as the divisive behaviour that is opposed (Cristoph Schwöbel, 2003, p. 35). People can oppose the strife-torn nastiness of the world because they are reconciled and have peace with God (Cristoph Schwöbel, 2003, p. 35). Because reconciliation with God means God is faithful, there is hope within which people can work for peace (Volf, 1996, p. 110). By seeking to dismantle social cycles and structures that cause conflict, working for peace allows peace...
to be widespread, beyond those immediately involved (De Gruchy, 2002, p. 174). Reconciliation with God and in corresponding hope conforms Christian communities to seek the most widespread peace in which the common good is manifest.

The universal goodness of God leads to formation of communities by people’s response to and reflection of God’s goodness in their relationships. As people are more self-giving, conciliatory and faithful, reflecting God’s surprising creativity, regardless of their individual contribution, a community can overflow with benefits that exhibit the common good. The common good is, therefore, present when people recognise that their relationships matter more than both competition and status. Recognition of the effort of repentance and forgiveness and people’s interdependence is also acceptance that people do not merely passively reflect God’s goodness. The common good, upheld by the best communal relationships, is founded on people’s continual efforts in reconciliation, rejecting conflict and seeking peace.

Conclusion

Reconciliation with God in Jesus Christ leads people to a distinct common good. People neither establish nor expect reconciliation with God. Nevertheless, people are able to approach this relationship because of the worth given to human life; to know and understand that God cherishes them. People’s response is, therefore, one of joy, humility and gratitude. Joyful that God has revealed the worth of humanity in Jesus Christ, and humbly recognising the selfless generosity of Christ, people are grateful for the measureless reach of God’s goodness and love. Forgiveness in Christ enables people knowingly and willingly to respond and repent. People’s response leads them to turn to others with generosity and faithfulness, reflecting Christ in reconciliatory and surprisingly creative relationships. In reconciliation through Jesus Christ, God’s goodness transforms people.
The Holy Spirit makes Christ and reconciliation in Christ ever present in people’s lives. People are drawn to fellowship in which their relationships reflect that reconciliation. Similarly, the example of Christ, which has already effected reconciliation, demonstrates the conduct of such reconciled relationships in his selfless, faithful, surprising and reconciliatory life. Transformed for such relationships, people are able to form a community that reflects these relationships.

The universal goodness of God means that people in a community reconciled in Christ can deliberately seek ever-widening good relationships that also overflow beyond expectations as the common good. A community where people bestow and receive worth places relationships before competition and status. The common good rests on the continual effort to be a reconciled community that also seeks peace with the community’s neighbours. This common good arises and is enabled because God has reconciled people in Jesus Christ.

Enabled by the Holy Spirit, people’s response to God’s goodness in the presence of Jesus Christ has made possible a community that seeks the common good. In the next chapter I consider that the Holy Spirit forms the fellowship of such a community in which people are sanctified through Christ. This community has a certain character, sustained by the distinct narrative of Jesus Christ. I discuss how this community character develops the community members so that they are oriented in Christ towards the common good.
Chapter 6 — The common good in the community of Christ

Introduction

Reconciliation in Christ enables a human community that nurtures human character, both giving rise to and sustaining the common good. In this chapter I discuss sanctification and development of virtue or character within a community in relation to the common good.

Consideration of sanctification within the Protestant tradition can be characterised by caution about human achievement and worthiness, as in Barth, Berkouwer and Bonhoeffer. The exception to this caution is the enthusiasm of Pentecostal tradition for the work of the Holy Spirit. From the Roman Catholic perspective, what matters is infusion of virtues by God’s grace, as well as the gifts of the Holy Spirit, that enable change in a person. Even the most cautious theologians, however, allow that people actively participate in their journey towards sanctification. Sanctification, initiated and intended by God, involves the Holy Spirit calling and leading people to conscious participation in distinctive community life.

Christian thought endorses that people change and develop as a consequence of their relationships with God and one another. Christian thought also endorses that people are limited in their knowledge and capability regarding their ultimate fulfilment of life with God. Human sin has divided people from God and one another; there is no alternative for human transformation than the divine initiative.

The discussion can, therefore, move to exploration of virtue and character without necessarily endorsing any notion of the person’s resultant merit. Hauerwas has indicated the proximity of the ideas of sanctification and a person’s growth in virtue, drawing on a spectrum of tradition, and subsequently endorsed by scholars such as Kotva (in the
Mennonite tradition) and Vandenberg (in the Reformed tradition). The Spirit calls and leads and sanctifies a communal people who can participate in the growth of their characters so that they are well disposed to one another for the common good.

This good community is therefore the locale for sanctification. Through the Holy Spirit, people’s co-operation to reflect God’s conciliatory goodness eventuates in the good community. Further, this good community, built by and sustaining the members is not self-contained, so the members’ dispositions enable communal encouragement that extends to whomever they may reach. Consequently, from God’s goodness, the common good comes to be manifest in wider society.

**Sanctification involves people**

As a reflection of God’s goodness, people’s goodness and perfection arises through sanctification. Scholars are wary of suggesting people perfect themselves but do affirm that people are conscious of and involved in their sanctification.

There is plenty of reserve, within protestant theology with regard to people’s active involvement in sanctification. Barth (1981b, pp. 340, 341) emphasises that God’s goodness is continually imparted to people so that they do not perfect themselves. Berkouwer, from a strongly Reformed perspective, (1977, p. 64) cautions that people cannot assume they are perfect or can perfect themselves. Sanctification is not simply about changes in earthly life that people can measure as practitioners or observers (Berkouwer, 1977, p. 102). Moreover, there is always the need for forgiveness (Berkouwer, 1977, p. 75). Sanctification is outlined as not accessible through human effort or assessment and incomplete in earthly life.

Conversely, the same theologians cannot avoid recognising human participation. Berkouwer (1977, p. 106) notes that people cannot be so terrified of sullying the all-sufficient grace of God with works-righteousness, that they do nothing at all. He also
claims that in the Roman Catholic view, the believer passively waits for the infusion of God’s grace (Berkouwer, 1977, p. 78). Similarly, Fergusson (1999, p. 383) notes there can be passive fatalism in response to the idea of predestination. It is noteworthy that Barth and Berkouwer, who stand in a tradition of rigorous excision of the possibility of self-achievement, nevertheless accept that people will recognise and co-operate in their changed lives. When people acknowledge God’s reconciliation they feel unable to ignore entirely changes in their behaviour (Barth, 1958, CD IV, 2, p. 525). If people’s sins are forgiven, then people expect to avoid sin (Barth, 1958, CD IV, 2, p. 505). People are, moreover, involved, over time — pursuing, enduring, persevering and striving (I Tim. 6:11; Heb. 12:1; I Cor. 14:1 cited in Berkouwer, 1977, p. 101). People are, therefore, involved in change during their earthly lives.

Even the most cautious theology allows that people are involved in sanctification as something that takes place in human life. As part of human life, sanctification involves people’s behaviour and their interactions. Consequently, I discuss that people who are changed for the good are necessarily involved in a good community.

**Sanctification in community**

God initiates sanctification through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit also calls people to be a community. Sanctification is located within a community where people consciously and responsively exert themselves. The Spirit inspires people to respond to Christ’s reconciliation, thereby strengthening their community through their reconciled relationships, enabling them to manifest the common good.

It is God who intends sanctification. As proposed by Story’s survey of sanctification from a Pentecostal perspective (2009, p. 91):

Sanctification […] embraces the past, present and future experience of Christian believers. At the same time, the call to holiness is a command and exhortation (process), which is to be a goal, designed to motivate Christian attitudes, conduct
and word. For Paul, sanctification is an expression of God’s will for each Christian and each Christian community (1 Thess. 4:3).

People are aware of, and live in accordance with, the sanctification that God intends (Berkouwer, 1977, p. 23). This sanctification takes place through the operation of the Holy Spirit (Berkouwer, 1977, p. 106). Because God is good, people’s response in their sanctified lives reflects this goodness, which means what they do is good (Barth, 1958, CD IV, 2, pp. 589, 594). Moreover, sanctification is more than simply measurable moral improvement, but also the sanctified presence of the Holy Spirit within people (Berkouwer, 1977, pp. 102, 106). Sanctification is, therefore, the active presence of God that also changes people’s lives to reflect the nature of God’s goodness.

God also calls people to be a community. It is God’s call and God’s perspective that sanctifies people as a community rather than their prior suitability (Story, 2009, p. 78). God has created people for relationships, and has always intended to relate to them as a community, neither as individuals nor an undifferentiated mass (Bonhoeffer, 2009b, p. 80). Moreover, for Rabens (2014, p. 274)58, God’s call has always been for relationships with people that are transformative. This transformation is by the Holy Spirit who acts on people thus united by Christ’s presence in a community (Bonhoeffer, 2009b, p. 158). Through the Spirit, people are children and fellow-heirs with Christ and thus all are brethren, drawn closer to God and one another (Rom. 8:14–17 cited by Rabens, 2014, p. 279). It is the reconciled relationship in Jesus Christ that people recognise conforms them, which brings them together, as I stated in the previous chapter. The Holy Spirit transforms people in community who are united in their relationships in Christ.

People’s transformation means they perceive themselves conformed by and to God’s goodness. The exaltation of humankind in Jesus Christ, has also given people a new direction in which people are free to act in a way that lifts them to God (Barth, 1958,

58 A protestant advocate for the importance of relationships for the work of the Spirit in Paul.
People expect to live in accordance with their response to Christ without necessarily perfecting themselves (Berkouwer, 1977, p. 64). Consequently, people’s call and conversion means they see themselves as altering their behaviour to correspond to God’s character (I Cor. 6:11 cited by Story, 2009, p. 79). Theissen (1992, p. 259) indicates that one of the foundations for the early Christians was that people were converted and became new people living new lives. Sanctification means people can recognise their own transformation in agreement with the character of God’s goodness.

Sanctification happens with rather than simply to people who are consciously on a journey of change. People are able to strive because of God’s grace (Berkouwer, 1977, p. 107). VandenBerg (2012, p. 106), elaborating reformed theology, indicates that people in their reconciliation to God, co-operate with God. Additionally, Bouchard (2002, p. 555), expounding the Roman catholic approach to virtue development, states that people find the Holy Spirit complements and perfects people’s efforts for virtue. Even the theological virtues given by God, such as hope, need practice to be strengthened and developed (VandenBerg, 2012, p. 111). I discuss virtues as a description of sanctified character later in the chapter. Finally, people’s intention, engagement and striving is effective. Paul exhorts several of his congregations to make the effort to act as people of God, because their effort is expected to bear fruit (Story, 2009, p. 80). Sanctification involves people who are conscious of and co-operative in the work of the Spirit.

Sanctification is manifest in earthly time and the pace of earthly life. Sanctification is an ongoing reality in which people live (Barth, 1958, CD IV, 2, p. 516). Sanctification involves people’s response in time on earth — “[. . .] in fellowship with
the life of the holy Son of Man" (Barth, 1958, CD IV, 2, p. 553). While change occurs in earthly time, it is never completed in earthly life. Fulfilment and perfection is an expectation of the end in Christ and is never fully realised on earth (Kotva Jr, 1996, p. 76). And God in Christ journeys with people, as denoted by the prodigal son, on a transforming journey through life (Hauerwas, 1994, p. xviii, using Barth's metaphor). People change, in light of and in fellowship with the sanctity of Christ, without necessarily ascertaining their degree of perfection, but moving towards fulfilment in Christ. People’s journey over time is fitted for the pace of developing relationships in a community that is the fellowship of Christ.

The Holy Spirit transforms people through and into reconciliation in Christ. Barth (1958, CD IV, 2, p. 500), stated that sanctification takes place within the framework of reconciliation to God. The emphasis is of course that it is God who can and does sanctify because humankind can neither achieve nor alter what God intends. Nonetheless, if people are sanctified in association with their reconciliation with God, then the character of reconciliation can be expected in their sanctification. Jesus Christ who is righteousness and redemption, is also sanctification and wisdom (I Cor. 1:30). J. Webster (2003b, pp. 82–83) indicates that Jesus Christ consecrates people to be “holy before God”; and the Spirit is realising what is established in the reconciliation of the Son. Kotva Jr (1996, pp. 74, 72, explicating from Berkhof) says that because God has forgiven people, they can consider their transformation towards a Christlike relationship with God. Paul, as indicated by Constantineanu (2010, pp. 78–79, citing II Cor. 5:17; Is. 65:17–25) echoes Isaiah: forgiveness and reconciliation in Jesus Christ means new life, a new creation in which people can live in community in relationships of peace. I propose, therefore, that

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59 C. Gunton (2000, pp. 150–151) comments that for Barth, sanctification is participation in Jesus’ holiness. It is possible for all people consistent with their reconciliation but has only been grasped and acknowledged by those awakened to faith.  
60 Kotva Jr provides a useful study of Christian moral development and virtue.
sanctification by the Spirit transforms people in their reconciliation with God, and this means people may participate in new reconciled lives together.

Sanctification by the Spirit means people living in good God-given relationships. Rabens (2014, p. 277) proposes that people understand, encounter and contemplate Christ so that their behaviour reflects the character of Christ. It is the Spirit that enables transformation within empowered and loving relationships with God and with other people (Rabens, 2014, p. 281). People need the Holy Spirit to enable the love demonstrated by Christ (Bonhoeffer, 2009b, p. 168). Accordingly, Story (2009, p. 82, referring to Rom. 8) describes people’s sanctification through the love of Christ, empowered by the Spirit, which enables their loving relationships. I conclude that when the Holy Spirit sanctifies people they can live in the best possible relationships, which reflects reconciliation with God.

The call and sanctification of people who strive in time for conciliatory relationships can result in a community that demonstrates the common good. People led by the one Spirit of God are united in the direction of their common behaviour. The same Spirit that calls people together also conforms them to the goodness of God (Story, 2009, p. 86). People are united by the one Spirit that enables their participation in Christ’s reconciliation, therefore they are reconciled together in Christ (Cristoph Schwöbel, 2003, p. 25). Such a community can demonstrate good relationships. People who share this disposition in their relationship in Christ can engage in this kind of relationship with one another (Berkouwer, 1977, p. 148). Sanctification is expressed in love for one another (Story, 2009, p. 84). People are changed to serve one another and to be responsible for one another (Barth, 1958, CD IV, 2, p. 565). The gifts of the Spirit enable and are for the purpose of building up the community (Rabens, 2014, p. 279). As I argued in the previous chapter, because people respond to Christ’s reconciliation they are conformed to the
self-giving, conciliatory, creative and faithful goodness of God. Sanctification through
the Spirit leads people to live communally, which reflects this goodness of God. One and
the same good gifts dispose people to work together. Only through this shared life may
people access these good gifts. The shared good of their life together is the common good
that witnesses to their sanctification.

God has initiated and intended sanctification within a community called and led
by the Holy Spirit. People are able within such a community to recognise and participate
with their own effort within the passage of their lives. The Spirit leads people to respond
to Christ’s reconciliation, which is reflected in the quality of the relationships within the
community. People can spend time and effort to form relationships that reflect God’s
goodness and form the good community. I conclude, therefore, that God has intended in
this way, for there to be a common good.

If God is the initiator of the good lives that people live together, there need be no
concern that either individually or collectively, there are any human claims about what is
achieved. Before discussion of people’s development of virtues, I reflect on Protestant
cautions and put aside any notion of human credit for the achievement.

Sanctification is God’s gift

People can recognise that they are involved in, but not solely responsible for their
change through sanctification. People cannot claim any credit for their transformation,
nor assert their achievement in contrast to others. I will consider that God sanctifies
people who have been estranged from God and one another. People need forgiveness and
sanctification by God’s grace, which prevents any individual or community claim to an
achievement.

The discussion concerning sanctification can dismiss any notion that people
achieve or earn God’s reward. Even while people are involved in sanctification, it is
begun and completed by God. People, therefore, need not be too presumptuous about how holy they have become, remembering that it is the work of God’s grace and forgiveness (Fergusson, 1999, p. 381). Furthermore, people may change over time, but what signifies is Christ’s perfection, which they respond to in faith, rather than any assessment of what they actually do (Barth, 1981b, p. 409). While change can be observed, it is God who determines what the difference is (Barth, 1981b, p. 414). Biggar (1993, p. 135) also notes that for Barth (CD III, 4) character is not a static deposit, which people can make claims about, but only be known fully and truly as it is fashioned for their end with God. I do not, therefore, consider it necessary to attempt to calculate precisely what changes for a person or the degree of their own effort. People cannot even assess the extent of the change, much less assume that they themselves obtain and can claim any status except through the life of Christ.

People’s transformation is, moreover, not a claim for self-fulfilment they can make to each other. People’s new life in Christ, as I noted earlier, changes the engagement with others. Paul recognised that his encounter with and faith in Christ changed his perspective of himself and others (citing II Cor 5:16–17, Constantineanu, 2010, p. 74). Paul no longer regards Christ and those for whom Christ died in the same way (citing II Cor. 5:15, De Gruchy, 2002, p. 153). Because of Jesus Christ, Paul’s identity has become less fixed and more open to others (Constantineanu, 2010, p. 74). De Gruchy (2002, p. 152) adds that we can expect the example of others to challenge our perspective of what is good. More can be learned only by accepting and engaging with people and that means questioning one’s own perspective in an exchange (De Gruchy, 2002, p. 152). More than this, Bonhoeffer (2009b, p. 67) indicates that in the first place we also learn from others how to relate to and understand them. And we augment our self-consciousness by learning how others interpret our experiences (Bonhoeffer, 2009b, p. 68). There is no claim to make in a Christian community that anyone individually has achieved or has greater
inherent status, because everyone is dependent on God’s work of sanctification in a community where fellowship arises from their reconciliatory life in Christ.

Finally, the suggestion of human achievement is futile because of a primary effect of sanctification. If there were no sin, there would be no need to discuss sanctification that transforms flawed humanity. Human sin, as I discussed in Chapter four, divides people from God and one another. As Bonhoeffer (2009b, pp. 115, 148) proposed, each person’s fault divides them from other people and among people divided no one is the intended human reflection of the goodness of God. As such, everybody is estranged from God. In their estranged state, no person is able to restore themselves with God or one another. There can be, therefore, no claim to contributing to sanctification. Neither can members claim that their community is a repository of perfection. Nonetheless, God has graciously restored the relationship with humankind and so between people. Sanctification is God’s intention for people’s transformation in the context of good relationships so that they respond to the goodness of God.

I next move to a discussion concerning people’s dispositions for good relationships. As sanctification is not people’s own achievement, discussion of people’s character development need not be in terms of self-fulfilment. Nonetheless, I find people’s understanding of good character is inextricably linked to their relationships and community.

**Sanctification in virtue**

The Holy Spirit enables sanctification, in which people participate, co-operate and strive. Sanctification involves people’s lives corresponding to relationships reconciled by Christ. These relationships enable people to form the best kind of community, reflecting the goodness of God. In reconciled relationships people have certain dispositions towards each other. Virtues describe the necessary dispositions for mutually supportive
relationships. Consequently, I will discuss how people’s dispositions towards one another and their character formation contribute to this community.

Character development means a person acquires virtues. As was apparent from Aquinas (in chapter one), virtues are the good qualities of mind, covering both human reason and passions. People function most fully when they possess virtues (Hauerwas, 1981, p. 111). Also, with the possibility of virtues, people cannot only be understood as their actions (Hauerwas, 1981, p. 113). When Paul lists virtues and corresponding vices, these are a mixture of actions and dispositions (Kotva Jr, 1996, p. 120). For example, “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23), are all dispositions, although some also describe actions.

This list of virtues is a list of fruits of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is, therefore, involved in developing virtue and human character (Bouchard, 2002, p. 546). Sanctification includes the development of a consistent character (Hauerwas, 1994, p. 209). As such, these virtues are enduring qualities that a person acquires as second nature (Bouchard, 2002, pp. 546, 549). Instead of approaching each new action as though one had no prior knowledge, consideration of virtues indicates a stress on certain tendencies (Bouchard, 2002, p. 556). As these virtues are practised by people, they become habituated to Christian excellence (Lawler & Salzman, 2013, p. 467). When a person develops habits by practising with deliberate intent, their character development makes future good decisions and actions more likely (Hauerwas, 1994, p. 71). There is a consistency in a person’s character as they approach actions (Kotva Jr, 1996, p. 24). Furthermore, addressing some consequences is less likely when a person’s particular disposition provides foresight with regard to some actions (Hauerwas, 1981, p. 115). I concur that human habits are the way people involve themselves in the discovery of virtues. Sanctification by the Spirit enables people to develop a good and consistent character that displays the virtues.
For each person, the virtues are mutually supportive of their good character. The disposition of this good character is to be well disposed to others. As Aquinas (d. 1274 / 1969, I-II, 60, 3) stated, some virtues, such as justice, direct a person towards others (as I noted in chapter 1). Moreover, charity is the virtue that directs people to their greatest good in God (d. 1274 / 2006a, II-II, 23, 6). As their greatest good, charity directs the other virtues so that people are oriented to God (d. 1274 / 1969, I-II, 65, 1). The virtues co-operate in a person’s good character because, as Porter (1990, p. 121) proposes, for Aquinas, they cannot contradict. If a person is lead on by charity, then their other virtues, as such, cannot detract from their charity. The love of God, therefore, directs people to be charitable to all and so the other virtues in their character are disposed. Each person’s whole development in virtue is increasingly to engage selflessly with others.

Similarly, as people are directed towards others, their virtues have a beneficial effect on the virtues of others. Hauerwas and Pinches (1997, p. 26) explain that Aristotle regarded friendship as important because it is through friendship that people develop virtues together. The virtue of friendship means a faithful and constant disposition (Hauerwas & Pinches, 1997, p. 35). In their constancy, people are able to demonstrate consistent virtues to their friends (Hauerwas & Pinches, 1997, p. 36). Aristotle’s magnanimous man was warding off misfortune, generous to friends, in his constancy reluctant to be indebted, and eschewing dependency (Hauerwas & Pinches, 1997, pp. 16, 21–22, 114). There is a contrast with a Christian perspective where people accept the vulnerability of relationships, which might be broken, but can be reconciled and restored by forgiveness and repentance. Consequently, Christian virtues include humility, accepting help from others because no one knows themselves perfect (Fullam, 2011, p. 255). In charity people are mutually supportive; each gives and receives without calculation; and gratefully respond to each other’s giving (Hauerwas & Pinches, 1997, pp. 64–65). The virtues that have directed people to others, enable good relationships and
the demonstration of virtue, but also acceptance of our own and other people’s failings, and mutually supportive giving. The virtues that people acquire enable them to give and receive; to respond to another’s need and to accept the other’s response to their need. Christian virtue, therefore, accepts interdependency so that people will build, train, and nurture each other’s characters.

In their interdependence, people can together build the virtues that enable good relationships and build a community. The grateful and repentant response to the love of God in the forgiveness of Christ, as I maintained in the previous chapter, is to be conformed to the generous, conciliatory, creative and faithful goodness of God. The virtues that people learn from one another can reflect this conformity. These are dispositions of character always willing to give generously and seek to restore relationships; and to be faithful in their disposition yet creatively offering surprising and unexpected possibilities so that there is an abundance of goodwill and care. From this abundance, there can be stronger bonds and a better sense of connectedness between people so that a good community forms.

People develop enduring characters as they acquire the virtues. These virtues are the fruits of sanctification by the Holy Spirit. People’s virtues improve by their intentional practice and interact to support the total good and fulfilment of each person’s character. Fulfilment lies with God, so people’s virtues cohere in love, or charity, towards God and one another. People’s characters, therefore develop the dispositions for good relationships with one another, including the disposition to rebuild when relationships fail. I conclude that the Holy Spirit enables virtues that can sustain good relationships for and within a good community, which indicates and manifests the common good.
The good community

Sanctification enables people to have good relationships and a strong community. People’s characters can develop the dispositions to sustain these relationships. Not only are people enabled to form a good community but a good community forms them. I will now consider how people can be mutually supportive, receiving support from others and thriving as they contribute. I examine the aspects of a good community that can recognise everyone’s role and seek everyone’s good: admonishing, reconciling, in solidarity with, and teaching one another. I will also consider a community whose tradition maintains a narrative in scripture that enables instruction and provides the context for the development of people’s characters corresponding to that narrative. Such a community manifests the common good when acting for people’s good, which is both nurtured by and upholds the community.

The call and formation through the Spirit means a community life of mutual selflessness whose abundance manifests as the common good. Life in accordance with the Spirit is a life motivated by love (citing Rom. 13:8–10, Constantineanu, 2010, p. 153). This means a life of mutual service and welcome based on the example of Christ (citing Rom. 14:9–12; 15:3–8, Constantineanu, 2010, p. 153). Foundationally, (as I discussed in the previous chapter), people respond and are formed by forgiveness and repentance as they are reconciled to God in Christ. Enabled by the Spirit, people are formed as a reconciliatory community where there is love, forgiveness and grace (De Gruchy, 2002, p. 93). People in such a community act for one another, in prayer, forgiveness and service (Bonhoeffer, 2009b, p. 184). As each extends their love as a gift to others and experiences the same from others, they are freed from concern only for their individual selves (Bonhoeffer, 2009b, p. 166). People are truly engaged with one another’s burdens (Bonhoeffer, 2009b, p. 179). This community is valuable and is the strength that each person has (Bonhoeffer, 2009b, p. 179). As such, people can only appreciate the goodness
of God and the abundance given to a person’s life in such a community — this is their common good. Sanctification by the Spirit enables people to demonstrate this common good.

People can, therefore, expect to be dependent on their community. Ultimately, identity comes from the group around us and it is the community in which a person exists that enables them to know themselves as an individual member (Bonhoeffer, 2009b, pp. 75–76). The community comes before and is the context for each person to respond to Christ (Fiddes, 1989, p. 137). Christ is known to people through the activity of their community (Fergusson, 1999, p. 382). To receive sermons and participate in holy communion, people must participate in the community; as their faith is upheld, they need to acknowledge their dependency (Bonhoeffer, 2009b, pp. 226, 228). What people are dependent on is the common good manifest in their community.

Relationships built through virtues establishes communities that in turn nurture people. The entire pattern of community relationships endows, endorses and encourages each person’s character and virtues.

This better community in which virtues give rise to better relationships is an environment in which the virtues are truly exercised. Scholars note Paul’s concern that the Spirit’s gifts are in and for community. People’s saintly virtue is situated in community (citing I Cor. 14:33, Fergusson, 1999, p. 381). The Spirit enlivens the community’s relationships, and thereby endows people’s behaviour (citing I Cor. 12–14, Rabens, 2014, p. 280). People’s gifts are of little use if they are not exercised in the body of the community (citing I Cor. 12:12–31; Rom. 12:4–5, Kotva Jr, 1996, p. 121). And people’s gifts are bestowed by one Spirit for one purpose, people do not choose these gifts for themselves but receive them for the united purpose of their community (citing I Cor. 12:11, Thiselton, 2000, p. 989). People’s gifts need a community in which to be
expressed and thus contribute to a community in which they can demonstrate and
acknowledge the common good.

The common good in a mutually dependent community means people cannot be
discarded. Each person in the community denotes God’s love for people (Bonhoeffer,
2009b, p. 166). So much so that Christ gives up his life so that people may be reconciled
to God (Theissen, 1992, p. 172, citing Rom. 5:8, 10). For people to be conformed to and
aligned in sympathy with Jesus Christ, they act with the same love for others (De Gruchy,
2002, p. 59). Consequently (as noted in chapter 1), the virtue of charity is to love those
whom God loves regardless of their qualities (St Thomas Aquinas, d. 1274 / 2006a, II-II,
23,1). This means treatment of each person as someone who is encountered over time,
not useful today and ignored tomorrow (Barth, 1981b, p. 348). It means treatment of each
person not as a liability but a gift (Bonhoeffer, 2009b, p. 166). It means a commitment
beyond merely ensuring each other’s co-existence (De Gruchy, 2002, p. 185). And it
means that the other person cannot be appropriated as a source of enjoyment, but treated
as a distinct self who is responded to and one is responsible for (Ford, 1999, p. 37).
Ultimately, the uniqueness of each self is not disposable. Recognition, acceptance, and
engagement with another also cannot be at the expense of one’s own self (De Gruchy,
2002, p. 175). Diversity is important and useful; those who feel inferior are encouraged
and restraint required from those who feel superior; because diversity does not imply
status (citing I Cor. 12:12–30, Thiselton, 2000, pp. 990, 1005). Recognition of
dependency includes those who seem to have nothing to contribute; there is a common
good in a community that discards none.

The common good is manifest in a community concerned for people’s behaviour,
which the community attempts to address. As people are dependent on a good community
for their good characters, they are also dependent on their community healing their
missteps. If people behave badly, this has an impact on their community, which will be concerned to alter the behaviour or prevent the person from influencing others (citing Mt. 18, Kotva Jr, 1996, p. 109). Moreover, such behaviour has highlighted weaknesses in the community as a whole, consequently the greatest need is for community-wide repentance and forgiveness (O'Donovan, 1986, p. 169). People are penitently conformed to reconciliation with God as they are forgiven through Jesus Christ. Because people are forgiven by Christ they are able to be conciliatory and forgive each other (Bonhoeffer, 2009b, p. 189). Peace can be restored when people recognise each other’s pain; the offended are relieved of their anger and the offenders their guilt (De Gruchy, 2002, p. 176). The common good is manifest in this conciliatory atmosphere, as I discussed in the previous chapter. But there will be a continuing need to be reconciled because people are not made perfect and may behave badly again (Bonhoeffer, 2009b, p. 213). The common good is present in the constant intent to reconcile the community.

Communal concern for some members’ behaviour would also recognise the limits of communal judgment. If a community is concerned about the negative influence of bad behaviour, there is also a need for the demonstration and influence of positive corrections of behaviour. People are dependent on demonstrations of behaviour that do not undermine them, that recognise their weaknesses, and that restrain judgment. First, there is a need to be mindful of behaviour that disturbs other people (citing Rom. 14:13–23, Constantineanu, 2010, p. 175). It is not simply a matter of refraining from criticism of different practices but also avoiding behaviour so pointedly different that it diminishes people. Second, identifying the inadequacies in their own behaviour, people can perceive what kind of turmoil exists for others and what others’ needs might be (Barth, 1981b, p. 425). When people repent they are more able to understand others and demonstrate this in service to them (Barth, 1981b, p. 419). Their repentance also demonstrates that people know their own behaviour to be imperfect. Paul argued for sensitivity in judgment

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because no one can claim to be perfect before God (Rom. 14:10–12). Ultimately, therefore, all human judgments are limited; sanctification cannot be assessed from someone’s behaviour. Regardless of expressions of sincerity or the significance of their acts, reconciliation ultimately rests with God (De Gruchy, 2002, p. 104). All human effort to discern the best behaviour for people is ultimately provisional (O'Donovan, 1986, p. 224). For everyone to receive the benefit, the community as a whole will understand restraint in judgment. Consequently, a community demonstrates the common good in recognising the limits of judgment.

Limits to judgment do not mean anarchy; people remain dependent on those who will be able to nurture them in virtues. At any time, some are teachers and some are learners (Kotva Jr, 1996, p. 151), so different gifts benefit the whole community and all gifts are needed (citing I Cor. 12:12–31, Kotva Jr, 1996, p. 121). Moreover, the differences in people’s contributions are unimportant because all are equal before God (Bonhoeffer, 2009b, p. 206). Consequently, the authority of teaching comes not from loyalty to the teacher’s status nor from the wisdom of the listener (O'Donovan, 1986, p. 172). The authority of God stands, therefore, behind those who witness to God as they provide moral instruction (Barth, 1981b, p. 356). Sanctification is expressed in responding to this God-given authority of neighbours (Barth, 1981b, p. 357). Furthermore, the Holy Spirit enables people to surrender to their neighbours for what God intends (Bonhoeffer, 2009b, p. 176). The common good is also manifest in teaching virtues and people accepting and learning from their teaching.

A community has a tradition and a narrative that informs the recognition and understanding of virtues. Central to their tradition is the narrative of Jesus Christ (Hauerwas, 1981, p. 11), which tells people of God’s revelation engaging through and exemplified by Christ’s character. There are diverse characters within the narrative that
indicate each person’s situation within the narrative (Hauerwas, 1981, p. 148).

Additionally, Matthew’s gospel insists there is consistency between the characters and their actions (citing Mt. 23:3, Kotva Jr, 1996, p. 105). Behaviour arises out of character, so provides the evidence for a person’s character (citing Mt. 21:28–32, Kotva Jr, 1996, p. 105). People, therefore, discover what kinds of characters there are from the behaviour in the narrative. Moreover, there has been increasing awareness that narrative enacted in worship is important for bringing the virtues to life (Herdt, 2012, p. 216); in my own tradition the Anglican prayer book is a deliberate attempt at formation by a consistent narrative and corresponding disposition. The Spirit brings people into Christ’s narrative (Constantineanu, 2010, p. 112). As I have noted previously, the Spirit involves people in the narrative of Christ’s reconciliation; and therefore, in the self-giving, reconciliatory, surprising and faithful goodness of God. To inhabit this narrative gives rise to distinctive characters and behaviours. Finally, the Spirit prompts people towards a community narrative whose goal is beyond the community; both assuring people of their fulfilment in loving relationships and assuring the community of fulfilment in the love of God (Bonhoeffer, 2009b, p. 262). Christian communities have a distinctive tradition that portrays distinctive virtues pertaining to a character responding to God. The gospel can be heard when the gospel is embodied. This is demonstrated by Peter’s testimony of Jesus Christ to gentiles (Acts 10:36–38) in which identity, proclamation and “doing good” are indivisible. Communities sustain a narrative about characters in a good community because that is the consequence of a narrative about characters responding to relationship with God.

Christian communities therefore enable people to develop the virtues for their characters. The communities’ narrative contains perspectives on behaviour and characters which so behave, and it is these perspectives that teaches each person about their own character (Hauerwas, 1994, p. 116). Indeed, without the interpretation of a person’s
behaviour within a community, they cannot comprehend their behaviour (Hauerwas, 1994, p. 101). It should be noted that people still make their own decisions; their behaviour is not entirely determined by, even if interpreted within a community (Hauerwas, 1994, p. 104). Moreover, as virtues are dispositions that develop with practice, their presence relies on people’s ability repeatedly to practise their decision making over time in the company of others. Consequently, development of people’s virtues relies on a community that sustains a tradition (Hauerwas, 1981, p. 125). A community not only provides a context for people’s character development but retains a long corporate memory so that it supports people’s development through time and across generations.

An abiding community would consciously intend to develop people’s virtues. As I have discussed, this character development not only supports the formation of a community but also depends on that community. A community sustains people’s virtues, and is in turn, built by the relationships born of people’s virtuous characters. Pragmatically, a community relies on members’ virtues that contribute to the community and the community is, therefore, interested in people’s development (St Thomas Aquinas, d. 1274 / 2006b, I-II, 92,1). As Porter (1990, p. 121) proposes, it is not simply a matter of what suits the community as an end in itself. If charity orients a person’s character to the goodness of God, their character development is to their ultimate good. Or, as I have expressed it (in the previous chapter): people are conformed to the reconciliatory goodness of God. When the community supports people’s development it is both for the good of the community and the best support for each person’s good (Porter, 1990, p. 125). There is therefore, a common good that supports and includes each person’s good. A community manifests the common good by support of people’s fulfilling behaviour in community formation where the purpose is reconciled relationships with God in Christ.
In conclusion, the Holy Spirit has called and sanctified a community of mutual dependency. A community where people rely on others to nurture their characters; where the community seeks to improve people’s behaviour by reconciling them when their behaviour divides; where the community’s limitations are recognised; and where no person is discarded by the majority. Such a community is always able to refer to the biblical narrative, which depicts God’s intent for relationships and the character of people who respond. This community can consciously desire to uphold people’s character and virtues as people whose good is reconciliation with God. This same good is nurtured in these virtues exercised for the community. It is the common good of a community that supports people’s good and that is manifest in their life together.

A community without barriers

A community that manifests the common good is not only concerned with itself. By recognition of the inclusiveness of Christ’s reconciliation, I next consider that such a community excludes no one and that both in individuals and collectively, community responsibility, expresses a shared and common good.

A community formed in response to the call of the Spirit witnesses to the community’s calling by including those on the periphery in the common good. In Jesus Christ there can be forgiveness for all, so community members have no exclusive possession of sanctity and are just as much in need of forgiveness as any others who have just as much worth in Christ (Barth, 1981b, p. 341). Moreover, through Christ, our sins that impacted on others are forgiven, just as are theirs that impacted on us, so no one can claim moral superiority (Barth, 1981b, p. 348). Far from claiming superiority, a community would recognise Christ in others as those who are relevant and matter to Christ (Ford, p. 173). I note that it is Jesus Christ who represents all those to whom a community extends the good. Christ comes to people as the neighbour, so no neighbour
can be rejected without closing off encounters with Christ (Barth, 1981b, p. 348). The response to Jesus’ command directs people toward God and others and away from themselves (Barth, 1981b, p. 330). And response to the character of Christ leads people to be similarly oriented to others (Ford, p. 172). I think that if all may be reconciled in Christ, then those reconciled in Christ and conformed to good relationships can only be led collectively and individually to good relationships regardless of membership. Consequently, both within a community and without, people take joyful responsibility for others (Ford, p. 173). In this way, the common good is more truly common. The call to community is manifest in extending the common good and communal benefit as widely as possible.

A community, therefore, extends and shares the benefit of the community. In their mutual serving and giving people demonstrate that this good that overflows is the communal and common good.

**Conclusion**

To discuss people’s goodness is to talk about the intention of God not the achievement of humankind. Yet at the same time God’s intention involves people, their conscious activity, effort and interactions.

Through the Holy Spirit, God sanctifies people who God also calls to be a community. People’s intention and effort as they are involved in sanctification, therefore takes place in community. The Holy Spirit leads people to a new life in reconciliation through Jesus Christ. In their new life people live reconciled to one another; their strong relationships supporting a robust community. By reflection of the goodness of God in their lives together, their community manifests the common good.

In this communal sanctification, there is no need to consider people’s self-achievement. People are unable to assess what God intends and cannot make claims
even to each other. Sin has impaired the community so that there can be no individual or collective claim. God has reconciled people with God and one another and effects the transformation.

Sanctification means people develop the good dispositions of character to live in good relationships in community. Each person’s virtues can develop consistent with a character in reconciled relationship with God, and through such good relationships also strengthen their neighbour’s virtues. In reflection and recognition of God’s goodness, people can be mutually supportive.

God sanctifies people within a community. People’s development of virtue that enables good relationships takes place in a community that is enhanced by their mutual support. Such a community can nurture everyone’s good character, continually restoring relationships by admonishing, reconciling and teaching without being judgmental. This community maintains a narrative and is the context for people to develop characters corresponding to that narrative. In response to God’s goodness, the community can seek each and everyone’s good and the same good nurtures the community. This is the common good, which is present as the good of each person and manifest in their life together.

This common good manifest in the kind of community sustained by these reconciled relationships, overflows. There can be more than the sum of each person’s good that extends to all who can be reached. Consequently, in the next chapter, I discuss how people collectively envisage their relationship with wider society and the juxtaposition of a community and more widespread common good.
Chapter 7 — The common good in wider society

Introduction

People nurtured in good God-given relationships in a Christian community manifest a common good that they can individually and collectively encourage in wider society. In this chapter I discuss communities’ encounters with wider society and the possibility for a widespread common good.

God’s goodness overflows from communities through the benefits of people’s selfless, conciliatory, creative and faithful relationships (as I argue in previous chapters). Communities can be well disposed not only to each other but to anyone they meet. Communities can intentionally and collectively benefit from, and assist with, good reconciled relationships with others.

Here I extend the discussion of good God-given relationships to God’s purpose for the whole of creation and the worth bestowed on all human life. Sphere sovereignty, for Kuyper, operates within God’s purposes for creation. Both Dooyeweerd (also a Dutch reformed scholar), and O’Donovan (from an Anglican evangelical perspective) extend sphere sovereignty to indicate that Christ reveals and fulfils the kingdom. Subsidiarity, as outlined by Pope Pius XI, endorses the worth of human contributions throughout society. By contrast, Hauerwas emphasises that Christian communities engage neighbouring communities by the presence of each Christian community’s tradition and teaching, even if this community tradition might be so different from wider society for it to seem that the community has disengaged from society. I consider how Christian communities will engage with wider society in accordance with God’s purposes.

With a God-given purpose, Christian communities can expect to engage with society to reflect the goodness of God and recognise the worth of humankind. Rowan
Williams indicates that human purpose is not constructed by, but is prior to any human institution.\textsuperscript{61} Christian communities in accordance with such a purpose can seek recognition from and conduct relationships within wider society. From the Christian community’s perspective, society’s norms and regulations would make diverse contributory relationships both possible and welcome. Gascoigne’s discussion of the presentation of Christian ethics in the public forum from a Roman Catholic perspective, considers dialogue in the context of human relationships. In such relationships where all people are significant, their interdependence enables them to recognise what they have in common. I examine how Christian communities can also recognise people’s worth by seeking relationships where these are most damaged among those most disregarded. In seeking relationships reflecting God’s goodness, Christian communities find themselves both giving and receiving in mutual relationships for the common good. I argue that Christian communities can intend the common good of wider society and can intend distinctive relationships that make the common good possible.

**Perspectives of community interaction within God’s sovereignty**

In the first exploration of Christian perspectives of interacting communities, I will consider sphere sovereignty, which encompasses both the sovereignty of God and the independence and interdependence of human groups and communities. Kuyper (1898-1899) first described sphere sovereignty, which is further explicated by both Dooyeweerd and O’Donovan.

Society exists as several spheres of activity. Spheres must serve their own interest and not be dedicated to supporting one sphere in particular (Kuyper, 1932, p. 143); none of the spheres can claim authority over others (p. 131). There are spheres for industry, science, art, religion (pp. 126, 143) as well as government, whose distinctive task is to

\textsuperscript{61} Both O’Donovan and Williams endorse the principle of the priority of divine initiative, corresponding to Barth.
defend against the abuse of power, ensure all contribute, and maintain unity (p. 152). All of these spheres are founded within “the sovereignty of the Triune God over the whole Cosmos, in all its spheres and kingdoms, visible and invisible” (p. 126, original emphasis). Therefore, people act in diverse spheres in response to the sovereignty of God (p. 133). Each sphere has a distinctive existence with distinctive authority and all such authority is given by the grace of God (p. 143). As such, Kuyper has considered all spheres of human activity within God’s purposes and therefore worthy of honour. Additionally, these spheres involve communal activity. Just as the family arises without bureaucratic management (p. 144) so do other collective expressions of human capacity such as academies, professional bodies and trade-unions (p. 150). This spontaneous collective existence is also present in urban social life — “the social life of cities and villages forms a sphere of existence, which arises from the very necessities of life, and which therefore must be autonomous” (p. 150). Lastly, there may be tensions between the spheres and particularly with governmental institutions if, in attempts to regulate these tensions, these institutions overreach their role (pp. 147, 151). Kuyper (1932, p. 151) rejects the overreach of governmental institutions:

The State may never become an octopus, which stifles the whole of life. It must occupy its own place, on its own root, among all the other trees in the forest, and thus it has to honour and maintain every form of life, which grows independently, in its own sacred autonomy.

Kuyper (1932, p. 148) envisaged that both regulatory magistrates and social spheres have recourse to and are subject to the same law to maintain a balance. Governmental regulation is beneficial because it averts social instability but at the same time, its regulatory reach can be challenged (pp. 129–130). All are under the sovereignty of God whose nature raises people’s aspirations for human life (p. 142). For Kuyper, the many spheres (mentioned above) of communal human activity are equally honoured under God’s sovereignty.
Development of the concept of the spheres involves specifically the revelation in Jesus Christ through whom the spheres have unity in God’s kingdom — in both their autonomy and their interdependence. Dooyeweerd (1968, p. 10) saw all earthly society as dependent on the Kingdom of God whose order was beyond time and human organisational capacities. Consequently, all earthly society is based on the relationships revealed by Christ for the kingdom; “in the supra-temporal unity in Christ — this church is the true root of all temporal societal relationships required by God in his creation plan, [ . . ]” (pp. 9–10). Jesus Christ is the true root of creation because he is the ‘fulfilment of divine Word-revelation’ (p. 20). Jesus Christ is the root of newborn humanity and has therefore fulfilled the deepest meaning of the kingdom order (p. 19). This fulfilment is described as “service to God with the whole heart” (following Calvin, p. 19). For the spheres to co-operate, they must not only be united in the kingdom by Christ but also see their behaviours in some way directed toward fulfilment in the kingdom.

In such a kingdom order with this foundation, Dooyeweerd (1968, p. 11) explains that there is no human institution or structure that the diverse spheres of human activity serve, or that is their unifying principle. Each sphere of activity, such as family, government, church, school, industry, is not autonomous under licence from a government of which they are components (p. 28). Rather, each sphere has its own competence that cannot be reproduced or imposed in another sphere (p. 28) — a family and a school and a factory cannot be organised and treated as the same kind of community. Each sphere exists “in the fullest sense [ . . ] ‘by the grace of God’” (p. 29). Consequently, God has bestowed equal dignity on each sphere of life.

Within such equal dignity and independence there is also dependence. Dooyeweerd (1968, p. 49) indicates people’s simultaneous activity in multiple spheres — factories, farms, schools and governments will interact. No one sphere can be independent
and fulfilled by itself and conversely no sphere’s significance can be ignored; all need to function well by complementing and cohering with one another (pp. 33–34). When a farmer grows food that feeds educators and bureaucrats, the activity of food growing is completed and children who can become farmers are educated. Within this coherence, the sphere of government enables regulation for everybody for the good of everyone within the jurisdiction (p. 42). Each sphere enables each other for independence through dependence.

The continuity of Jesus Christ’s role in creation for the kingdom gives additional weight to the universality of revelation in earthly life. O'Donovan (1986, p. 19) indicates that revelation and reconciliation in Jesus Christ have affirmed what God has created. God has affirmed creation by raising Jesus (p. 14). In this new life order, Jesus Christ represents humankind as a sovereign of the kingdom order, assuring that creation will be restored at last with possibilities beyond human history (pp. 14–15). Consequently, Christ has given history its particular end within the Kingdom (p. 66). As such, human history does not naturally progress toward fulfilment; earthly institutions cannot achieve fulfilment by themselves and certainly cannot effect reconciliation (pp. 66, 72). There is a transient earthly common good to which Christians contribute from their faith in the kingdom’s purpose (p. 72). All creation is therefore affirmed for its kingdom purpose.

Through consideration of both creation’s affirmation and the concept of the spheres, O'Donovan (2005, p. 251), following Dooyeweerd, emphasises that each human working community has meaning through interaction with other spheres. The spheres are described as arranged concentrically, overlapping in their activities and flourishing because of each other (2005, p. 253). All manner of groups can consider in what way their contributions might best interact for the common good (2005, p. 138). Christ has revealed what was intended for creation; although not fully grasped, there has been insight in
human history into the same appreciation of human life (using Rom. 1, O'Donovan, 1986, p. 89). It can therefore be expected that diverse groups can share good insights for the common good. As O'Donovan (2005, p. 146) indicates, where there is a good climate of relations, institutions with power can agree to change for a common benefit. Moreover, other perspectives that enhance and stimulate Christian communities can be welcomed (O'Donovan, 1999, p. 268). Co-operative interaction is affirmed and can be appreciated throughout creation.

Within that co-operation, no single institution can direct the manner in which all the groups operate. With Kuyper and Dooyeweerd, O'Donovan (2005, p. 57) does not allow that governments in particular can exclusively determine the common good. Nor can governments only allow dialogue on their own terms. O'Donovan (1999, p. 219) argues that if public discussion is only in democratic and secular terms, it forces Christian communities to deny the reasons for their faith and dialogue. O'Donovan indicates the danger if governments alone decide the best way to arrange society. He proposes that it is more damaging if Christian communities merely exist on governmental terms than if people succumb to aspirations to influence government (1999, p. 224). On one hand, Christian communities simply acquiesce to a governmentally defined role. On the other, Christian communities want to be part of the control the government exerts. People should not see their Christian communities, as part of government or there to perform a role for government because their concern is with the purposes of the kingdom and what governments can achieve is limited (1999, pp. 159, 219). If communities merely collude with or acquiesce to authority, that purpose may be entirely forgotten, and they may mistakenly involve themselves in coercion (1999, p. 212). From the perspective of Christian communities, the purposes of Christ’s kingdom order reject any single human institutionally determined common good.
Governments should however perform the role intended. The significant governmental function is to defend against situations that threaten everyone’s contributory activities for the common good (O’Donovan, 2005, pp. 57, 139). Consequently, O’Donovan (2005, p. 62) wants governments proactively to prevent private neglect or wrong. When the vulnerable are defended, there is more space for groups to contribute to the common good.

The idea of diverse contributions

At a similar time to Dooyeweerd’s explication of the spheres (1936), Pope Pius XI published the encyclical, Quadragesimo anno, introducing the principle of subsidiarity (1931). The situation of communal interaction in society was addressed from a Roman Catholic perspective.

Subsidiarity is concerned with giving a place to every person and every group within society. The encyclical considers it “injustice” for a larger organisation to absorb a function that a smaller one can perform (Pope Pius XI, 1931, para. 79). I infer that removal of a minority’s capability is unacceptable because it diminishes them. This is doubtless consistent with Aquinas (as I concluded in chapter one), who maintained that human virtue and even more the love of God enables a full regard for others and intent for the common good. It is therefore part of a full recognition of human life to encourage people’s capacity and contribution. The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (2004, para. 187) affirms that subsidiarity means that a variety of groups protects minority groups from being submerged by larger ones and defends their dignity. Additionally, the Jesuit scholar, Hollenbach (2002, p. 101) illustrates the importance of variety:

Civil society is a complex web of human communities including families, neighbourhoods, churches, labor unions, corporations, professional associations, credit unions, cooperatives, universities, and a host of other associations. Calling this network of associations “civic” points to their importance in public life even though they are distinct from the state.
Subsidiarity recognises the importance of diverse contributions for a common good that upholds the dignity of the contributors.

The role of government in subsidiarity is to enable. The governmental institutions can more effectively perform their tasks if they allow and facilitate all other groups to make their contributions (Pope Pius XI, 1931, para. 80). The governmental institutions, “supreme authority”, would effectively prevent expansion of monopolies including its own (para. 80). The encyclical looks for good order in society rather than constant attrition between groups that seek domination (para. 81). Such good order is achieved when all in a distinctive activity collaborate (particularly workers and employers) and additionally all activities recognise that they co-operate for the common good (para. 84). Within the principle of subsidiarity, it may be that governmental regulation ensures the diverse contributions for the common good.

**A shared concept of good relationships**

Gascoigne explored the potential worth of diversity in the context of interacting groups. Most notably, such interaction raises the possibility of agreement about good common behaviour.

In the first instance, an emphasis on people’s worth arises in distinctive relationships. Gascoigne (2001, p. 81) explains that people have worth because some universal truth bestows worth. No one has to wait until they have acquired a certain level of that truth and this truth cannot be degraded by human behaviour (pp. 81–82). The same truth gives dignity to all (p. 81). The Christian understanding is that people have dignity because they are oriented to and through the pursuit of a particular truth (p. 80). There is conviction from revelation that people exist in relationship to infinite being and are invited into communion with the Triune life (p. 82). The Christian tradition affirms the worth of all to God and that human relationships express the love of God (p. 83). There
is, therefore, recognition of shared life and purpose rather than simply respect for people as isolated individuals (p. 83); and Gascoigne (2001, p. 213) goes on to say that human life is fulfilled in mutually committed relationships within a community. Gascoigne has emphasised that people have worth in a distinctive relationship with God, which gives rise to good relationships with everyone.

Where all people can potentially be esteemed through good relationships, there can be dialogue and agreement concerning the behaviour for good relationships. Gascoigne (2001, p. 92) indicates that in a post-modern plural society, Christian insight from revelation can contribute in a forum where there is no general acceptance of universal meaning. There is recognition that public conversations cannot be arranged around limited predetermined public truths and there must be space for distinctive traditions (p. 165). And where some of the various traditions recognise the same principles of relationships, diverse communities can apply this understanding between themselves and develop their inter-community relationships (Gascoigne, 2001, p. 95). The distinctive Christian revelation is of a divine intention for universal peace and reconciliation for creation (p. 96). A Christian community can only contribute if as well as demonstrating these kinds of good relationships, the community also participates in a dialogue about good community (p. 167). More particularly, what Christian communities understand was not established in a vacuum. Gascoigne (2001, p. 121) notes that a tradition develops as it is addressed by revelation and expresses the same in the context with which the tradition interacts. The narrative carried by Christian tradition arose as it was recounted amidst particular cultures (p. 123). Consequently, a Christian community can expect the perspective of the community’s proclamation to be enhanced by the response of hearers from outside the tradition (p. 124). A tradition that endorses good relationships is itself the beneficiary of the variety of creative relationships.
The tradition of good relationships enables Christian communities to respond in the practice of dialogue. Gascoigne (2001, pp. 210–211) proposes that discussion not be so tightly tied to the Christian narrative that non-Christians cannot participate, and that discussion will not be acceptable if “God” appears to be a trump card that squashes other opinions. At the same time, deliberative dialogue can be sought, with reflection on human meaning, including divinely bestowed meaning, as opposed to heated debate (p. 211). Christian communication can sustain this dialogue “in relation to an infinite mystery who creates, loves and sustains” and is therefore committed to a vision of the kingdom, the story of Jesus and the prompts of the Spirit (p. 211). Conversely, without people’s actual engagement in caring relationships, their experience of life is narrow, and they tend to perpetuate the situations that created their narrow experience (Gascoigne, 2001, p. 232).

A tradition of good relationships would mean Christian communities attain as wide a practical experience as possible and can engage people in the meaning of those relationships.

**The significance of communities’ mutual contributions**

I have also drawn on Williams in a discussion of constructive interactions in society as a perspective a Christian community can endorse.

Ideally, powerful institutions, particularly governments, will recognise that they cannot bear all meaning themselves (as O’Donovan also stated). Williams (2012, p. 32) indicates that Christian communities have continued regardless of political upheaval, but governmental institutions generate instability when they attempt survival as their destiny, acting oppressively, even in the name of community preservation. Consequently, powerful institutions must accept that meaning is prior to themselves (p. 33). Because the powerful cannot adjudicate concerning this prior meaning, they require the co-operation and consent of other institutions, groups and communities as contributors to meaning (p.
All institutions have, therefore, a modest role to foster space for others and there would be a limitation to dominance by one or some particular groups (pp. 3–4, 27). Meaning is something to which many groups contribute.

If many groups contribute, they all have an interest in the possibility for contribution. Consequently, Williams (2012, p. 27) proposes that there must be trust between groups that overreach can be restrained and that all will be heard. While there will be some things in common the reasons for them will be diverse because they arise in specific and distinct narratives (p. 129). Different contributions and traditions cannot be reduced to alternative attire for the same ideas (pp. 131–132). An assumption of no underlying difference is not a way to avoid the alternative assumption of implacable opposition (p. 132). No group need fear respectful debate nor avoid it in case it offends others (pp. 3–4). The reasons for all traditions would be heard rather than a claimed neutral culture held in place coercively (p. 292). When all groups know they can be heard, all have some interest to create the public space in which their contribution takes place (p. 133). In such an environment, diverse traditions will be defended by others if there are attempts to divide or impose on them (p. 297). Diverse groups become interested to defend the space not only for their own contribution but also for the contributions of others.

All groups can benefit from the contributory insight of others. Williams (2012, p. 293) proposes that communities benefit from the discovery that faith persists regardless of any attempts to enforce the claims of their tradition. Communities gain from resistance to their attempted coercion and from the resultant clearer distinction between faith and whatever communities intended to assert (p. 293). Elements in the Christian tradition rejected by others, require Christian communities to be clear about the presence of those elements in the tradition (pp. 284–285). At very least, alternate traditions are a necessary
sign that Christian communities might not have a comprehensive understanding (p. 290). Christian communities are rescued from hubris to rely on God’s provision and oversight with the failure of the coercive enforcement of their claims (p. 296). If a Christian community is conformed to distinctive relationships in response to God, people act not from their collective knowledge and initiative, but in grateful and obedient response to divine initiative (p. 304). As such, Williams endorses the need for receptivity and rejects coercive assertiveness.

Christian communities do not preserve a distinct tradition at the expense of others. Jesus, who was rejected, makes a new community without simply endorsing or destroying human relationships as they are (Williams, 2000, pp. 231–232, 236). Williams (2000, p. 235) explains that Christ’s suffering represents the nadir of good God-given relationships, and thereby demonstrates that people are not expendable. Christian communities can therefore support any group that supports the kingdom, even if unknowingly (p. 236). And if another group is at odds with the kingdom order because its aims are at the expense of others, it can be resisted (p. 236). Christian communities cannot resort to expedient reliance on supports that deny their faith (2012, p. 296). Power and security cannot be obtained at any price (2000, p. 237). Consequently, Christian communities would demonstrate a lack of interest in conquest and security (2012, p. 304). Christian communities would not seek worldly power and influence for itself because they answer to the divine vision for creation (2012, p. 304). Even less would communities, specifically for their own interest, seek the power of institutions because governmental power is itself limited and provisional (2012, p. 29). For a Christian community, the leadership of Christ cannot bring power and security at the expense of any other people.

Christian communities seek to demonstrate a different kind of interaction. Williams (2012, p. 28) notes that openness to dialogue is risky. But communities can
present gentle means that subvert coercion because they can trust in that which transcends mere coercion (p. 296). Communities can be trusted if they are willing to be assessed by their proclamations, particularly when there is collective failure (p. 306). Communities are, therefore, a witness to regard for all peoples’ worth beyond the communities’ apparent interests (p. 306). If Christian communities’ behaviour celebrates the glory of God — in selflessness and acceptance, there is something for others to celebrate (Williams, 2000, p. 254). Communities witness to the possibility of the common good demonstrated in the quality of these interactions.

The importance of independent communities

A different perspective of the interaction in society is provided by Hauerwas who is more sceptical of the motives of groups and institutions.

The interaction of a Christian community with other institutions can undermine the community. If a Christian community works too closely with other institutions, to exercise influence on them, this may simply mean adoption of their methods (Hauerwas, 1981, pp. 72–73). Hauerwas (1981, pp. 72–73) is concerned that a Christian community’s presentation of opinions about institutional action too readily accepts the agenda and the terms of discourse. Hauerwas (1987, p. 90) does not exclude whole-of-community opinion and action but is wary of the effects on the community of engaging in accordance with criteria not chosen by the community. He is concerned that a Christian community may succumb to being merely another group that operates within political power games that prop up civil religion. And Hauerwas (1981, pp. 108–109) is at least willing to accept the accusation of Christians’ withdrawal from society because Christian communities and society are not assumed to be identical. Hauerwas (1981, p. 85) is concerned that acceptance of the agenda of powerful institutions is acceptance that only they create the future. Furthermore, if a community concentrates on other institutions to fix the moral
life of society, they lack conviction that there can be nurture of the community’s virtuous life (Hauerwas, 1981, p. 3). At worst, the community asks lawmakers to enforce what communities have failed to be (Hauerwas & Willimon, 1989, p. 81). Reliance on other institutions to conduct repairs further undermines a community’s relevance (Hauerwas, 1988, p. 191). The logical conclusion is that communities endorse governmental regulation as the only criteria for people’s behaviour and purpose, including for communities themselves (Hauerwas, 1981, p. 85). Moreover, communities cannot expect fulfilment through human institutions’ regulations because communities always act in hope, knowing those institutions to be provisional in the kingdom order (Hauerwas, 1981, pp. 108–109). Christian communities would be wary of interaction that involves adoption of others’ methods and ultimately relies on their adjudication.

The preference is a Christian community that can discern, and nurture people in, Christian behaviour as a benefit to everyone. Hauerwas (1987, p. 93) wants Christian communities first to discuss issues in accordance with Christian priorities because that is the kind of people the community has nurtured. Given the dispositions this community has nurtured, people are in a position to act (p. 93). Furthermore, those dispositions are the basis for engaging with and changing others; thereby changing society rather than by providing declarations of the community’s opinion (p. 93). The focus for Christian communities is that they exist as an example to wider society (Hauerwas, 1981, p. 12). Moreover, Hauerwas (1981, p. 74; 1987, p. 90) has indicated that a Christian community supports wider society, because people’s virtue formation will lead them to create a good society. As such, he has not tended to emphasise whole-of-community engagement (1981, p. 74), whilst also protesting the subsequent accusation of sectarianism (1987, p. 90). Hauerwas (1988, p. 15) expects that Christians can be involved in all manner of other communities throughout society and (p. 11) even expects that a community will nurture
people in the necessary discernment of when and how far to engage. The nurture of a Christian community enables Christian individuals beneficially to change wider society.

When other institutions recognise the activity of a Christian community, this gives further weight to the community’s approach. Hauerwas (1988, p. 194) wants the executive government to give space to institutions that foster people’s character development and virtues in recognition of this contribution to well-regulated society. Hauerwas (1988, p. 194) does not expect governments to form virtuous people nor does he assume that democracy can rely on people’s natural morality without groups and institutions that debate virtues. The less recourse institutions have to coercion, the more effort there is to discover those virtues for a stable society, in a shared environment with good relationships (Hauerwas, 1987, p. 91). A community can discuss with other groups, traditions and institutions to discover what people can recognise as the same good (Hauerwas, 1987, p. 91). A community can, at times, join with others if members feel they have sufficiently shared behaviour in the same situation (Hauerwas & Willimon, 1989, p. 47). Christian communities contribute because recognition of their behaviour leads to further good behaviour across wider society.

The kind of Christian community that can have such an influence, is deeply concerned with the welfare of the members. The beatitudes say that the rejected people are important to God (Hauerwas & Willimon, 1989, p. 84). People’s difficulties are not solved so that the community does not have to be confronted with them anymore (p. 82). Shows of support, warmth and empathy extend the experience of relationship, so that people are able to respond to robust support (p. 82). The mutual embrace within the Christian community changes everyone’s behaviour (pp. 81–82). The Christian community members influence society through the experience of nurturing and being nurtured.
After consideration of some Christian perspectives on interaction with society, I will now discuss the concept of a common good for all society. This concept is made possible because God’s purpose in reconciled relationships recognises all people’s worth.

**Community interaction in the context of God’s Kingdom**

A Christian community’s perspective of interaction in wider society is based on community engagement in God’s purpose for creation. I will now consider how sphere sovereignty proposes recognition of human worth within God’s purposes; and additionally, that subsidiarity recognises the variety of human worth within creation. Gascoigne indicates that human worth, bestowed by God, is recognised in relationships. Hauerwas also indicates that a Christian community would recognise the worth of all. A community will understand their purpose through good relationships that recognise the worth of diverse activities and communities, which thereby demonstrate the common good.

The concept of sphere sovereignty begins with Kuyper’s indication that the diverse areas of human activity are jointly able to contribute to human society and none holds sway over the rest. In this way, he indicates that the diverse activities that contribute to human life are good. The well-regulated conduct of people’s lives in their various spheres is something given to them by God as part of creation. Within their spheres people have authority to co-operate rather than act in accordance with direction external to their sphere. All the communities in their spheres must accept that they live in balance and accede to the same laws. In this way, all communities contribute to a stable society. Dooyeweerd noted that contributions were by individuals’ actions in more than one sphere and by the mutually beneficial interactions of communities. Consequently, each community’s activity is good and that goodness actively contributes to the entire society.
While Kuyper simply describes all spheres’ actions under God’s sovereignty, Dooyeweerd specifies that Jesus Christ reveals and gives purpose to human life in the kingdom. Jesus Christ has revealed and fulfilled the kingdom order that is the basis for all human relationships, although Dooyeweerd does not particularly expand on the way the order upholds relationships. O’Donovan does elaborate that Jesus Christ has affirmed creation in the resurrection, for the life of the kingdom as the goal of human history. I concur that Christ as sovereign dispenses the kingdom order, which affirms that human life and all creation can be good. Jesus Christ in life, death and resurrection reveals and enables the relationships of the kingdom order.

I think more can be said, from my previous discussion, about Jesus Christ revealing the good relationships that enable the good community where the common good is present. Not only does Christ reveal, but people are transformed through Christ; people’s reconciliation with God makes correspondingly good relationships a possibility. As I also observed (in chapter five) it is a staggering revelation of the character of God who goes to such lengths, beyond people’s expectations, to restore their relationship with God. In such surprising activity, God reveals the extent to which creation and human life is treasured. The good order, communities and relationships revealed in Jesus Christ are good because God has bestowed such worth on human life.

Sphere sovereignty also proposes that God gives dignity to human life. People in their diverse activities can order their affairs under Christ’s sovereignty. More than mere automatons, people have been given scope to regulate their lives together without overwhelming chaos. Each sphere has honour by authority within its compass. Dooyeweerd refers to each sphere’s existence by the grace of God and as such all constructive human activity has dignity. Concern for the maintenance of a balance
between spheres without domination by one reflects the need for the human communities to recognise this dignity in other communities.

The principle of subsidiarity also recognises the worth of contributions to human society. Each group that can, should contribute, because to ignore or subsume their efforts, diminishes them. As such, subsidiarity recognises the worth of diversity. If many groups can contribute, none can be summarily rejected without first considering the experience they bring to human life.

The worth of the experience that others bring is reinforced when Gascoigne talks about the worth of human life bestowed by the engagement of the Triune God. It is worth not bestowed by human decision and cannot be removed by human behaviour. Moreover, the worth is in relationship with God reflected in human relationships. Consequently, it is necessary to engage with people to appreciate their worth and contribution properly; therefore, to recognise the importance of each community’s life.

In a way, Hauerwas’s insistence that a Christian community demonstrates the good communal life also recognises the worth of all humankind. A community’s behaviour focuses on help that supports the members, not simply for their own benefit, but to nurture them in such supportive behaviour. Community members experience nurture that they can reflect in wider society. When society recognises and appreciates this behaviour what they recognise is the concern and worth Christians assume for everybody. As such a Christian community is a sign indicating the worth of human life, which God has created for relationship with God.

I therefore find that God has given human life within creation as a good order that involves constructive and balanced interaction between communities. The affirmation and purpose for this good order is Jesus Christ who enables the good relationships for
good communities, and who reveals that God cherishes humankind, which makes such community life good. God has bestowed dignity on the diversity of communities within the good order. A Christian community would expect to reflect this worth in relationships, both internally and with other communities. There is no restriction of God’s good purpose, so the community can envisage affirmation of the worth of all in the interaction of communities as a widespread and common good.

**Christian community approaches to interaction**

Christian communities can expect beneficial interaction between all human communities that arises from their worthy participation in God’s purpose. I next consider Christian community attitudes to such interaction. Christian communities know the common good is possible within their communal life. In contrast to Hauerwas, I propose that a Christian community would fully acknowledge the community’s impact in wider society. Further, I consider the extent of interaction between communities. Community interaction would avoid both inflexible isolation of human activities and excessive regulation that overshadows the delicate balance between groups. Consequently, a community can imagine intentional, extensive and constructive interaction with all communities.

The common good found in a Christian community is always sought beyond the community. People are conformed within a community to selfless, conciliatory, creative and faithful relationships, as I argued in chapter five. In this way, they form a Christian community and share the common good. People reflect the goodness of God when it is given away and shared. There is no discrimination in these kinds of relationships, so whether members or not, all people are encountered and engaged to form good relationships. Selflessness gives all people due regard; the embrace of people’s diversity recognises creativity; consistency encourages faithfulness; and persistence in forgiveness
can reconcile those estranged. Moreover, Christian communities which are so formed, consciously nurture their members. Consequently, a whole community can deliberately encounter individuals and groups with the intention of these good relationships. Constantineanu (2010, pp. 158–160, using Rom. 12:9–21) considers that Paul urges a Christian community to contribute to demonstrate genuine love to unbelievers and to find something in common with them. As far as Christian communities can agree on and form good relationships, they seek and enable the common good.

Christian communities would therefore, intentionally and collectively be outward looking, not only present through individuals. Communities are neither neutral in their influences on individual behaviour nor invisible in each community’s entirety. I think that Hauerwas’s position to avoid the role of making the nation function has tended to stress separation to the extent that the community as a whole has a limited role. The emphasis has been on the actions of individuals whom the community has nurtured. To focus solely on the community members either gives the impression that any benefit to others is somewhat accidental; or that the community sets an example that they do not collectively and openly acknowledge. As a community interacts in entirety within wider society, I think the community can at least discern and affirm the collective impact of interaction. I would prefer a more open acknowledgement of the community’s influence. Additionally, since members are nurtured in behaviour resulting in collective action that contributes positively to wider society, it is contradictory for a community not to represent the behaviour the community nurtures. If a Christian community has nurtured people in certain behaviours and discernment concerning wider society, then the community has taken a position and has a visible presence for which there should be collective responsibility. Furthermore, there are descriptions of a community operating as a whole. O'Donovan (1986, p. 107) proposes that the Holy Spirit evokes agency in the community as it does in individuals. Bonhoeffer (2009b, p. 103) also envisaged a “collective person”
that was spontaneous and self-conscious. In the same way that a community can aid individual members to be discerning, there needs to be community-wide recognition of the community identity, purpose and practice for good relationships that enable a common good.

Christian communities’ outward behaviour would recognise that the intended life of creation, its purpose in the kingdom order, is for communal interaction and interdependence. Expositions of sphere sovereignty identify that the spheres’ interactions are significant. Dooyeweerd perceived that each sphere of activity was incomplete without the others. The spheres are united by their purpose in the one kingdom in which Christ is sovereign. Consequently, no sphere of activity could disregard other spheres. O’Donovan emphasises the extent to which the spheres overlap and interact. No sphere can flourish without the others; they will seek the common good by deliberation on the way they interact. The order and purpose of creation that is revealed in divine engagement through Jesus Christ, as I noted earlier, takes seriously the worth of all human activity. To reflect that order and purpose, conformed to that engagement, a Christian community expects communities mutually to engage for the common good.

The significance of the interdependence of human communities cannot be overemphasised. O'Donovan (2005, p. 254) considers that Christian communities challenge any rigidity or reduction in the overlap of the spheres, because the communities have a universal perspective and look to the purpose of the kingdom. Christian communities are drawn into closer interaction with all spheres due to the single purpose of the kingdom. Furthermore, Barth (1961a, CD III, 4, p. 22) notes in relation to Bonhoeffer's mandated human activities, that good God-given relationships between one activity and another manifest the roles of those activities for kingdom purposes. Unless spheres of activity interact well, simple definition of roles by contrast to others does not
convey the dignity of their purpose. I think that human activities are isolated from each other and their interaction is reduced to the fringes when the independence of spheres of activity is given too much prominence. Additionally, the importance of the interaction between the spheres reduces if specific spheres of activity as they are at some time in history are regarded as fixed in their extent and character. Spheres of activity can be flexible over time regarding their roles because of their experience of interaction. Consequently, honouring diverse activities cannot fix them so rigidly that they are no longer meaningful in other spheres.

Interdependence between human spheres of activity does not need to be co-ordinated by excessive control. The principle of subsidiarity endorses the contribution of many groups within society and for smaller groups not to be overwhelmed by larger groups. It is expected that governments will be the ultimate regulator of these interacting activities. As I shall discuss later, it is important that governmental institutions exercise their regulatory role for all other groups to function in a stable society. Within subsidiarity I perceive a potential tension (similar to the problem of governmental overreach to control disputes noted by Kuyper) between governments allowing diverse groups to interact as freely as possible and intervening against dominative powers to protect smaller groups. At some point, regulating all other groups seems to place governments beyond restraint. Dooyeweerd rejected the necessity of governmental coordination of groups because it reduces their dignity. O'Donovan (2005, p. 259) criticised subsidiarity specifically because governmental co-ordination reduces the way human activities are interdependent. I think, with Dooyeweerd and Kuyper, that increasingly bureaucratic regulation stifles rather than stimulates. Communities’ recognition of their mutual dependence and worth through constructive relationships has a much greater effect. Consequently, a Christian community would expect to contribute to diverse communities’ recognition of their interdependence.
I argue that a Christian community will be outward looking, and expect all communities, groups and institutions to interact well. It is a conscious intention for interaction; people recognise the collective impact of the perspective in which they have been nurtured. Such a community expects groups to be interdependent, regarding them as united in the order and purpose of the kingdom, revealed through encounter with Jesus Christ. Consequently, no group or activity is defined in a fixed way, but by its contribution as it interacts, and the interaction between groups cannot only rely on regulation. Christian communities expect every group to interact, so that all are esteemed and contribute for a good order that is their common good.

**Christian community expectations during interactions**

Christian communities have distinctive expectations of the kind of interaction between groups in wider society. Seeking the common good for the kingdom purpose will qualify community acceptance of other purposes and the same kingdom purpose leads to intentional relationships that enable the common good. O’Donovan, Hauerwas and Williams (as in my earlier discussion) provide overlapping but distinct perspectives. I first consider Christian communities’ approach to the origin of human purpose; the problems with interaction with human conceptions and implementation of purpose; and the danger in adoption of the same methods. Second, I consider the extent to which Christian communities can engage within wider society based on common agreement concerning what is good. Finally, I reflect on Christian communities’ need for a well-regulated society in which there is space for all contributions, mutual benefit and the common good.

The purposes of the kingdom and resultant human meaning is prior to all human institutions. Christian communities have no expectation of humanly-founded meaning because they accept God’s sovereignty and that God’s kingdom provides creation’s
purpose. Humankind is reconciled with God for their fulfilment in the kingdom. Werpehowski (2000, p. 240) notes Barth’s (CD IV, 2) insistence that Christian communities only witness to Jesus Christ whose cause is humankind in relationship with God. O’Donovan therefore indicates that fulfilment is beyond human conception or construction. No institution can supply its own meaning and be self-sustaining. Communities with traditions concerned with meaning are able to contribute these within society’s culture. Consequently, Williams hopes that powerful institutions, particularly, would recognise the contributions to meaning within wider society. Governments consult “industry experts and participants” because it is more inclusive and easier to make decisions with agreement. Many other local decisions can only proceed after consultation.

In some cases, a permanent council exists that the government either creates or consults. There is a good case for a permanent dialogue structure with faith traditions collectively, representative of the presence of traditions and meaning within society rather than the electorate. Decision makers need to acknowledge these traditions and their influence on society. I perceive that there was considerable unstated meaning in the then Australian Prime Minister’s apology to the stolen generation. Christian concepts of repentance and reconciliation were used whether deliberately or unconsciously and were accepted in the same way. Use of the Christian view of reconciliation is of course helpful, given that I argued that this is the framework for the relationships that enable the common good. Open acknowledgement of the origin of reconciliation, for example, provides a firmer foundation for society because people are able to identify and distinguish between concepts. Christian communities would contribute their meaning to society; in parallel with community interaction that demonstrates pursuit of the common good.

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62 The apology referred to: being sorry, reconciliation, the difficulty of forgiving, an unacknowledged shadow preventing reconciliation, admitting and regretting the pain felt by others, reconciliation being a new beginning, and practically and intrinsically recognising another’s worth (Rudd, 2008).
Christian communities know their own purpose, so can exercise healthy scepticism in interactions with other institutions. Hauerwas draws attention to some institutions who not only set the terms for interaction but also create the agenda. Christian communities can find that they are indistinguishable from other groups if some others determine the criteria for engagement. A similar lack of differentiation leads Christian communities to concur with governments that all that is required is regulation of their communities and wider society. Consequently, too close a resemblance to other institutions can lead to acceptance of their purposes and goals, which are limited to human achievement on earth. Jesus Christ proclaims and establishes the purpose of the kingdom that leads the community, so I concur with Hauerwas that Christian communities need to discriminate regarding interaction with other groups.

Scepticism is necessary not only because a Christian community is distinctive but because the achievement of human purposes can lead to forceful measures. O’Donovan outlines a danger when Christian communities accept roles given to them by powerful institutions, particularly governments. When groups act as governments determine, even by simple passive acceptance, those groups can allow powerful institutions forcibly to determine human purpose and the common good. A Christian community deals not only with institutions that may wield coercive pressure but with those structures, such as economic forces, that are often assumed to be beyond human control. Those forces are difficult for a Christian community to avoid, for example: property ownership, use of money for exchange, surplus resources held as money, interest earned, and borrowing money with interest. Behaviour alters with the assumption that these forces are so deeply enmeshed in wider society that they cannot be avoided. These forces and pressures give results corresponding to their compulsion, whether deliberately imposed or viewed as unstoppable. O’Donovan warns that humanly directed fulfilment involves coercion. Christian communities engage through good relationships in which compulsion of others
has no place and consequently engage with caution regarding human means as well as ends.

Still less would Christian communities cynically attempt to preserve their community’s position at the expense of others. Given that Jesus Christ came to restore relationships, a community cannot seek the protection of institutions by which it is undone. As Williams indicates, Christ’s suffering demonstrates the bankrupt position of the intention to gain at the expense of others. A community’s relationships would be self-giving not self-preserving; conciliatory not conquering; creative not constricting; and faithful rather than expedient. Christian communities cannot serve the purposes of the kingdom by following or using an earthly agenda of self-preservation.

Christian communities can independently identify the kingdom purposes they serve without resorting to human agendas, coercion or self-preservation. In accordance with those purposes, a Christian community can conduct relationships that support the common good to the extent that a broadly inclusive common good is recognised.

The wider the gulf between the common good fulfilled in the kingdom and a humanly constructed fulfilment, the more difficult a Christian community’s interaction will be. When powerful institutions see themselves as the totality of the good, common or otherwise, relationships with those institutions will be limited. Wallis (2014, p. 211) proposes that severe material inequality breeds distrust, hopelessness and disengagement because wealthy institutions use power to manipulate society for their own purposes and seemingly have no interest in, responsibility for, or relationships with, others. Engagement with those kinds of powerful institutions is similar to engagement with those who enabled Jesus’ crucifixion. Not only would a Christian community not act in

63 Jim Wallis is president of Sojourner’s community, Washington DC and prominent Evangelical social activist.
self-preservation at the expense of others, but as Williams explained, the community can resist any institutional demand that requires human exclusion and suffering, and thereby question such demands. A Christian community’s good relationships are a defence for all, particularly those who respond. Such circumstances lead Bonhoeffer (2009a, p. 365) to formulate that when the network of institutions that claimed governmental authority failed in that role by over-exertion of power, to provide insight to the institutions and for the sake of those suffering, Christian communities might defy such institutions to protect the sufferers. Influential Anabaptist and ecumenical theologian John Howard Yoder (1994, p. 209), indicates that there would be consequences to such defiance, dispensed by those who wield power, which Christian communities would accept for the sake of self-giving and faithful relationships with the victims. In the extreme, Christian community-wide support for the common good is sustained in the relationship with victims.

Where there are more benign relationships, Christian communities can affirm common ideas about what is good and be concerned about what is not. Communities will be most concerned about the power that disrupts good relationships and leaves some neglected. As I discussed (in chapter two), there are ways society is conducted that disrupt relationships, fragment communities and lessen the possibility of people’s nurture in good relationships. A Christian community can indicate any disagreement with institutions’ perceptions and roles, but Bonhoeffer (2009a, p. 365) also envisaged the community’s provision of aid to the disregarded. Both effectively criticise social structures. West (1999, p. 96) proposes that pastoral care is prophetic announcement about what it finds abhorrent to God’s purposes. John Howard Yoder (2001, p. 25) considers that in the light of the biblical jubilee, there can be advocacy for legislation, guidelines, local needs, and

64 Similar to the requirement of Christian communities made by Barth (CD III, 4) to champion the weak against the strong (Werpehowski, 2000, p. 236).
65 A missionary, ecumenist and scholar in theological ethics.
specific persons. Not only a community helping or asking others to do so, but Christian individuals questioning the structures in which they work and suggesting change (John Howard Yoder, 2001, p. 26). West (1999, p. 122) wants the community to go further and examine the disruptive structures and discern the causes. A community in dialogue can suggest ways in which those structures can be altered to serve people better (West, 1999, p. 122). When people’s lives are dislocated by exploitation or neglect, the community can ask for help on their behalf. Within a courteous dialogue, there is no intention to coerce decision makers. The more the dialogue is conducted within what a community sees as a good relationship — in which there is consistency, willingness to benefit others, modesty and imagination — the more likely is the community’s view will be accepted (as O’Donovan indicated). If members are willing to defend the vulnerable at a cost to the community when institutions are oppressive, the community can also ask more amenable institutions to defend the vulnerable. Some structures are only effectively altered by widespread coordination at a national or international level or alteration requires a certain level of resources (Wallis, 2014, p. 236). A community may discern that there are circumstances where some people’s relationships and community are undermined to such an extent that requests for institutional assistance is most urgent and demonstrative of the importance of good relationships, attitudes and behaviour. Disaster relief, reduction of armed conflict and assistance for refugees are obvious examples; but working conditions, together with residential and transport planning, can also profoundly affect people’s communities. Christian communities within good relationships with other institutions can indicate and demonstrate how institutions can act together to protect people from fractured relationships for the common good.

Christian communities conduct these good relationships within a stable society that allows all contributions to be recognised. A Christian community would have a perspective that the sphere of governmental regulation has its place. O’Donovan does not
want governments to be the architects of the entire common good, but he does want governments to regulate so that everybody can contribute to the common good, even for governments to intervene where private behaviour has neglected or harmed others. I perceive that a reduced sense of private vengefulness or competition to survive benefits human society. Where society is reliably stable and wrongs are addressed, groups trust that each can contribute. Christian communities want a well-regulated society so that each community can interact positively and participate in the contribution to society.

Christian communities would also want all groups to recognise the beneficial participative space. A partnership between governmental and non-governmental institutions, groups and entities recognises the extent of the social space (Wallis, 2014, p. 236). Williams wants governments to defend the space for everybody’s interaction; for all groups to welcome this public space where all constructive contributions are included. Groups can support each other’s presence when they recognise that contributions in this space are important. I think governmental regulation that ensures all groups can participate is welcome so that groups can experience the benefits of their interdependence. Consequently, recognition that groups need to participate through good relationships leads to constructive behaviour that enables a common good.

The kind of interaction that Christian communities intend is within a society that recognises human meaning and purpose are not humanly conceived and fulfilled. Where institutions construct their own purpose, conformation to their agenda requires communities to be cautious. Caution is necessary because human purposes are frequently pursued forcibly — illustrated by the pitfalls for communities in pursuit of self-preservation. The degree to which human purpose is enforced will limit a Christian community’s relationships that enable the common good. At worst, the community can only be alongside those disregarded. If there is some acceptance of the self-giving,
conciliatory, creatively surprising and faithful relationships Christian communities pursue, there can be constructive and critical exchange to support all relationships in society. Consequently, Christian communities want the regulatory institutions to provide stability so that there is space for all to contribute for the common good.

**Community interaction that builds the common good**

Christian community interactions can demonstrate the common good as they reflect God’s goodness. A community can reflect God’s generous, creative, conciliatory and faithful goodness in relationships that appreciate the worth of others. I next consider the ways in which Christian communities can experience generosity and creativity through constructive and communal dialogue that appreciates the contribution of others. I also consider how generous, faithful and conciliatory relationships assist those whose worth has been disregarded. Both Williams and Gascoigne advocate that communities also receive even as they participate in cherishing others. I propose that as a community regards others well, among growing relationships that reflect God’s goodness, all participate to foster the common good.

Consideration that Christian communities do not have an omniscient understanding, either of their own community or the universe, can lead communities to accept and esteem the contributions of other groups. In the first instance, those contributions are beneficial as resistance, as Williams notes, if a community’s claims are too all-encompassing. A community’s acknowledgement of other groups avoids the temptation to claim an exclusive relationship with God (West, 1999, p. 96). Also, Williams notes, communities do not have to rely on claims to faith secured by enforcement. Generous recognition and esteem of other’s insights reflects God’s goodness and leads communities to be more humble and less defensive.
Generous acceptance of the worth of others also sharpens Christian communities’ understanding. Again, Williams notes that external contributions benefit Christian understanding of the presence of some strands in the Christian tradition. The simple presence of alternative insights indicates that such alternatives might be necessary. As Christ’s sovereignty is universal, there is no restriction to any further illumination of his revelation (Barth, 1961b, CD IV, 3, p. 118). Christian communities’ generous faithfulness can discover surprising creativity during dialogue with diverse groups.

In dialogue with others, a community demonstrates respect by taking the position of others seriously. As Gascoigne proposed, the community must do more than simply dismiss others’ insights because of a presumption to know some divine verdict. At the same time, it willingly goes beyond a stated position in order to discuss and compare reasons from their different traditions. Christian communities would also be mindful that tradition developed in a cultural context. Consequently, Gascoigne expects Christian communities to welcome the insight of others as valuable because the insight is ever-present. Christian communities can express the worth of other communities in the development of relationships through attentive dialogue.

Christian communities can have a creative approach to relationships that reflects God’s creative goodness. Gascoigne proposed that if different groups recognise the same principles of good relationships, their dialogue can be augmented by this understanding. Through this socially constructive behaviour people can further agree on good relationships; as I noted (in chapter one), natural law supportively proposes that people can have common ideas to treat each other well. The more a Christian community develops good relationships with others, the more the possibility of good relationships comes to light. A Christian community and the dialogue partners all benefit from developing a grasp of good relationships, which further improves the dialogue. A growing
and improving dialogue benefits all whether involved or not and contributes to the common good.

The reflection of God’s goodness in generous esteem and acceptance of creative insights in dialogue, acknowledges the worth of other groups, but also enables Christian communities to be more like the good communities they intend. As a community presumes less and offers more, the community also receives. Christian communities and their dialogue partners can all benefit in the same way from God’s goodness; as the dialogue improves and deepens, their mutually beneficial relationships contribute to the common good.

Christian communities can also develop through reflection of God’s goodness when they recognise the worth of others who are least regarded. A community can establish relationships, esteem and assist those people who have the most disrupted relationships.

All people’s needs are intertwined. People’s relationships suffer when they are struggling with a precarious income. Worry about ability to provide food; the inability to be hospitable or sociable with food; and the impact of hunger on temperament all cause relationships to deteriorate (King, Bellamy, Kemp, & Mollenhauer, 2013, pp. 32–35). Conversely, those whose lives are more isolated tend disproportionately to have other needs. Hardship and social exclusion was found to be much more likely among single parent or single adult households (King, Bellamy, Swann, Gavarotto, & Coller, 2009, pp. 20–21). The conclusion drawn was that single issue, transactional assistance had limited effect because people were not considered as social creatures with interrelated needs (King et al., 2009, p. 47). To esteem people properly, Christian communities would

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66 Research from the church agency, Anglicare.
address their needs through and alongside good relationships because people’s lives are a whole and various aspects cannot be treated separately.

Christian communities would therefore be involved and cannot be at arms-length in their well-rounded appreciation of others. We are warned trenchantly by Barth to beware of eschewing inconvenient encounters,

A whole ocean of official and private charity, both Christian and secular, for this reason is no real serving of the neighbour, the true point of the relevant measures and institutions being to rid society, government, pastor, and individual of needy fellowmen. (Barth, 1981b, p. 426).

If as Hauerwas noted, rejected people are the recipients of the beatitudes, their problems cannot be solved so that they no longer trouble a community. Both authors indicate that Christian communities would lack integrity if they appreciated that aid provision requires interaction with people but were not prepared themselves to be involved in those relationships.

From their own tradition, Christian communities know that good conciliatory relationships lead to a community’s inclusive engagement. The Eucharistic pattern is to share within the context of companionship (John Howard Yoder, 2001, pp. 18–21). Paul warns against a failure of relationship if people do not extend their table fellowship with all believers, which indicates that they are not sincerely involved in Christ’s saving work and do not trust in God’s faithful goodness for all (Thiselton, 2006, pp. 185–186, 189, citing I Cor. 11:18–34). Paul also warns against sharing any material aid that does not involve genuine concern for people (Thiselton, 2006, p. 221, citing I Cor. 13:3). Christian communities celebrate a tradition that forms them for good conciliatory relationships. Communities know that there must be the continual possibility to restore difficult relationships. A Christian community can reflect God’s goodness by faithful and conciliatory relationships that respectfully address people’s needs.
Engagement among diverse communities, which I proposed earlier, uncovers the benefits of their insights and the mutual benefit of common understanding for the common good. Similarly, Christian communities can be more closely acquainted with God’s goodness and the common good by seeking meaningful relationships where these are most disrupted. Additionally, I will consider that practical involvement to help others through good relationships to enjoy more robust community is part of a Christian community’s own transformation.

A Christian community’s confidence in good relationships also needs to be experienced. Gascoigne proposes that people’s intentions, formation and experience are intertwined. If a Christian community is not engaged in relationships to assist people, members have less expectation that they will be so engaged. Gascoigne is drawing on Mette (1988, pp. 78–79) who was concerned that when Christian welfare organisations are separate from congregational activities, members may perceive this care has little to do with the community’s life and relationships. I think in a community that practises care of stranger through good relationships, it is easier for people to join in. People are more likely to practise what they know is possible. Further, as I discussed for virtuous dispositions (in chapter 6), behaviour is easier with practice. People’s expectation and performance are tightly bound up with their practice; when theoretical possibilities are enacted, they are easier to repeat. Moreover, from a different ecclesial perspective, Barth (1958, CD IV, 2, pp. 721–722) maintained that a Christian community is more greatly conformed to life in Christ as they communicate that life with everybody. John H. Yoder (1997, pp. 27–28) comments that the community cannot first define and perfect that life internally without demonstrating the same life to others. A theoretical knowledge of good caring relationships has no strength without a Christian community’s expectation to practise them. Christian communities can only grasp the extent and depth of God’s goodness in relationships as each community practises them.
As Christian communities practise conciliatory, faithful, generous and surprising relationships, they discover a change among themselves as well as their beneficiaries. Hauerwas and Willimon, concerned with the formative nature of a Christian community, felt that when people receive care in the context of good relationships, they are better able to participate in such relationships. Moreover, those who give such care are also more able through their experience and practice with others. Further, I indicated (in chapter five) that it is necessary that communities adhere to an active conciliatory approach to maintain and restore relationships. The experience of such activity, which reflects God’s goodness in relationships, is not confined within a Christian community, but can be the community’s experience in wider society. A community can regard people well whom they endeavour to embrace in relationships and as they embrace, all can only be more greatly transformed by God’s goodness.

Christian communities would want to reflect God’s goodness in relationships by interaction with other groups for the common good. In those relationships, each community can be generous in regard for others by willing dialogue that welcomes surprising and creative contributions. And communities can generously, faithfully and conciliatorily encourage people in their most dire need and damaged relationships. Greater involvement with and regard for others can lead communities to the good relationships their tradition endorses. As a community’s experience extends, members can perceive that the community not only bestows but receives an experience of good relationships. As a community concurs with others in their relationships, they may uphold one another in God’s goodness that extends unchecked for a common good.
Conclusion

There is a common good because there are good relationships that sustain everybody’s wellbeing. The common good of a Christian community, nurtured in God’s goodness, cannot but extend through relationships that overflow to the greatest extent.

There is order in creation that is directed to the purposes of the Kingdom of God. People are cherished in this good creation whose order is upheld, demonstrated, and unified through reconciled relationships in the sovereignty of Jesus Christ. Within this order, all peoples’ spheres of activity make a worthy contribution in interdependent relationships. Consequently, Christian communities can expect to contribute to the common good of all creation.

The Christian community expects to conduct relationships in wider society for the common good that accord with God’s purposes. The community expects purpose beyond human goals would be recognised and is cautious, therefore, of human agendas and compliance with enforced human goals. The community can recognise the worth of all and through constructive exchanges, encourage efforts to build better relationships throughout society. The community wants a stable society that encourages diverse groups to contribute to the common good.

Christian communities would reflect God’s goodness through good relationships with other groups and institutions so that together they seek the common good. A community can recognise people’s worth by acceptance of other insights into good relationships and by assistance in situations where relationships are damaged. In both giving and receiving a community can experience the benefits of good, selfless, creative, conciliatory and faithful relationships. Christian communities can with others know there is a common good.
I have offered a theological vision of the common good. This vision can be compared with the reality of statements and actions within church organisations. From the comparison in the next two chapters I consider whether the vision contributes to current church activity.
Chapter 8 — A case study in the Australian Anglican Church

Introduction

A comparison with the actual concerns of Christian communities brings into relief my theological proposals for the common good. The potential practice that would express this theology for the common good can be compared with actual practice and its theological import. A fruitful examination of the similarities and differences with a real-life illustration enables exploration of the full expression of theology in people’s lives. To begin the comparison, in this chapter I describe the stated or visible interest in the common good in some Australian Christian communities.

To provide the description, I conduct a case study within the Anglican Church of Australia. Through a case study, I can examine events, processes and attitudes, and note both their interconnections, and conceptions of community and common good.

In this study, I first examine explicit references to the term “the common good”. The frequency, use, and meaning attached to the term can give some indication of the relevance and impact of the common good.

There are also reports of practical action that contribute to the benefit of individuals and their wider social situation. Beneficial practical action demonstrates generosity, creativity and faithfulness, and potentially interest in good relationships. I am specifically interested in activities where the purpose is to provide benefits by personally engaging others in a social context. Activities that arise from people’s co-operation, with benefits enjoyed in common, can be a sign of seeking an unarticulated common good.

Finally, I wish to consider what are the stated aims for social welfare within the Anglican context and ultimately, what reasons from Christian faith are given.
In the initial phase of this study, I outline what the Anglican discussion communicates about the common good in word and deed, what is stressed as important, and the reasons given. In the subsequent phase in the next chapter, I consider more targeted questions concerning the degree of connection between these Anglican organisations and my theological concerns.

**Method**

This case study examines published activities and opinions expressed within the Anglican Church context. I conduct a brief case study by gathering a range of material that can be publicly accessible or has been publicised to congregations through the internet and printed news media. The material was gathered during the period of the thesis and may include prior matter that persists in electronic form. Temporary material indicates transient ideas while persistent material is illustrative of more enduring attitudes.

I examine reports of Anglican organisation activity using approaches from content and critical discourse analysis. This analysis indicates the concepts that organisations and communities commit to or are exposed to most of the time; and therefore, indicates the importance and understanding of the common good. The more widespread the activities and the more enthusiastically reported, the more robust and better appreciated the engagement that sustain both activities and enthusiasm. In the simplest sense, content analysis reflects the proportion of interest in the common good or alternate themes. Content analysis also indicates the interconnection between themes, such as, attitudes to Christian community and attitudes to socially beneficial communal activity. I therefore look for themes whose presence I think is indicative of an interest in the common good. This content analysis overlaps with discourse analysis — described as examining the way people or groups represent their actions in their reports (K. Jacobs, 2006, p. 138). A
critical discourse analysis examines reports for their discursive practice of reinforced perspectives and at the macro level, the social practice in which the report is situated. In other words: what emphasis is given in opinions and accounts of activities; who are the originators and audience in these accounts; and what is the occasion? I examine both the discursive and social practice of reports to portray attitudes to the common good within the Anglican context.

My role as researcher is a knowledgeable observer who has a certain detachment from the three Anglican dioceses that are the location for the study. I have not participated in any of these dioceses for a few years, but as a lifelong member of Anglican communities, I am likely to understand the denominational colloquialisms. As I lived until adulthood in the United Kingdom and subsequently about the same duration in Australia, I can be attentive to the distinctive information Australian Anglicans convey about themselves. Additionally, I have lived in several urban and rural locations, participating in local Anglican communities, so have varied expectations concerning community characteristics.

I conduct this study of the activities and associated statements within the three most populous dioceses of the Anglican Church in Eastern Australia — Melbourne, Sydney, and Brisbane. These dioceses are representative of the range of Anglican Church expression in its most common urban Australian form. Between them, these three dioceses also substantially represent the range of theology, church expression and activity, both shared and distinct, that is apparent for these Australian Christians.

The activities of various Anglican communal entities and organisations and their interactions are indicative of interest in the common good. Within the three Anglican dioceses, primary communal activity takes place within one or more congregations within a parish. The parishes are connected with some co-ordination within substantially
autonomous dioceses. Within each diocese there are Anglican welfare agencies whose professional staff undertake a considerable range of work beneficial to people’s needs.

The material I examine describes activities, opinions and reasons for both. Diocesan news media outlets provide accounts from specific congregations as well as more general interests and opinions. Initiatives and explanations are also present in diocesan synod material, vision and mission statements. Among other material disseminated in diocesan websites, are statements concerning Anglican (private) school communities either provided by the diocese or provided by individual schools. Church welfare agencies produce their own newsletters and broadcast their interests and campaigns, as well as producing annual reports, plans, research documents and submissions to government. All this material indicates the content and interests of widely-known Anglican public discussion. The material also discloses the flow of information in discussions and the roles portrayed both internally and to wider society. I additionally utilise any (infrequently) relevant church survey statistics that provide broad quantitative indications alongside the qualitative evaluation of interests within the Anglican context.

I anticipate that Diocesan and agency statements could provide some theological foundations and direction concerning attitudes to the common good because these institutions can draw on a deeper well of reflection from which they expect to provide direction. Whereas reports of parish activities are mostly about practical expression because to provide reflection on purpose depends on individual capability and expectation.

It is possible that the material examined does not accurately report the incidence of activities. As welfare agencies are audited, their reports are factually accurate. Moreover, both agencies and dioceses in general are concerned to report their activities as favourably as possible. Consequently, they will cover as much good news as possible.
and are unlikely to risk their reputations with misrepresentative reports. It is possible that there is a focus on specific kinds of activity and opinions as the preferred news. In that case, this study gauges the emphasis and roles that are important across various Anglican organisations. If there are activities given less attention, the relatively low-key reporting may be discernible but also indicates there may be interests and activities that are not visible to this study.

As I review this data, I make observations concerning the interest in, activities supporting, and reasons for, a concept of the common good.

The common good scarcely mentioned

A review of interest in the term, the common good, within the Australian Anglican Church context will be brief because the references are fleeting. Explanations for the concept of the common good also reflect little exploration, but as far as possible, I examine those explanations. Specifically, I consider the expectation of the role of governmental institutions to uphold the common good in Australian society.

References to the common good concept are infrequent within the three Anglican dioceses. Within the material available during the period of my investigation, the phrase has appeared once in media statements by the archbishop of Melbourne (Ashby, 2012) and the Dean of Sydney (Phillip Jensen, 2012); once in a sermon in central Brisbane (Henderson, 2012); in a paper made available by Melbourne Dioceses’ Social Responsibility Committee (Cameron, 2010); in a lecture given by a British peer hosted by the Brotherhood of St Laurence (The Sambell Oration, Brolly, 2015); and is mentioned in three welfare agency publications (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012a; Brotherhood of St Laurence; Nicholson, 2006). While in three articles it was an important theme, such infrequency suggests that the common good concept is not at the forefront of

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67 Paper originally produced for the Australian General Synod Public Affairs Commission.
discussion in the Australian Anglican context. There might be an unspoken assumption that the concept of the common good is always present. Alternatively, the focus of these communities is elsewhere if there is no urgency to raise the common good as an issue.

The loss of the common good concept in wider society, as I discussed in chapter two, may have had a very great influence within Anglican organisations.

The lack of focus is also reflected in the description of the common good. The common good is not clearly described in most cases. That everyone should enjoy material wellbeing is mentioned, that everyone in society should have a share in wealth and wellbeing (Freier cited in Ashby, 2012, para. 23); that concern for the common good spurs people’s financial generosity (Nicholson, 2006, p. 2); and that a less common good means economic exclusion (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012a, p. 4). In addition, there is concern for other aspects of people’s lives; that there is equitable provision of services such as health and education (Nicholson, 2006, p. 2); that the common good means social inclusion (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012a, p. 4); and that a truly common good enables family and community relationships (Phillip Jensen, 2012, paras. 13–14). The Sambell oration introduced the concept of the importance of community organisations — neither government nor market — from the perspective and experience within the United Kingdom (Brolly, 2015). In more depth Cameron (2010, p. 18) refers to the correlation between social and economic exclusion; to sensitive court decisions; people’s dignity; and equitable utilisation of resources and human capabilities. All of these provisions are linked to equity that Cameron (2010, p. 19), drawing on O'Donovan, locates in the context of human community, interdependence and intercommunication. These descriptions indicate that the common good is seen largely as a matter of material distribution that is linked to the interconnectedness of society. The relative brevity of these descriptions indicates little regarding the way the common good concept might arise within Christian faith or theology. Within this Anglican context, it is assumed either that everyone has the
same clear idea of and enthusiasm for the common good, and the concept need not be pressed as urgent, or that other matters are greater priorities.

A further aspect is the persistent expectation of governmental responsibility for the common good. For the Brotherhood of St Laurence, the common good requires more than private generosity:

[. . .] this ‘common good’ is more than donating to charities, important though that is. It’s also about strengthening institutions that build a more just society: good services for toddlers; better public and low-fee schools; constructive not punitive welfare programs; affordable housing; support for the lonely and confused aged and their carers; and well-funded public services to help the injured, the ill and the addicted back into the mainstream. (Nicholson, 2006, p. 2)

Such services and institutions are clearly resourced and therefore planned by governments and Nicholson’s (2006, p. 2) expectation is that governments will “show decisive leadership”. Phillip Jensen (2012, para. 14) supposes that the task of parliament is to support the common good. Governments are to promote and maintain the factors for the common good, although their function is limited (Cameron, 2010, p. 19). Additionally, there is governmental responsibility to provide a clear vision and goal and the means by which it will be achieved, while responsibility is also expected from business, trade unions and the general public (Freier cited in Ashby, 2012, para. 24). Such expectations are similar to Australian society in general in which there are public calls for governments not only to protect people and provide material aid but also to provide counselling and education in order to improve people’s behaviour — in an area as personal, relational and communal as domestic violence (Knauss & Gorrey, 2015, para. 1). It should be noted that the expectations of governmental responsibility are not, statistically, an overwhelming perspective; although it is held actively by a significant proportion who, together with those who agree in some situations, constitute a numerical majority in Australian society (Phillip J. Hughes, Bond, Bellamy, & Black, 2003, pp. 17, 19, 21, 24). These expectations may also be underpinned by the relationship of Anglican welfare agencies with
governments by whom they are largely funded, as I discuss later. The only purpose of government is for everyone’s good, as I have discussed (chapters two and seven), but there is an imbalance if governments are overwhelmingly responsible for the common good.

What seems to be absent from the Australian Anglican commentary on the common good is that many communities contribute conceptually and materially. There is a contrast with other Anglican provinces. A survey within the Episcopal Church found people hoped most for a welcoming Christian community that responds well to neighbours (Task force for reimagining the Episcopal Church, 2014, pp. 37, 39). The Church of England (2015, pp. 4, 26) bishops, meanwhile, want governmental support for the common good within the context of many contributors from the diverse communities to which people belong, and which are not part of governmental bureaucracy. Both perspectives consider that good Christian communities, which interact with and contribute to other communities, are important and for everybody’s good. Christian communities can be more keenly aware of the common good if they consider themselves among the contributors. The main emphasis apparent in scarce Australian Anglican Church commentary is for governmental responsibility for the common good. As such, there is little apparent focus for flourishing Anglican Christian communities and their role that both embodies and contributes to the common good.

I have found that there are few prompts to consider the common good an urgent issue within the Australian Anglican Church context. There are few detailed descriptions of or explanations for the common good, and the role of government rather than Christian communities is emphasised. Either Anglicans are complacent concerning a common good for themselves and wider society, or Anglican organisations perceive they have other priorities.
Anglican Church organisations do, however, contribute to wider society which, I next discuss, leads to some support for the common good howsoever it is named.

**Activities for a widespread common good**

A review of Anglican Church activity discloses ways in which beneficial activities are undertaken at various levels. These benefits are dispensed simply because the needs exist. Potentially, the improvement in people’s lives is felt throughout society as a common good. I look at individual congregations and their local activities. Church welfare agencies, which historically have been supported across each diocese, undertake more substantial activities. I also consider the more recent recognition and interest in co-ordinating congregation activities with those of the large Anglican welfare agencies.

Reports indicate that discreet Anglican parish congregations are involved in support and assistance to the wider local community. This activity is unsurprising as regular members of Christian congregations are more likely to be involved in social welfare than society’s average (Kaldor et al., 1999, p. 72). Moreover, across Australian churches generally, ninety-two per-cent of churches provide some kind of community service activity, and within Anglican churches, twenty-six per-cent of members are involved in such activities (Ruth Powell et al., 2012, pp. 53–54). The following reported anecdotes reflect this research and that these activities have some significance for congregations. Activities range from education through social support to emergency volunteers. In Broadmeadows, Melbourne, funds were raised for homework assistance for migrant children and volunteers assisted 100 children in four schools ("Homework clubs," 2014, p. 8). Adults were assisted with their tax returns in Corio ("Help with Tax," 2014, p. 9) and language assistance provided in a number of Southern Queensland parishes ("Around the Diocese," 2015, p. 11). In Wynnum, Brisbane, a shipping container on church land will provide a youth recreation area (Maccoll, 2015, para. 3). A number
of Brisbane parishes offered Christmas meals and food parcels, often as part of a regular food provision program (Maccoll, 2014, paras. 2, 6, 11–12). Lastly, Pitt Town community, Hawkesbury region, has established a disaster policy to assist and counsel people during extreme events (Gilbert, 2014b, p. 5). Clearly, many individual Anglican congregations willingly and imaginatively assist wider society.

The extent of this congregational activity depends on the voluntary and financial capacity of members and their perspective on aid donations. Such activities were reported in distinct articles (in this and next chapter across 2014–2015 issues) that represented three per-cent of *Focus* in Brisbane, one per-cent of *The Melbourne Anglican*, and three per-cent of the Sydney *Southern Cross*. As such, these activities are a minority of reported events and discussions, which indicates they are relatively less important within the Anglican context.

In addition to parish volunteers, Anglican churches were originators of welfare agencies that are now effectively an arm of the welfare state. Historically institutions were created by churches to provide more permanent assistance to society (Carey & Riley, 2012, p. 696). Their foundation may reflect a very long-standing role within Christendom of church concern for healthcare, welfare and education. Anglican institutions have largely been amalgamated into diocesan Anglicare organisations (in Melbourne there remain multiple organisations of which Anglicare and the Brotherhood of St Laurence are particularly relevant) (Anglicare Southern Queensland, 2012, pp. 2–3; Anglicare Victoria, 2012b, p. 2). These organisations were the channel for church material and volunteer assistance to provide care in response to society’s needs. Subsequently, these organisations have been funded mostly by governments, which support their acknowledged expertise (Carey & Riley, 2012, pp. 696–697). Close to forty per-cent of governmentally funded services for family and community, indigenous needs and
employment are provided by not for profit organisations and service levels are also significant for culturally and linguistically diverse, disability and housing services (Productivity Commission, 2010, p. D.7). Among Australian charity or not-for-profit organisations, one third (mainly Christian), identify religion as one of their charitable purposes, and of these, the quarter who identify religion as their main purpose, is the largest group of organisations (Knight & Gilchrist, 2015, in Executive Summary). Church welfare organisations have a significant role in society.

Welfare agencies provide a considerable range of services and on a different scale from parish activity. For example: foster care; disabled child support; aged care and support; HIV support; women’s refuges; remote assistance; youth clubs; correctional chaplaincy; mental health, disability and carer support; youth stability after leaving state care; refugee support; and emergency relief and financial counselling (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012b, pp. 4–6; Anglicare Southern Queensland, 2012, pp. 10–23; Anglicare Victoria, 2012a, pp. 12, 29). The Brotherhood of St Laurence also seeks cross-community partnerships in activities such as: corporate funding of learning support; providing large retailer clothing stock for hospital emergencies; and sponsoring migrant family reunions ("Assulum seekers [sic]," 2013, p. 7; "AXA extends partnership," 2006, p. 3; "Brotherhood community resource bank," 2006, p. 3).

These welfare agencies, while established by the dioceses, have independent governance, and are largely funded by governments to provide planned assistance to society through salaried employees. Congregations within a diocese remain connected to agencies through diocesan news reports and agency support for social awareness (I discuss both in more detail in the next chapter). Anglicare Southern Queensland ("Vision, Mission and Values," 2012, para. 1) states that it shares the mission of Christ of the Diocese of Brisbane, while Anglicare in the Diocese of Sydney ("Who we are," n.d., para.
2) sees its work as the fruit of the gospel of Jesus Christ — partnered with churches where possible, and Anglicare Victoria (2012a, p. 3) simply states that its work expresses God’s love. Additionally, Gordon Preece (2017, p. 24) expresses concern regarding the declining connection between those working in agencies and congregations. With varying degrees of identification with their founding churches, the agencies provide separate professional assistance from congregation activities. Historically and because governments have chosen to maintain services through the not-for-profit sector, the initiative of Anglican churches continues as public welfare in which the congregations are not comprehensively involved. These activities are not directed from within the Anglican context, rather governments determine the activities and resources to provide professional social welfare for the benefit of society. Advocacy for the work of the agencies is not conceptually different from endorsement of any governmental or not-for-profit activity that provides a social benefit. Members of Anglican congregations might endorse agency activities for social welfare and be influenced by what agencies do and the way it is done, but the activities do not arise from within the fabric of the Anglican church.

Co-operation between welfare agencies and individual Anglican congregations, usually known as parish partnerships, potentially bridges their distance. These partnerships have led to congregational assistance with activities such as: emergency aid, counselling, migrant support, homeless support, respite care, op-shops, food drives, and aged day care (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012a, p. 12; Anglicare Victoria, 2012b, p. 4; Kell, 2011, paras. 8–14). The partnerships have not only provided welfare agencies with physical and human resources, such as a location for an aged care day centre in Sydney or a men’s mental health drop-in centre in Brisbane, but also indicate that the local Christian congregation seeks to act positively through relationships with the recipients (Anglicare Southern Queensland, 2012, p. 17; Wilson, 2008, para. 4).
The parish partnerships clearly have great potential for local Christian congregations to be aware of agency activities as well as engagement for and experience of relationships necessary for well-rounded social support. Most of the information concerning parish partnerships is provided by the welfare agencies who show much more interest than church congregations. Indeed, the description provided by Anglicare Victoria ("Parish Partnerships," 2013, para. 2) indicates that parish partnerships achieve service delivery for the welfare agency, particularly in geographical locations where the agency is not otherwise active. Anglicare Victoria expects that delivery of welfare services is also the intention of local Anglican congregations ("Parish Partnerships," 2013, para. 1). Welfare agencies appear to provide the impetus for parish partnerships. General church media has not reported appreciatively the significance of support for relationships and community that involves local Anglican congregations. Local church congregations seem to have accepted the agencies’ professional organisation and different scale of resources to provide services to wider society, including organisation of their congregations’ contributions. There is little emphasis on or celebration of local Anglican congregations that have grasped the potential for a greater communal experience on their own level.

I conclude that Anglican involvement, singly, or collectively through professional organisations, has historically organised a considerable range of support and service to wider society. Clearly, there is undefined willingness and tradition to serve, so that all may flourish, but the initiative and celebration of communal activity seems not to rest within Anglican congregations. It is not so clear that service and community life are strongly connected, as I discuss further in the next chapter.

Within such limited articulation and celebration of the common good, the theological reasons for action are instructive of underlying attitudes.
Reasons for action for the common good

As I have reviewed Anglican Church initiatives for the social support they provide, I finally consider the reasons given that are grounded in Christian faith. Most of these explanations are present in material from the Diocese of Sydney, which at least sees an explanation as appropriate for the life of a Christian community.

There is certainly an expectation that Christianity does lead to concern for others and society’s needs. Christianity has a tradition of care for the poor, widows and orphans (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012a, p. 4); Christians need to be aware of their responsibilities for society ("Social Responsibilities Committee," n.d., para. 1); care is given to anyone regardless of their response (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012a, p. 4); there is an intent to address physical, social, emotional and spiritual needs and the latter is only met in the Gospel of Jesus Christ (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012b, p. 3). Social justice or equity is mentioned as the outcome of “expressing God’s love” or “the fruit of the Gospel of Jesus Christ” (Anglicare Victoria, 2012a, p. 3; "Social justice," 2012, para. 1; "Who we are," n.d., para. 2). In a rather less explicit manner, four of the twenty-four Anglican schools in the Melbourne diocese referred to both Christian identity and care for others (Camberwell Girls Grammar School, n.d., paras. 1, 2; Lowther Hall, 2016, paras. 1, 8; Melbourne Grammar School, 2016, pp. 26, 30; The Peninsula School, 2016, paras. 13, 14); while in the Brisbane diocese a characteristic of Anglican schools should be to offer themselves to serve God and wider society (Anglican Schools Office, 2013, p. 2). The Gospel of Jesus Christ leads to Christian faith that has a long tradition to assist others.

Some imperatives for assisting others are provided. People are led to this course of action because they would reflect a divine attitude that God loves people (Anglicare Victoria, 2012b, p. 2); or follow the example of Jesus’ love (ANGLICARE Diocese of
Some require care of people whom God has created (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, ca. 2009, p. 5); who are made in God’s image (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012a, p. 2); or to praise God appropriately by trust that they participate in God’s provision (Cameron, 2007, p. 2). Additionally, there are some straightforward biblical directives to love neighbours (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012a, p. 4) or that servants of Christ should care for others (citing Gal. 6:2, 5, 10 ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, ca. 2009, p. 5). Because God loves, God bestows worth on people who must care for one another.

There is lastly, a brief expectation that faith in Jesus Christ transforms people to care for others, alongside their conveyance of the Gospel, in response to God’s love (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012a, pp. 2, 4). These reasons are too brief to explain how faith in Jesus Christ transforms people. While Brisbane diocese considers that Anglican institutions will be specifically intentional in reflection of their Christian character, it also admits that certain qualities that reflect the love of Jesus Christ are presumed for Anglican schools before they are clearly defined (Anglican Schools Office, 2013, pp. 3–4). While there is a tradition of care and that people are worthy of care, it is not made clear why faith in Jesus Christ leads to this behaviour. Still less is there any indication of the role of Christian community life. As with unconcern regarding the common good, there is a confident assumption that the reasons need no explanation or else Anglican organisations have other priorities.

Given that most of these explanations came specifically from within Anglicare in Sydney, they represent expressions within the Anglican context and to the wider public about the Christian expression of social care. In other words, in Sydney Diocese it is important to say that there are Christian reasons for a church welfare agency, even if it is not clear how a welfare initiative eventuates. In Melbourne and Brisbane there is an
assumption that there will be such activities and little explanation is needed. This is an assumption that the unarticulated tradition will continue to support such activities.

**Conclusion**

The Australian Anglican Church barely mentions the common good as such. My review indicates that there is little expressed urgency concerning the common good. The most consistent affirmation is that substantial responsibility for the common good rests with governments. Anglican Church congregations directly, through support of and some partnership with Anglican welfare agencies, show a willingness to provide social support for those who do not otherwise benefit within Australian society. Consequently, there is an unspoken tradition that Christian communities have a role to ensure all may benefit in a more truly common good. The interest and initiative for these activities within the Anglican congregations themselves is not overpowering. Finally, theological statements about the Anglican Church activities that imply support for the common good indicate a corresponding absence of detailed and coherent theological elaboration. As with the activities themselves there seems an unspoken assumption that underlying theology is understood and present without articulation.

I specifically examine behaviours that might implicitly support the common good, for the second phase of this case study, in the next chapter. I have proposed a theological foundation for good relationships and the quality of Christian community that demonstrates the common good. I consider themes within the context of this case study that are, to varying degrees, connected to good relationships and community.
Chapter 9 — Common good themes in the Australian Anglican Church

Introduction

An examination of specific behaviours within the Australian Anglican Church enables an understanding of the extent of supportive attitudes towards the common good. In the second phase of this case study, I inquire into the presence of behaviour, attitudes and theological approaches that I consider tacitly support the common good.

As with the first phase in the previous chapter, my context is the three most populous dioceses of the Australian Anglican Church in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney.

A comparison between my theological concerns and behaviours indicative of the common good within the Anglican context, illustrates where those theological concerns are situated within such Christian communities. The examination of indicative behaviour includes attitudes to the importance of communities as such, including attitudes to supportive relationships and interdependence. I also consider attitudes to the role of communities in advocacy and in practical support for the common good, or in other roles Anglican communities identify as important. Lastly, I examine the connection of these attitudes to theological reflection about relationships, community and reconciliation in Jesus Christ.

Through this thematic examination of attitudes within the Australian Anglican Church, I can identify varying degrees of interest in, and support for the common good. Within a complex of attitudes, I identify some areas where there is opportunity to pay more attention to my theological concerns. I recommend some Christian community approaches that can be more supportive of the common good. Given the presence of a tradition of community activity that is socially beneficial, but the low level of explicit
interest, there is an opportunity to encourage this tradition, so that Christian communities can more robustly embrace and support the common good.

**Method**

I continue the case study by content and discourse analysis concerning the various Anglican organisations’ activities and associated discussion and attitudes. I maintain that certain underlying themes suggest that communities seek the common good. I compare the presence, interest and attitude to these and other themes identified within the Anglican context.

Initially, I consider attitudes towards good community life that can demonstrate and seek the common good. I maintained, in chapter five, that the common good arises from good God-given relationships. I first consider, therefore, Australian Anglican organisations’ approaches and activities that affirm good relationships, relational activities and resultant communities. The next consideration is Anglican approaches to interdependency and mutual learning. I discussed in chapters six and seven that a good community demonstrates good relationships by interdependence, so regarding all members well and extending that regard to wider society. I examine Anglican organisations’ approach to mutual formation and interdependence to understand in what manner they express their regard for people, both internally and towards other communities in wider society. Through these questions concerning the quality of community life, I consider strong and less strong attitudes towards the common good.

I also consider Anglican organisations’ perceptions of their roles that may to varying degrees support the common good. I first consider approaches to the conduct of relationships in wider society in advocacy for the common good. I maintained in chapter seven that the relationships that demonstrate the common good are those required to advocate for the common good across society. I consequently, ascertain whether Anglican
advocacy for the common good demonstrates behaviour that indicates the common good. Second, I consider Anglican attitudes to community life that has a beneficial practical outcome. I expected (in chapters five, six and seven), that good community life will eventuate in practical assistance for community members and wider society. As Anglican organisations pursue socially supportive practices for the common good, I discuss whether they strongly connect these practices to perspectives of relationship and community. In contrast, I lastly consider what roles are important for Anglican communities as reported in diocesan vision and mission statements.

Church welfare agencies feature prominently in reported church activities and conversations that might lead to the common good, although these agencies, as I noted in the previous chapter, are currently resourced to deliver governmental welfare. The agencies carry the church name or are associated historically with Anglican churches and an association continues in media reporting within Anglican discussion and to wider society. As such, the agencies convey among Anglicans and wider society not only the kinds of activities considered socially beneficial but also the way these are performed. As active advocates for improvements to welfare, the agencies instruct Anglicans and wider society alike concerning the roles, responsibilities and nature of these improvements. Similarly, agency activities, the reasons given for these activities and agencies’ association with the Anglican Church, all communicate roles for participants within wider society. The significance of church agencies is what they communicate about roles within society rather than the specific aspects of their vast range of work that delivers social services. Throughout my discussion of attitudes that indicate inclination for a common good, I consider what the church agencies convey for each theme, such as relationships, community, interdependency, and advocacy.
To complete the comparison, I review Anglican material for indications of theological reflection on good relationships and community. Specifically, I look for indications that these reflections are based on reconciliation in Jesus Christ. I have discussed in chapters three, four and five that revelation in Jesus Christ, which gives rise to Christian communities, transforms those communities through reconciled relationships, so that they can manifest and extend the common good. Consequently, I look for indications that reconciliation in Christ is the reason communities seek the common good.

The discussion continues with comparison of the identified themes with Anglican material.

**Approaches to good relationships and community**

The first theme I examine is the importance of good relationships and the significance for good communities for Anglican Church organisations. Interest in good communities can implicitly demonstrate the common good where there is appreciation for good relationships and formation in communities. Diocesan synod and some church news reports indicate attitudes towards expansive and inclusive communities that can encourage good relationships and community. Anglican welfare agencies may communicate something of the importance of relationships in the complexity of people’s needs and corresponding support programs. These descriptions of good community life that enable support for relationships denote the importance of such communities for Anglican organisations.

There is some interest in good relationships and people’s formation in community in the direction given by the archbishop in Melbourne. Freier (2012, p. 8, in charge to Melbourne Synod) indicated that the nature of human relationships in church communities was at least as important as the numbers of regular members. Consequently,
the quality of each parish community mattered more than a display of size (Freier, 2012, p. 7) and that when numbers of members grew, there must be attention to maintain good community relationships (Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, 2010, p. 4). Freier (2012, p. 2) explained that the fullness of human relationships involved trust and interdependence rather than formal transactions, and the Diocesan vision and directions affirmed that people have hope as they are nurtured within reconciled relationships ("Vision and Directions," 2013, p. 2). Such relationships would reflect Trinitarian relationality incarnate in the church of Christ (Freier, 2012, p. 7). These statements indicate some concern for the quality of relationships and community.

The Brisbane Diocese’s strategic plan is also interested in growth in the qualities of faith, service and generosity as well as increased membership ("Strategic Plan 2012-2015," 2012, para. 4). Growth in people’s Christian faith is described as necessary so that they can serve and nurture others in their Christian communities and beyond ("Strategic Plan 2012-2015," 2012, para. 15). Further, it is appreciated that the organisation fulfils its purpose better when different parts are able to interact as a human community and people see themselves connected within it (Aspinall, 2013, pp. 2–3). Parishes have been encouraged to utilise a tool to better understand their collective qualities, so that they can improve and be advised about those qualities that they lack (Aspinall, 2013, pp. 7–8; "Church health and growth," n.d., para. 1). The review of qualities identifies, among others: robust relationships and conflict resolution; and supportive relationships to encourage people as they exercise their capacities and participate in communal activities ("Ministry Plan Checklist," n.d., pp. 2–4). In this diocese, there has been some intention that communities understand good relationships for good church communities.

Contrastingly, there are some indications within congregations that welcoming and flourishing communities cannot be taken for granted. While surveys found that
church attendees had most regard for warm relationships (as opposed to self-esteem or pleasure) (Bentley & Hughes, 1998, p. 81), such relationships may not be manifest in behaviour. There are a number of clubs specifically for youth with disabilities in Sydney, but at the same time there is a reported reluctance or fear of change that would incorporate those with disabilities into church activities; be it changes to physical access, word dependent worship style or simply inhospitable church communities (Webb, 2015, p. 20).

Various churches run English teaching classes (as I noted in the previous chapter) that can effectively link congregations with migrant communities. The effectiveness of this activity was also connected to how much the minister and congregation as a whole were involved (Buerger, 2013, p. 21). It was both implied and stated in the article by Buerger (2013, p. 21) that this kind of activity can be marginalised or terminated because the congregation as a whole has been uninterested and uninvolved; people see no benefit from community engagement with neighbouring communities. Given that these are meant to be positive accounts of church community behaviour, there is an indication that the embrace of hospitable relationships in an accessible community is not at the forefront of congregations’ intentions or behaviour.

Both congregations and wider society receive information about the complexity of material needs and relationships from Anglican Church agencies, whose role I outlined in the previous chapter. Agency reports explain how difficulty in one part of life adds to difficulties elsewhere (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012a, p. 8). While the focus is material shortcomings, they also indicate the interaction with health and sociability. A report on food insecurity recommended: monitoring health and availability of healthy foods; improving transport; greater focus on food provision in retail planning; and improving housing security; as well as simply increasing welfare payments (King et al., 2013, pp. 3–42). A general governmental welfare aim to enable people’s employment was not found to take much account of the drawbacks of insecure housing, limited family
and social background, or lack of mental wellbeing (CEDA, 2015, pp. 7–9, including contributions from Brotherhood of St Laurence researchers). More specifically, a submission to government concerning affordable housing proposed that the proximity of affordable housing to work, urban services or at least good public transport contributes significantly to people’s place to live (Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2014, p. 12). Improvements to emergency relief include suggestions for training in a variety of life skills such as: home finance, cooking, parenting, employment presentation, relationships, and robust mental health (King et al., 2009, p. 51). Agencies find that each material need and benefit is not isolated from other needs and benefits.

The impact of good relationships was apparent in studies of support for school-age children. Additional resources were recommended not only for mainstream education but also for professional assistance where parents and children were not able to behave like average families (J. Taylor, Borlagden, & Allan, 2012, pp. 15, 26, 33–34). The same report also touched on the impact of the quality of relationships — single mothers had fewer social supports and greater financial and family health difficulties (J. Taylor et al., 2012, p. 15); children’s school achievement was related to quality of home relationships and stability of families’ housing (p. 26); and school leavers’ options were limited by the experience and suggestions of their network of friends and family (p. 34). A program to engage adolescents in danger of exiting school or training found that their engagement was better after participation in the program and that the participants rated the relationship with and personal support from their case-worker as highly valuable and central to the program (Barrett, 2012, pp. 44, 48). The quality of relationships enables people to flourish. Welfare agency research describes the interweaving and interdependence of various aspects of people’s lives with others’; that people’s lives are enhanced to the extent to which they are mutually supportive; people need good communities.
Anglican welfare agencies are the conduit for governments to provide substantial professional care to help people with vulnerable relationships. The agencies help people when their (usually family) relationships are severely damaged by provisions such as: child placement in foster care because their family is not a safe place; emergency provision for women and children who have left their homes; assistance to family members’ communication after such separations; and chaplaincy to people isolated in prison or hospital (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012a, pp. 5, 8–9, 12; Anglicare Victoria, 2012a, p. 28). The agencies also recognise the significance of support for people before their lives are so dislocated. Agencies seek to address a range of needs as often financial and medical difficulties together with limited guidance compound to break up fragile relationships (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012a, p. 8). Agencies such as Anglicare recognise that people need relationship skills for more hopeful futures (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012a, p. 8). Anglican agencies prevent a great deal of misery with professional help for people to maintain and mend their closest relationships and therefore also better equip people for interaction within society.

The agencies also refer to activities to strengthen communities or help people back into the community when they have fallen out (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012a, p. 4; Anglicare Victoria, 2012a, p. 3). Wider society benefits when people are well connected within community (Anglicare Victoria, 2012a, p. 7). People with mental health disorders are mentored to develop social structure in their lives that improves their lives including their mental health; the spectrum of support for aged persons is not only to provide services but to avoid loneliness and isolation; new migrants acquire social networks through volunteering, and activities that involve pre-schools and sharing social skills; in all of these socially supportive programs, agencies intend to improve people’s capacity for and the extent of their social networks (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012a, pp. 16, 18, 21). The agency programs demonstrate and communicate appreciation
that people need to be able to practise good relationships as part of communities, albeit, as I later discuss, they convey the assumption that good communities are available for people to join.

There are also some instances where church welfare agencies indicate that working as or through communities supports people’s communal life. Parish partnerships are part of Sydney Anglicare’s mission statement (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012b, p. 3), suggesting that co-operation is important as is expressions of social support as a community. Alongside professional development, provision of chaplaincy ministry and pastoral care for staff at Anglicare Victoria (2012b, p. 8) is important, indicating that the function of Christian community should not be overlooked by agency workers. Some activities highlight co-operative relationships and the support for relationships. Residents of an aged care facility at Oran Park, Sydney volunteer to hear children read at a nearby Anglican school; those who attend Wollongong aged day care also experience the company of local TAFE trainee students; at Mt Druitt, both congregation members and Grammar school students provided food and entertainment for a Christmas carers respite day (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012a, pp. 21, 22, 26). Additionally, Anglicare agencies appreciate that the opportunity charity second hand shops are often the first place to hear of people’s needs, and where volunteers enable regular human contact for local welfare support (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012a, p. 14; Anglicare Victoria, 2012a, p. 41). Within Brisbane Diocese, tools were briefly promoted to encourage dialogue within communities particularly concerning disputed issues ("Dialogue across the diocese," 2012, p. 3; "Dialogue Tools and approaches," 2014, para. 1). These relatively few references and brief descriptions of communal cooperation indicate that while welfare agencies appreciate formative communities for and through good relationships, it does not have a major emphasis within agency culture or Anglican congregations, who do not celebrate such activities as particularly significant.
Anglican Church leadership has given some support for good relationships for and within good communities, but there is also evidence that congregations might not easily endorse outward-looking communities. I describe other demonstrations of the worth of community activities later in the chapter, but the importance of good relationships and a good community are seldom explicitly discussed or celebrated. The welfare agencies convey the complexity of people’s material, health and social needs, support damaged relationships and improve social connectivity, sometimes with demonstrations of community life. I conclude there is some appreciation of good relationships and community, but neither dioceses, congregations nor agencies indicate marked affirmation for personal involvement to build exemplary, impactful communities of good relationships.

Even if good relationships are taken for granted, I next consider whether these are relationships in which people are well regarded, so that there is an expectation of mutual formation and interdependency both within the Anglican Church context and alongside other communities within society.

**Expectations of interdependence**

Expectations concerning the nature of good relationships within the Anglican Church context will be apparent in the way communities regard and esteem people. Congregations show this regard in their approach to mutual learning and dependency within and among themselves, and in the approach to learning with and dependency on other groups within society. I next consider the reported approach to learning and formation within the Anglican context, the demonstration of mutual learning and formation, and therefore the appreciation of interdependency. I also consider what church welfare agencies convey concerning expertise and interdependence within the Anglican context and to wider society.
The Australian Anglican church strongly demonstrates that Christian communities will learn principally from trained leaders and formal training. The Melbourne Vision wants more trained leaders and more programs to train congregations (Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, 2010, pp. 2–3). And the results of pilot programs will be fed back into future professional training ("Vision and Directions," 2013, p. 1). In Brisbane the strategic plan has a key focus to train and equip leaders ("Strategic Plan 2012-2015," 2012, para. 16). One of Sydney Diocese’s four priorities is to equip leaders and train church members ("Mission 2020," n.d., p. 2). Additionally, for Sydney, “spiritual maturity” is to be developed by congregations forming small groups of similarly circumstanced members (such as working women, single parents, retired persons) under the guidance of specifically trained leaders (Anglican Diocese of Sydney, 2015, p. 6). In a wider survey, two-thirds of Anglican and protestant Church members reported that they did not actively participate in leading the functioning of the church (Kaldor et al., 1999, p. 35). A more recent survey indicated half of Anglicans (fifty-six per-cent) feel that leaders encourage them in their abilities to a greater or lesser extent and similarly (forty-nine per-cent) that their ideas are important, while a further thirty per-cent feel somewhat encouraged or listened to (Ruth Powell et al., 2012, p. 43). While these numbers indicate that there is some appreciation of the gifts of the entire community, the more recent question is couched in terms of dependence on discerning leaders rather than mutual affirmation. The emphasis on Anglican Church leadership leaves many members, either passively led by or heavily reliant on, leaders for their participation. This emphasis could indicate the influence of attitudes to professional management in wider society to which I alluded in chapter two. A hierarchy of formal training has been strongly emphasised as compared to mutual formation for and within good relationships.

There is some appreciation of the mutual benefit of learning within church initiatives. It may be simply that leaders benefit from their mutual appreciation; if all the
Brisbane leaders are co-located and are able to have good relationships, they will more likely have a united focus on the current mission strategy (Aspinall, 2013, p. 3). In some cases the directed mission strategy utilises the concerns, experiences and responses from activities in congregations; the Melbourne pilot programs that will inform future leadership training will take a particular shape chosen by the congregations (Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, 2010, p. 3); and the experiences and responses to Sydney’s mission to be used for leader’s mutual learning in “mission area groups” (Anglican Diocese of Sydney, 2015, p. 8). In all these cases, leaders are mutually learning or seek contributions to augment their learning. Encouragement of church leaders’ mutual formation within their communities is sometimes recognised as beneficial.

There is less reporting of mutual learning for congregations. A Brisbane diocesan initiative to begin with an introductory one-off bible study was partly with the intention to spur congregations to form more small groups for bible-based mutual formation and learning (Aspinall, 2013, pp. 5–6). An annual Sydney event involves church youth members with an Anglican retirement village with stated benefits from the intergenerational interaction, including some ongoing relationships ("ARV Mitchell Youth," 2015, p. 12). These few cases indicate there is neither extensive reporting nor celebration, that congregations regard people well by welcoming their ideas and skills in the context of good relationships. Yet, Australian Christians generally stated that they feel more part of their Christian communities when they can contribute and their contributions are both sought and appreciated (Kaldor et al., 1999, p. 42). There is little indication that people are encouraged through their relationships that appreciate mutual contributions.

Within Anglican congregations there is even scantier reference to the benefit of ideas shared with distinctly different groups. In one multicultural area of Sydney (Arncliffe), the parish recognised the contribution and benefit of welcoming the already
mixed population (Adamson, 2013, p. 5). A Toowoomba (Qld) parish considers the enthusiasm of recently arrived Sudanese Christians “a gift to the parish” ("Around the Diocese," 2015, p. 11). Pascoe Vale, Vic has worked with the Eritrean Orthodox community and found mutual learning (Arnott, 2012, para. 3). Anglican, Catholic and Uniting Church women (Mornington, Vic) met with local Muslim women for a fruitful question and answer session ("Christian and Muslim women," 2015, p. 9); and Christian and Muslim communities (also in Mornington) met to affirm their common promotion of peace ("Christian/Muslim gathering," 2014, p. 10). Additional articles discuss multicultural engagement as a good idea, but the infrequent references provided indicate that congregations are not reportedly much interested in demonstrating their engagement and learning openly with the wider range of people and groups in society.

Church welfare agencies communicate that mutual learning is reciprocal exchange of informed expertise. The agencies want to collaborate with tertiary institutions and other community agencies; to share data and research (Anglicare Victoria, 2012a, p. 33); and to agree definitions of e.g. poverty and strategies for public education ("Anglicare and QUT," 2012, p. 2; King et al., 2009, p. 10). Anglicare Southern Queensland ("Social connectedness," 2012, p. 4) not only works to improve basic literacy and numeracy so that people have better mental health due to increased social connectedness, but also intends to be involved in Queensland University of Technology research to better understand the convergence of social connectedness and mental health. The Brotherhood of St Laurence invited supporters, equivalent organisations, politicians and media to a meeting to raise and exchange ideas to reduce poverty and hardship in Victoria ("The Brotherhood of St Laurence invites," 2006, p. 4). Welfare agencies also demonstrate their expertise to institutional decision makers with whom they wish a like-minded collaboration (as I discuss further in the agency’s advocacy role). Church agencies are comfortable in a reciprocal exchange with other experts and spokespeople.
I conclude that mutual appreciation of member contributions is not strongly conveyed in Anglican Church practice. Diocesan emphasis on leadership, agency emphasis on expertise and limited reporting among congregations does not convey that a community of good relationships benefits from and appreciates the contribution of its members. Most initiatives are to ensure that there are good leaders to train receptive congregations to provide specific contributions. The appreciation of mutual contributions of community members is not widely reported. Corresponsingly, it is rarely reported that Anglican congregations engage in formative dialogue with other communities. The welfare agencies convey that their expertise, whose mutual learning is with other experts, addresses impulses for the common good expressed as concern for social needs. Among Anglican congregations there is little encouragement for mutually formative and supportive communities who might express themselves as and for the common good in wider society.

I next consider the way Anglican organisations conduct themselves in the role of advocates for the common good in wider society. I wish to see whether Anglicans both demonstrate the common good through good relationships and at the same time through these good relationships, seek agreement for activities for the common good.

Advocacy through relationships for the common good

For this theme, I examine the kind of relationships conveyed and apparent for Anglican organisations in the role of advocates for the common good. I look for the way in which these relationships demonstrate the common good that the proponents seek. First, I consider which Anglican organisations undertake most advocacy and their claim to speak. I also examine how advocacy is conveyed within Anglican organisations and across wider society. Finally, I consider what is conveyed to decision makers and how
the relationship might be constrained. Anglican organisations may have uneven involvement and relationships in their widespread advocacy for the common good.

The welfare agencies not only serve people’s needs but are advocates for disadvantaged people to wider society and powerful institutions, particularly governments. Diocesan statements also refer to advocacy for the marginalised and empowerment for individual advocacy within congregations ("Strategic Plan 2012-2015," 2012, para. 19). It is the Anglicare welfare agencies, however, that generally have provision to be the advocates both within the church context and into wider society; and in both Sydney and Brisbane dioceses advocacy, or social responsibility, is part of the Anglicare activities of research and publicity (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012a, p. 6; Anglicare Victoria, 2012b, pp. 7, 33; "Social Justice," 2012, para. 1). Advocacy is visibly largely a welfare agency activity.

The welfare agencies speak for the people they serve, in their role representing Anglican concern. The welfare agencies assume the role of speaking for the marginalised because it is a louder voice than would be heard from individuals and expect their influence to be greater than the marginalised they speak for (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, ca. 2009, pp. 5, 9). A detailed study acknowledges the voices of welfare recipients and expects any improved welfare delivery to include continuing consultation with recipients (King et al., 2009, pp. 6, 50). The feedback from the recipients enables agencies to provide more suitable programs (King et al., 2009, p. 50). Recommendations for improved welfare provision additionally promote resilience in those assisted, rather than their continued dependence on immediate material relief (King et al., 2009, p. 50). But, there is seldom suggestion that marginal voices might be empowered independently.

From a perspective internal to agency organisations, Cleary (2012, pp. 142, 165)\footnote{An Australian Anglican minister with a lifetime of experience in advocacy and agency organisation.}
proposes the necessity for a theological challenge to agency structure and services which inhibit community leadership and initiative. Agencies assume that they will continue to be the conduit for recommendations for the marginalised. Advocacy for those who receive assistance is somewhat paternalistic in that agencies make the structural decisions. The relationship with the welfare recipients is one-sided; power is in the hands of the agency; and the recipients can make no contribution except to demonstrate the efficacy (or otherwise) of the programs. The agencies convey themselves as the experts who provide their considered opinion on behalf of welfare recipients.

The Anglican welfare agencies intend to dispense their expertise to wider society. The welfare agencies intentionally engage with schools, not only Anglican, to educate children about the condition of society and to influence their attitudes to social support (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012a, p. 7; Anglicare Victoria, 2012b, p. 9). Within ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney (2012a, p. 25) student projects and programmed activities engage students and their families through: op-shops, celebration of families, fundraising, and aged-care gardening. The agencies also offer their experience and data from welfare activities to provide an informed opinion about social support (Anglicare Victoria, 2012b, p. 7). Church agencies as the welfare experts expect to inform and persuade congregations and society alike concerning social needs and support.

Advocacy, mostly by the agencies, additionally involves and indicates a multi-faceted relationship with decision makers. Public announcements to governments that inform Anglicans and society generally that an issue is significant, also remind decision makers, at a distance, that the issue cannot be ignored. The continuing presence of refugee children in Australian governmental detention provoked a joint communication by the senior bishops of every Australian state (Austin, 2014). The Brisbane Social Responsibilities Committee ("SRC Chair urges Premier," 2012, p. 3) urged the
Queensland government to take part in a trial to most speedily be ready for a more just, supportive and fulfilling scheme for people with disabilities. The Brisbane diocese requested a Royal Commission into child abuse (as early as 2002) from both state and federal governments; and practically reinforced the urgency of an investigation by its own inquiry (Aspinall, 2013, p. 10). There is publicity for dialogue with institutions, such as a submission to the television regulatory body, which advocated for child protection (Russel Powell, 2015, p. 8). Finally, there are campaigns, initiated by the agencies or others, to which Anglicans and the general public are urged to provide support such as, a campaign to raise the Newstart Allowance ("Fair chance for Basics," 2015), and publicity for a Getup! Campaign for responsible corporate ownership of poker machines ("Pokies Reform," 2012, p. 3). These kinds of communications emphasise that the relevant institution must act and therefore imply judgment should they fail to act. The expectation is present (as I noted in chapter eight) that institutional decision makers should take responsibility to act for society’s benefit. This kind of advocacy conveys, within the Anglican context and to wider society, a somewhat adversarial public demeanour towards decision makers.

Welfare agencies convey in more detail that they expect decision makers to act to improve society’s existing structures. Research papers as well as detailed submissions to government indicate that there is some bias against the marginalised within society’s structures. People have more than single needs but are also caught in structures that are unhelpful for some needs and therefore make all of their lives more difficult. Unless all aspects of life are considered, people’s disadvantage simply continues, even if some aspect of material assistance is available. At the same time, agency reports do not suggest a radical departure from current arrangements, simply better planning and more targeted assistance. Reports argue that there are structures that consume resources for those already at least materially comfortable and do not offer similar resources for those who
much less well endowed (Yates, 2009, p. 38). It has been proposed that there should be a greater balance between arrangements for domestic property owners and the currently much less favourable arrangements for tenants regarding capital gains tax, land tax and negative gearing (Yates, 2009, pp. 39–41). A separate report recommends much more equal arrangements between high and low-income earners to build superannuation assets (Brody & McNess, 2009, pp. 9–10). The reports propose that the current financial arrangements be improved rather than drastically altered. I conclude that Anglican church agencies are well informed of and recommend a need to alter biased structures to reduce people’s marginalisation. Another facet of the relationship is that agencies expect that decision makers could manage structures and institutions to work better. Agencies convey this through publicly available reports, but not necessarily, I next observe, as part of discussions in Anglican congregations.

There is less public fanfare concerning detailed reports produced by agencies. Cleary (2012, p. 147) observes that among church communities, neither agencies nor church organisations have strongly promoted the diverse worth of agency work. The Anglicare agencies issue press releases and specifically communicate their research and submissions to their supporters but wider church news media only occasionally disseminates reports and submissions, seemingly at best no more frequently than the mainstream media. In one example, the Melbourne Age (Short, 2015) reported favourably in response to an Anglicare Victoria report (David, 2015) concerning a program for mentoring vulnerable children’s educational engagement, while the positive results were covered in The Melbourne Anglican ("Bridging the Education Gap," 2015, pp. 14–15). Of all distinct articles (for issues during 2014-2015), items concerning agency activity were six per-cent of Focus articles in Brisbane, one per-cent of articles in The Melbourne Anglican and in a particularly low year, less than one per-cent of articles in the Sydney Southern Cross. Anglican news media reflects community opinions but less of the
substantial reasons and experience of agency social support and the conclusions it advocates to institutional decision makers. Reports tend to focus on the good work and results for specific immediate needs rather than the structural, social and life context of the recipients. As such, only those directly engaged with agency activities are well informed and there is little more involvement in these experiences and advocacy within the Anglican context than across society at large.

Welfare agencies, including social responsibility bodies, also undertake to engage governments in corresponding language. Welfare agencies have the capacity to compile research pertaining to their activities and therefore have the expertise and specific interest to make submissions to government, in contrast to representatives of dioceses or congregations. Most submissions to governments are a dispassionate account of the facts, which particularly emphasise the agency’s relevant experience. For example, a description of the accumulative disadvantage for people with insecure housing is assumed to be reason enough to have mitigating policies (Anglicare Sydney & Churches Housing, 2014, p. 8). There is an expectation that an account of disadvantaged or damaged lives speaks for itself and the audience will have a similar appreciation of the information as the authors.

There is also a similar assumption of shared expectations that governmental decisions are reasonably valid and deliver the greatest benefit. Submissions are occasionally more forthright in expression to address decisions that have seemingly obfuscated reasons, or only benefit a specific interest, or make human need a lower priority. A submission to the Queensland parliament concerning gambling regulation suggested that at best, the impact of “changes quietly introduced in a piecemeal manner” could not be properly assessed, and rejected the claimed benefits and costs (Social Responsibilities Committee Anglican Church Southern Queensland, 2014, pp. 7–8). For
an inquiry into income inequality, Anglicare Australia (2014a, pp. 9, 13, representing a
national network of regional agencies) was concerned with what was achieved by
delaying payments to the young unemployed, apart from demonstrably making it harder
to seek employment, and questioned whether fiscal rectitude was defensible if it harmed
people and “national culture”. The tone of indignation reflects the difference in
expectations concerning governmental purpose. Expectation of a common understanding
of agency submissions and governmental purpose assumes that agencies and governments
hold similar values about what is good for people and society.

Alternatively, agencies have little expectation that meaning and purpose can be
introduced into the conversation even if goals differ. Anglicare Australia (2015a, pp. 2,
3) provides an introductory statement about the worth of all human lives, and went on to
note that the approach to social welfare provision nationally signified “how we perceive
and treat our least well off”; the most explicit statement that the reduced circumstances
of peoples’ lives indicates that they are treated as less valuable. People’s circumstances
are also described as reducing the quality of people’s relationships and participation in
communities, although the worth of such relationships is presented as self-evident
(Anglicare Australia, 2014b, p. 2). A single reference to the common good was couched
simply in terms of improvements to unbalanced wealth distribution (Anglicare Australia,
2014b, p. 8). Furthermore, the reasons for the worth of people’s lives or their communities
are not given at all much less the connection to Christian faith or purpose.

The agencies, in their submissions, do not press the meaning and purpose of their
aims, nor do they explain the importance of the construction of good communities for the
common good. Alternatively, agencies seem to expect that the thinking of submission
recipients thinking is sufficiently close to their own for further explanations to be
unnecessary.
The welfare agencies would like to increase like-mindedness through productive relationships with institutional decision makers. Agencies are interested in their good relationships with all institutions, particularly with those that provide governmental or significant private sources of income (Anglicare Victoria, 2012b, p. 9). The most passionate recent submission to government concerned the relationship with government in the process to tender for welfare services (Anglicare Australia, 2015b). The submission expressed indignation that the distinctive attributes of agencies were not recognised (Anglicare Australia, 2015b, p. 10). This reflects dissatisfaction that governmental decision making is not always similar to the agency perspective. Apart from the practical difficulties of the bureaucratic process, the poorer relationship between the government and agencies was noted. The process impeded the collaboration with departments that the agencies feel most suits their role to provide services (Anglicare Australia, 2015b, p. 2).

In other words, within good relationships, there is a greater understanding of the common good and through good relationships that social support is best provided. Anglicare was able to articulate to some degree the importance of the kind of relationships that make such agencies function when the undermined relationships impacted most on their capacity.

Agencies are largely limited as they depend on what governments wish to deliver as social welfare, regardless of their objections when the relationship with governments is not one of like-minded and mutual respect. Agencies must address the situation where they seek to be advocates for the people they serve, but at the same time their service is reliant on significant donors, which extends to the research that supports their advocacy (Gallois, 2008, p. 48). The fundamentals of the relationship, despite public protest, remain one in which welfare agencies are dependent on resourced decision makers. As agencies must operate within governmental parameters, there is an impact on the relationship with the marginalised, the element of control increases and encouragement of social and
economic self-empowerment decreases (M. Webster, 2002, pp. 79–80). If and when it transpires that governmental policy has different goals from the agencies, and measures what can be quantified rather than the quality of peoples’ lives, there is tension between the social support the agencies want to provide and that for which the government will provide resources (Oslington, 2002, p. 23). The agencies are not free to provide the services they would wish nor deliver them as they would prefer. The relationship with donors and particularly with governments is one-sided. Undoubtedly the agencies would prefer to be respected and like-minded partners, but welfare agencies can only represent the social support they are permitted to deliver.

The Anglican welfare agencies are advocates for welfare recipients and communicate those needs both to Anglicans and wider society. Congregations are for the most part, not the origin of advocacy, and rely on the expertise of agencies. The welfare agencies also for the most part provide the input to decision makers. The agency position is complex: they publicly convey a critical demand for decision makers’ action; and they expect that good decisions can make institutional structures work well; but they may also feel constrained in articulating their purpose directly to decision makers; and yet they look for a good relationship in collaboration with like-minded decision makers. The agencies are further constrained because governmental funding allocations determine most of their activities. Anglicans seem largely to rely on this complex relationship within agency advocacy to convey expectations for the common good.

**Role of supportive community life**

In this theme, I consider the extent of indications that Dioceses, agencies and parish activities appreciate that the outcome of good Christian communities is an overflow of supportive behaviour. Alongside some appreciation of good relationships, good community and advocacy for social needs, there may be recognition that good
communities uphold the weakest relationships, resulting in social support and welfare. I discuss whether congregations demonstrate and recognise that assistance for others is necessarily a communal activity, and the way in which such activity involves wider society outside Anglican Church membership. I consider what church welfare agencies convey concerning the socially supportive qualities of communities. Finally, I consider the interaction between the considerable professional support provided by Anglican agencies and attitudes towards congregations’ communal activity. There may be a remnant community tradition that continues to demonstrate the common good extending to wider society.

More than one person in a church community co-operates to provide most practical forms of social support. Community communication of recipient needs encourages even private individual donations. Such co-operative and communal activity is hardly ever reported as significant, so is presumably underrated or taken for granted. Opportunity shops for example, are mentioned as achieving various ends for church mission or welfare agencies, but seldom reported as simply strengthening relationships and forming existing members within church communities.

From the few reports of communal activity that provides social benefit, even fewer indicate that the nature of the activity and benefit could be connected. A glimpse of the appreciation of the importance of communal context of assistance was the report from St Anne’s Ryde (New South Wales), which conducts promotion of donations for specific overseas aid items (gifts) as part of worship activity (Gilbert, 2014a, p. 6). Not only were funds raised to benefit farming and education in developing countries, but it was also seen as important that people gave as part of church community life and were thus able to affirm one another’s generosity (Gilbert, 2014a, p. 6). Children’s and youth ministries’ activities also affirmed the importance of giving aid (Gilbert, 2014a, p. 6).
Other reports of social service activities recognise that there is some relational aspect to what is done. The congregation at Hoxton Park, Sydney helps with an Easter holiday club in western New South Wales in cooperation with local Uniting and Baptist Churches ("Service in the Riverina," 2014, p. 10). The benefit of improved trust and relationships even between Anglican congregations was recognised ("Service in the Riverina," 2014, p. 10). Rosemeadow and Appin congregations, Sydney, organised a mothers’ day breakfast at the local state primary school whose primary purpose was to improve relationships with the school community ("Mothers' Day," 2014, p. 27). St Alfred’s, North Blackburn, Melbourne, hosts many programs for or run by seniors, including school mentoring; the minister recognises the importance and relative under-emphasis of congregations’ participation (Nichols, 2015, p. 5). In Melbourne the recently created archdeacon responsible for parish partnerships stated that enabling people to belong created a healthier society and stimulated more creative lives ("Archdeacon Appointed," 2015, paras. 6–7). One musical and two recreational activities were reported in internal school news during a twelve-month period among the four (out of twenty-four) Melbourne Anglican schools that referred to caring service ("Music performance", 2014; "Values in action", 2015; "Years 7 and 8", 2015). Under-reporting may indicate a lack of interest in developing community capacity for social support. Congregations are not overwhelming in their appreciation of this aspect of their community’s worth.

Anglican congregations also conduct activities that express inclusive collective support as necessary, with and for wider society. However understated or unrecognised, simply working together with each other and non-members to provide help is a statement about communal activity. Even in more mundane forms of material relief, congregations communally provide social support and co-operate with other individuals and groups as well as the recipients. St Peters Eastern Hill, Melbourne, provides a breakfast that attracts
non-member volunteers and with Anglicare logistical support also is a contact for rental housing and basic medical needs (Shearer, 2015, p. 7). In the Maranoa-Warrego district, Qld, the local church worked with the Rotary Club to provide relief to drought and flood affected farmers who were initially unlikely to request help ("Anglican Church vouchers," 2014). Working on a broader scale, the Brotherhood of St Laurence demonstrated communal action by co-ordinating corporate donors, corporate volunteers, and community groups to resource, assemble and distribute 5,000 school packs for Victorian low-income families ("Valued partnerships help students," 2013, p. 3).

Many of the forms of relief are to provide people with better human contact to strengthen their capability for relationships and community. Selby church, Vic, provided a venue for the Men’s Shed retirement group but also hosted an evening group to discuss what men in particular would do when retired ("A Men's shed," 2013, p. 1). To assist a range of sensory interaction for dementia residents, a Queensland Anglicare residential unit co-ordinated with an Anglican Grammar school and Bond University so that residents could tend a partly edible garden ("Dementia projects," 2015, p. 4). In Box Hill, Melbourne, the congregation set up a sewing group with Sudanese migrants that enables practical results and childcare as well as restorative relationships for dislocated and war-torn families ("Sudanese Sewing Group," 2011). To assist, congregations must work together, with wider society, including the people assisted, and in projects where the assistance is to benefit relationships and community. These projects demonstrate their worth, which is seldom emphasised when they are (infrequently) reported.

These scant reports indicate that the connection between good communities and their capacity to provide social support is seldom appreciated. Survey results indicated that Anglican Christians considered wider community care and encounters with non-Christians far less important than worship, the Eucharist and bible teaching (Kaldor
et al., 1999, p. 10). Moreover, Australian Christians generally were least able to correlate community service with all other aspects of church community health (Ruth Powell et al., 2012, p. 103). Overall, there is some recognition that upholding people’s way of living relies on good relationships encouraged and supported by a good community, but there is little reported interest in such communities and their outcomes.

The Anglican church agencies state they are concerned with service, equity and community but the context is service delivery rather than community building. While agencies indicate concern about people’s needs and want the structures of people’s lives to be understood so that they can be properly assisted, what follows indicates that their proposals and communications are directed less towards mutual support and community strength. The agency organisations intend to serve people who are disadvantaged (“Social justice,” 2012, para. 4) or have “fallen out of the common good” (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012a, p. 4) and to help people have more secure homes and employment (Nicholson, 2013, pp. 1–2). There are a number of references to communities or relationships such as: that lives are better with better relationships (Nicholson, 2013, p. 1); that strengthening communities is an outcome of service (Anglicare Victoria, 2012a, p. 3); and that advocacy is for marginalised communities (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012b, p. 4). As I discussed earlier, agencies intend to support people to engage better with existing social structures.

I observe that there is seldom any explanation of the way good communities eventuate or what kind of community relationships make it easier for people to remain connected and supported. The same submission concerned with the co-location of affordable housing and good urban services, described the potential material disadvantages but did not explain the impact to people’s relationships, social life, mental health etc beyond the words “connectedness” and “good life” (Brotherhood of St
Laurence, 2014, p. 12). If people are living in a network of good and supportive relationships, this, I have argued, is a community that enables the common good. Most agency services are aimed at sustaining individuals and household units, and the benefit to wider relationships and community is secondary. The mere existence of such community networks, however, is necessary to provide locations where others can join (Ashcroft & Caroe, ca. 2012, p. 17). Lyons (2001, p. 38), in a study of the not-for-profit sector, suggests that the demands of service delivery overtake ideals to strengthen communities, although I observe that agencies do not portray themselves as having frustrated ideals. Only infrequently do agencies discuss the quality of the community with which people become more engaged, but in one case it was stated that the agency enabled “constructive re-engagement in sharing communities in society” (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012a, p. 5). Relative to the circumstances of people in dire need, engagement with wider society is good for them and society. But there are assumptions that good community life is waiting to receive them, providing they can individually adjust sufficiently, bearing in mind this is the same society that let them drop originally.

The church agencies can provide professional services, but they do not elaborate on the ultimate importance of supportive communities. The one aspect of parish partnerships that receives little attention is that church communities can demonstrate community and its supportive attributes. I infer from Cleary (2012, p. 142) that agencies need to be more “closely related” to congregations and local community life. Furthermore, appreciation of all spheres of life (as I described in chapter seven) could be encouraged, as Gordon Preece (2014, p. 7) notes, by celebration within congregations. Such celebrations by congregations for and in the presence of agency personnel could affirm their roles and indicate the benefit of the supportive community both to agencies and congregations. As agencies are unable to define the scope of their services, they may be constrained in proposals for actual community formation. While the agencies
appreciate that people need to be part of good communities, their communications, even with parish partnerships, do not emphasise a necessity to encourage intentionally good communities.

Perceptions of agency activity can create distance from Anglican congregations for whom the good community’s activities become less relevant. The scale of welfare agency activities can leave the impression church communities need not be involved. Agency budgets and organisations are large compared to diocesan organisations and social services generally. A third of people employed in Australian community services work within church-related organisations (Phillip J. Hughes & Fraser, 2014, p. 68). The size and reach of the welfare agencies may give congregations an over-inflated impression of church efficacy and influence when agencies actually deliver governmental services.

The delivery of major social service functions by professional institutions may make communal volunteers seem unqualified. Agencies intend their employed staff to develop professionally; wish to attract volunteers with professional experience; and for volunteers to develop in alignment with agency values (Anglicare Victoria, 2012b, p. 8). Agencies themselves may be under pressure to deliver services in a conventionally professional manner in order to meet their governmental contract and reporting requirements (Hynd, 2016, pp. 79, 85). The increase in governmental requirements for the verification of volunteers reinforces these attitudes. Anglican congregations consequently, may see church social support to be entirely in the hands of the professional organisations where experience and training are necessary. Wider church research indicates that this separation of community from professional welfare is expected by church congregations whose average socio-economic status also means they are more
likely to expect community welfare to be institutionally organised (Kaldor et al., 1999, pp. 11, 73).

Some Christian opinion has questioned the relevance of welfare organisations to Christian communities, if the agencies are seen purely as welfare organisations, distinct from church community life. Practical service is seen to detract from the priority of evangelism (Sterland, Powell, & Pippet, 2009, p. 4). Kell (2011, p. 1) admitted that some in Sydney had been sceptical of the value of Anglicare’s “Christian social action” and Anglicare, for a time, did not seem to articulate the Gospel clearly. Congregations can think that practical support does not involve them at all or that community life has a distinct role solely to evangelise.

Where congregations are not directly and collectively involved, in welfare, individual Christians seek out organisations and activities where they can be involved. While I have previously noted research that indicates church members are more likely to be volunteers, it should also be noted that the individual Anglican congregation as host for such activity has declined and the Anglican Christians (like others) are more likely to contribute through organisations other than their local congregations (Kaldor et al., 1999, pp. 70, 72). Agencies, such as Anglicare, that call for individual volunteers (even while they also seek parish partnerships), add to a perception that social service has less of a congregational context ("Around the Diocese," 2015, p. 9), even though such volunteers are drawn from what is assumed to be a continuing church tradition. Even if Anglican Church members continue to be involved with specifically church agency social support, if the support activity is relatively unconnected to the congregation, the reasons for volunteering are more individual and less embedded in the relational life of the community. If volunteering is not explicitly part of a community’s activity, such a continuing tradition is fragile. These observations cohere with a description of the five
key dimensions of relationships (Ashcroft & Caroe, ca. 2012, pp. 38–40). The benefits of the community come from direct contact between people; from the stability of practices or traditions over time; from a good understanding between congregations and agencies in this instance; from a sense of more equal exchange between agencies and congregations; and from a sense that they have common purposes. To conclude, congregations are less likely to perceive that community life is strengthened and demonstrated in social support if such support is perceived to be well-provided by agencies; or seems best left to agency professionalism; or is distinct from the remit to evangelise; or something that individuals choose unconnected to the community.

The long-standing tradition within Anglican communities is reflected in members’ participation to assist, either personally or from within their congregation. This tradition also led Anglican communities originally, to found agencies to assist people in need. There is little indication that the tradition is treasured and nurtured so that it is present for subsequent generations, because communities either allow the prevailing influence of wider society to shape their tradition or succumb powerlessly as that influence simply sweeps their tradition aside (as I described in chapter two). The current existence of church agency activity may cause confusion concerning the role of Anglican congregations in the tradition. The relative absence of explicit appreciation for communal activity and its beneficial outcomes, perhaps through complacency, leaves the tradition visible only through local practical demonstrations. Without nurturing a contemporary celebration of this tradition and people’s associated active participation, individuals are less likely to discover that the tradition exists. And if the tradition is not explicitly nurtured there will be little intentional activity to draw people together so that their mutual formation is an ever-widening experience within and beyond congregations.
Anglican congregations exhibit the necessity for co-operation as community life reaches out as practical example and support to wider society. Such activity occurs as a demonstration with little reported appreciation of the role of community life. Discussion in the Anglican context does not frequently indicate a perception that direct support for people is an outcome of Christian community life. Anglican welfare agencies provide much professional assistance for people’s fragile personal relationships but convey less of the importance of supportive communities. Anglican congregations have limited encouragement for participation in a tradition of good community, particularly when they perceive social support as a welfare agency responsibility. There is limited appreciation that the continued demonstration of this tradition can be in socially engaging supportive activities, which are the outcome of a good community.

**Importance of community expansion**

Within the Anglican Church context, there may be complacency concerning the qualities of good communities and their outcomes. But there is significant urgency and priority given to the expansion of church membership in the overall outlook of each diocese.

The numerical growth individually, and overall number of Christian communities, rather than their quality, occupies a great deal of conversation, time and planning in the Australian Anglican Church. Numerical growth is more greatly emphasised in Sydney diocese, but is also one of the three main concepts of the Brisbane strategic plan, while piloting and positioning to respond to growth are among the six strategies of the Melbourne vision and directions ("Strategic Plan 2012-2015," 2012, para. 17; Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, 2010, pp. 3–6).

Within this emphasis on growth, descriptions of social support are frequently couched in terms of the potential ultimately to increase church membership. Opportunity
shops are a venue for church members to meet non-Christians, and to invite them to church activities that provide more information about Christianity (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012a, p. 24). Accounts of socially supportive or communal activities largely refer to the relationships as an opportunity for invitations to additional church activities, including: a keep fit group, North Sydney; a school holiday program, Turramurra; a Parramatta Asian cup soccer event; a gamers club, Waitara; and English classes (Carswell, 2014, p. 12; Gilbert, 2015, p. 3; "North Sydney gets fit," 2015, p. 8; "Northern Region seminars," 2015, p. 5; "St John's scores," 2015, p. 27). And governmental grants for community engagement are seen as a means to increase membership ("Sixty-one churches receive," 2013, p. 8). Some church research supports this direction that assistance for others helps spread the gospel and increases church membership (Sterland et al., 2009, p. 4).

Such perspectives can make social support and demonstrations of good relationships and good community rather less an expression of Christianity and more of a means to increase the number of people attached to a church organisation. The Anglican Diocese of Sydney (2015, p. 3) talks about parish partnerships as seeking:

> to bring the love of Jesus to the disadvantaged in our community in partnership with local churches. Anglicare wants to support and equip parish ministries that will serve the disadvantaged, connect them to the church and give them an opportunity to respond to Jesus.

Even in this statement, the communal expression of the love of Jesus may be more of a means to attach members, particularly as it is situated in the context of a mission document and less concerned with ever-inclusive good relationships. If an increase in membership is the end rather than the means, it may be less important to desire the presence of a good community in society, and a good community may not simply be the result of a growing community. The introduction of good community to wider society is
not intrinsic to Christian communities when the priority for the role of communities is to increase membership of an organisation focussed on growth.

The diocesan visions involve numerical growth within their respective contexts. In Melbourne, there is a management plan to develop various capacities of the organisation to support the expected growth. As such, there will be financial and property planning, alongside a search for Christian and non-Christian partners to engage with in wider society (Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, 2010, pp. 2, 5). The greatest concern is that the organisation is oriented to growth, so pilot parishes and parish plants will provide the experience that the organisational and financial planning will facilitate. The actual details of growth will depend on specific Christian communities; whether in numbers or social contact or teaching the faith (Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, 2010, p. 3). The assumption is that this activity will have an impact on society and for that to last, organisations need to be prepared. After “making the Word of God fully known” the rest is the work of the Holy Spirit ("Abp urges renewed commitment," 2011, p. 19). The role for growth is to manage organisational structures, but the nature of each growing Christian community seems to take care of itself.

Within the Brisbane diocese, there is an intention for both qualitative and quantitative growth (as I have mentioned previously). There is also the intention that this growth involves all congregations within the diocese ("Strategic Plan 2012-2015," 2012, para. 5). Initiatives such as comprehensive introductions to the bible are intended to energise congregations in their sense of relationship with God (Aspinall, 2013, p. 7). There is also an attempt to measure the growth, although quantitative measures tend to focus on the number of people involved, so narrow the focus to people numbers rather than other changes to people or community (Aspinall, 2013, p. 8). And even the quality of the community is expected to bear numerical fruit because the better community life
will attract new members ("Church health and growth," n.d., para. 2). The overall strategic goal is to increase faith, reflected numerically ("Strategic Plan 2012-2015," 2012, para. 8). Within this diocese there is interest that some kinds of Christian community are better than others, will connect better to wider society and will, thereby increase their reach and their membership.

A clear-cut drive to increase Christian encounters, membership and churches is present in Sydney diocese. Part of the strategy is to be involved with wider society to have the opportunity to preach the gospel (Anglican Diocese of Sydney, p. 2). Christian communities are to have a reach across cultures, geography and generations with new congregations and the presence of children ("Mission 2020," n.d., p. 2). Other strategies involve integrating potential and new Christians into the community’s identity, which includes prayer, sharing faith and bible reading (Anglican Diocese of Sydney, p. 2; "Mission 2020," n.d., p. 2). Supportive development will also strengthen the gifts of leaders and the membership in general, particularly for further evangelism and development ("Mission 2020," n.d., p. 2). There is a clear intent to form specific kinds of community, with a clear identity, to enable the members to participate in the increase in membership.

All this indicates that Anglican communities have a reported focus on the size of their membership rather than their relational behaviour. Where there has not been complacency, concern has been to make communities numerically significant. The behavioural qualities of a good Christian community remain an assumed support for the numerical expansion of Anglican communities, whether those qualities are a matter of faith and hope or given some attention. I do not wish to suggest that emphasis on membership growth contends with the quality of community life as mutually exclusive alternatives. Rather, membership expands because the Christian community demonstrates
faith in action. No matter how well the gospel is presented, or how well organised the institution, relationship with Jesus Christ gives rise to tangible community behaviour that nurtures all aspects of people’s lives; which attracts and enables them to belong within Christian communities.

**Liturgical and theological articulation of reconciled relationships in community**

The articulation of the relational quality and purpose of Christian communities reflects their faith. Within the Anglican context, I consider whether there is much theological emphasis on community and the nature of the community’s behaviour in the liturgy and public discussion. Of interest is understanding that links good community life with reconciliation with God in Jesus Christ.

Within the Australian Anglican Church there is a formal liturgy that is almost entirely based on the foundation Anglican liturgy, *The Book of Common Prayer* of 1662. This original prayer book reflects late medieval-early modern life, largely based on earlier versions from the previous century. An illustration of this life is found in the occasional prayers, which mainly concern natural disasters such as inclement weather, crop failure, disease and pestilence. At the time, these were disasters beyond anyone’s control, from which all would suffer. Because their effect is indiscriminate, it is implicit that everyone will contribute to and benefit from relief. In one prayer for relief from famine it is explicit that the glory of God, distribution to the needy, and comfort for communities and households are equivalent (The Church of England, 1968 edition, p. 39). The structure of people’s lives meant that it was virtually unnecessary to state to the listening congregation that their common situation and such an obvious interdependence will lead them to recognise the common good.

Liturgical revision in the Church of England from the nineteen-sixties, consciously or otherwise, turned to the phrase “the common good” because it was no
longer self-evident that people live within structures of mutual interdependence (Brown, 2015, pp. 121–122), and the Anglican Church of Australia followed a similar pattern. One of the default intercessional prayer sections for Holy communion gives thanks for leaders serving the common good; a different section considers the church to proclaim salvation; and another gives thanks for people living in the fellowship of communities, that echo the great commandments in affirming love for one another (The Anglican Church of Australia, 1995, pp. 184–185). The roles and location for seeking the common good, the church, and good relationships in community seem separate. Specific petitions added under these categories by the leader of intercessions may reinforce these separate directives for behaviour. These prayers may convey that socially beneficial behaviour in Christian community life is simply enjoyed privately. Additionally, the original prayer book assumed that congregations were established in and representative of every settlement in the country, and that congregations were upheld by, and in turn supported, governments. Current prayer for leaders to serve the common good recognises a common purpose for a plural society in which Christian perspectives are not necessarily representative. But to give thanks for leaders who serve the common good can also mean expectation to support some or most leaders who will take responsibility for the common good. Those hearing these words may also have expectations that they can rely on a common Christian heritage. The prayers suggest that there will be concern for the common good through the mechanism of government, but there is no particular connection to Christian communities formed by their reconciliation in Christ.

Within current Anglican Church reporting, there are some public statements that Christian community life expresses God’s purpose and character. Contemporary individualism is a danger to Christian community life because it undermines the gospel of the self-giving love of God (Peter Jensen, 2012, p. 5). Proclamation of the good news of the kingdom includes collective activities that represent Jesus Christ, so that the
kingdom order is present in wider society ("Strategic Plan 2012-2015," 2012, paras. 8, 19). The parish partnerships lead to changed lives and growing communities throughout society through Jesus Christ, although in what manner is unspecified (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, ca. 2013, pp. 4–5). Christian communities draw their life from God’s action in Christ and gives themselves to God’s mission (Aspinall, 2013, p. 2). These statements indicate some affirmation that Christian community is relevant as the location to reflect Christian faith and God’s purpose.

Some of the affirmations of Christian community life are more specific about its God-given qualities. Anglicare Southern Queensland ("Vision, Mission and Values," 2012, paras. 2, 4), shares Christian communities’ mission to exhibit compassion and humility; to help vulnerable people, to strengthen relationships and community; their values are: generosity, love, hope and humility. Aspinall (2013, p. 9) has faith that each Christian community is sent by God to be a restorative and reconciliatory presence. The Peninsula School (2016, paras. 10, 13, 14) on the Melbourne fringe, is founded on the Anglican tradition guided by God’s love and grace and commits itself to a community of friendship and interdependence in selfless action for the greater good of wider society. Christian communities are there for God’s mission, to express God’s love and driven by the relational triune God (Anglicare Victoria, 2012a, p. 7; Aspinall, 2013, p. 9; Freier, 2012, p. 7). There is some, infrequent, acknowledgement that it is the nature of God that creates the character of Christian communities.

Sometimes the nature of God revealed in divine activity is linked to the character of a community. To receive God’s grace is to show grace to others and to intend to meet their physical, material and emotional needs; while only Jesus Christ can meet people’s spiritual needs (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, 2012a, p. 3). More specifically, God restores people in love, giving them the opportunity to be at peace with others and
participate in relationships based on the same gracious caring love (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, ca. 2013, p. 7). Confusingly the same document refers to God’s initiation of reconciliation and right relationship with God through trust in Jesus Christ, but alludes to community as simply the way God has made people with no apparent connection to reconciliation or relationship with God (ANGLICARE Diocese of Sydney, ca. 2013, pp. 8–9). The significance of God’s reconciliation and a good God-given community are not at the forefront of reported Anglican discussion.

The source of these public statements may be indicative. I note that most of the public statements are from the welfare agencies. As such, there is minimal evidence of even diocese-wide origin and dissemination of theological reflection about Anglican community activities. It may be that agency activity and reflection is considered to express social concern on behalf of the communities.

The significance of the common good expressed in Anglican liturgy rests on regular use of a specific form of intercessions. Even then, the congregation expresses support for government to address the common good seemingly separate from both church and everyday community life. Within public discussion, while perceiving rampant individualism as a problem, Australian Anglicans are remarkably reticent about the worth of their communities and particularly about their reflection of God’s generosity and grace. Salvation through Jesus Christ, the faith that makes Christians, has seldom led to affirmation that reconciliation in Christ transforms reconciled people into Christ-like, selfless, surprising and faithful communities. The public pronouncements do not give much theological weight to Christian communal life that flourishes in life with God with a capacity to pour out for the common good of wider society.
Recommendations for Anglican communities for the common good

The situation for the common good within Anglican communities suggests there are opportunities for more theology for the concept and practice of the common good. The theological reflection I provide could support the conscious affirmation of good God-given relationships and community and their practical outcomes. Such practices would be present in the liturgy and in deliberate activities that continue an elaboration and experience of community dispositions; practices that would necessarily engage with other groups and decision makers, thereby enabling well-connected dialogue for, and to demonstrate, the common good.

Encouragement of community character

My description of Anglican community life indicates that church leaders provide some encouragement for good communities. Church welfare agencies convey that professional assistance includes supporting people’s capacity for relationships as part of their whole of life need. Discussion within the Anglican context seldom indicates much awareness of the importance of relationships and the potential of communities.

My study also indicates that there is an Anglican community tradition to help others. I have identified a tradition to sustain activities that support people’s lives both within the communities and outwardly in wider society. I find that these activities are not often explicitly affirmed and the reasons for them not substantially elaborated. In a post-Christendom society, this tradition is necessarily articulated independently in a setting of plural ideas yet always seeking to be connected to society. In the contemporary setting, this tradition demonstrates a concern for the common good.

I can therefore recommend that a contemporary tradition is given greater encouragement and supported by more substantial formulations. To maintain their tradition, people in Anglican communities need to hear that their Christian faith includes
its expression in communal life that extends to those who may not be considered members. This communal expression of Christian life is central rather than peripheral and can be celebrated. Greater affirmation can lead people to attend to the significance of their tradition.

Such affirmation of the tradition is also necessary because support from elsewhere cannot be assumed. I discussed in chapter two the currently dissimilar structural assumptions and expectations between Christian communities and their situated society, such as Australia. The tradition in Anglican communities originated in a more supportive culture. To continue to nurture this tradition, more deliberate support by Anglican communities is likely to be necessary.

Anglican communities would therefore recognise that they and their tradition are not automatically aligned with the society in which they are situated. But that does not preclude their self-expression that benefits society. I argued that Christian communities would recognise the wider impact of their communal activity, in chapter seven. Difference does not lead communities to withdraw their interaction with wider society, which is impractical, and denies communities their beneficial expression. Communities can affirm good relationships, regardless of the dissimilarity with wider society, if people within communities recognise the importance of such relationships.

Anglican Church discussion focuses on providing leaders who will ensure specific outcomes for communities. Welfare agencies emphasise their expertise in providing benefits to society. There is little suggestion that Anglican communities appreciate the mutual contribution and corresponding worth of their members. The substantial concern in Anglican community life is that communities are able and oriented to expand. Community nurture that can support expansion and take care of new members is again under-appreciated behaviour. Compared to growth, the identity of Anglican communities
in welcome and inclusion is relatively unimportant. This limited appreciation extends to approaches to dialogue with culturally different groups.

Theological support for the common good suggests that encouragement and affirmation of Anglican communities is not entirely for their own sakes. Simple affirmation of community strength does not necessarily lead to an outward looking community or one where people engage in good relationships. Communities would affirm generosity, creativity, faithfulness and the importance of the ability to reconcile in their relationships, as I proposed in chapters four and five. Communities would recognise the kind of relationships that manifest the common good not only for their own membership, but as widely as possible.

Affirmation of a good Anglican community contrasts with less desirable alternatives. The characteristics of good relationships are best preserved when they are a high priority. Other concerns and initiatives would be accommodated to the importance of good relationships and the ability to reconcile them. When relationships are damaged and people are unable to restore them, the community is preoccupied and uncoordinated, thereby limiting their ability to perform other tasks. To pursue concerns I described earlier, such as leadership, membership or volunteering, a community relies on robust relationships.

Affirmation of all in an Anglican community can lead to benefits that multiply. The importance of relationships for communities could be demonstrated in attitudes to interdependence that intentionally recognised each person’s contribution and the importance of supporting each person. Those disposed to affirm the tradition and support beneficial activities can support each other. Their presence is a witness and an impact within their community and enables the community to demonstrate those characteristics within wider society. I described in chapters five and six the way people are encouraged
by one another in their dispositions and this leads to benefits beyond the direct effect of any specific activity. These benefits are a common good that can be supported by Anglican communities.

**Theological expression**

Theological reflection concerning Anglican community life is not prominent. Public discussion sometimes expresses that the nature of a Christian community is the location for God’s purpose and indeed that God’s love directs the community’s character. But revelation of reconciliation in Jesus Christ is hardly ever mentioned as leading to good community. If Jesus Christ is central to Anglican communities, there is no strong connection to people’s relationships and communal behaviour. Theological encouragement of the possibilities of Christian community life is seemingly peripheral.

Theological affirmation can guide a Christian community concerning good relationships and communities that give rise to the common good. I have argued in chapters three to seven that good God-given relationships sustain good communities that seek and demonstrate the common good. God has revealed and demonstrated in Jesus Christ that in salvation people can be reconciled to God, which transforms their disposition in relationships. There can be faithful encouragement for the overflow of generous relationships, which contribute to the Anglican community tradition to act beneficially and uphold a disposition for the common good.

The frequent and repeated use of formal Anglican liturgy is a significant source of meaning in Anglican communities, yet the formal liturgy does not encourage people to associate the common good with their community life nor within the context of reconciliation with Christ.

Intercessions within the Australian Anglican liturgy could be developed that gave greater encouragement to two aspects of interaction in wider society that uphold a more
truly common, common good. The first aspect is responsibility for the common good and the second is the expectation for interaction.

An Anglican community might ask that the whole society is concerned for the common good. The current request that leaders would serve the common good is an acknowledgement that Australia is a plural society whose government is not necessarily aligned with Christian communities as I noted earlier. In such a society, it is positive to request that leaders remember the common good, not only to focus on a select group. Such a request could go further and propose that all institutions and organisations are oriented to the common good. It is not unreasonable for a Christian community that expects to work for the common good to hope that this will also be the expectation of other groups, and thereby to enable greater cooperation for the common good. I indicated in chapter seven that each groups’ activities are in interaction with others with whom they are interdependent. The responsibility for the common good not only resides with leaders and governments but with the purposes and constructive interaction of all activities within society.

Requests for good communities might also emphasise their interaction. Currently, the intercessions acknowledge that people might belong to more than one community and desire that these should all be communities with good relationships. This request could indicate that since people belong to multiple communities, including their Christian communities, these communities, therefore, overlap and interact. The good relationships desired in each community can, therefore, be encouraged for each community’s interaction with another. As I indicated in chapter seven, these are communities that can draw from one another as well as seeking to support people whose presence in community is more tenuous. Desire for good relationships among communities enables them to interact well for the common good.
Deliberate community activity

When people in an Anglican community demonstrate, and provide socially engaging, beneficial activities, they necessarily co-operate. While there is some positive reporting of the activities, there is almost no appreciation that communities’ roles are the outcome of their Christian qualities. There has been a tradition that expects the Anglican communities to be representative to and participate in wider society, which gave rise to support for welfare agencies, but whose existence seems taken for granted. The welfare agencies themselves provide professional support for people’s relational capabilities, but they convey much less about the importance of supportive communities to nurture these relationships, even with parish partnerships. The simple presence of welfare agencies can convey the impression that there is a very limited role for expression of communal life by demonstrations of outward looking generosity. Yet, unless a Christian community demonstrates the community’s life, it is hard for people to be aware of, much less be nurtured by its tradition.

Anglican communities could recognise the significance of a visible tradition; a tradition in which they have involved themselves in activities that provide benefits within and beyond community membership. Particularly when the reasons for such activities are not fully articulated, the presence of such activities is a sign both for these communities and for wider society. The tradition is visible because of active congregations. It is important that Anglican communities recognise and announce that maintenance of such activities is worthwhile. When people experience and practise good relationships, they are able to understand themselves within a community of good relationships that rest on reconciliation with God. The tradition only continues to be visible because people participate and consequently affirm the qualities present. Anglican communities would therefore recognise the importance of continued visible and participatory activities.
The tradition could be made more visible by circulating ideas among Anglican communities within a diocese. The purpose is not for competition, any more than when congregations’ financial contributions are listed in synod papers. A more widely known tradition of beneficial community activities encourages communities concerning their tradition. It is likely that there are more activities than are publicised in diocesan media and a wider audience would benefit from awareness of them. Additionally, if an Anglican community is encouraged, the activities occurring in similar communities may provide practical suggestions or enable communities to consider complementary activities. Anglican communities can celebrate their activities across the diocese.

Recognition that the tradition can take many forms can lead each community to pay more attention to their specific practice within the tradition. To support the common good an Anglican community need not sustain a great range of activities. It is likely to be beyond a community’s capacity to address every situation all at once. Community members would discern their collective strengths and context and decide what activities were most applicable. Most attention would be paid to the quality of the community that can develop in the practice of the activity. Members would want to act together and expect to demonstrate their good relationships. They would expect to be generous to one another as well as in the results intended for the activity. They would allow for people’s shortcomings and intend to mend deteriorating relationships. The communal activity would aim to instil trust among themselves and in their outcomes. The community would welcome new possibilities for community activities. Community members would know these qualities to arise from their reconciled relationships in Jesus Christ. Intent for these qualities in community activities would enable those activities to support the common good.
Anglican communities could therefore arrange for communal activities that lead them to seek the common good. The participation of the community can be extended and relationships strengthened, when the activity does not only involve the active practitioners. People can be involved in a variety of supportive roles — materially, administratively, prayerfully and in encouragement. The entire community could recognise that these activities do not simply rely on individual effort but arise through their interdependence. The same interdependence means it is not necessary for a community to identify or build activities in isolation. The actual tasks may be entirely organised by another group. An Anglican community could support individuals or a cohort’s involvement in such a group. There could be co-operation between several Christian groups with the same focus or the community may establish the activity in partnership with a not-for-profit welfare group. What is important is that the beneficial communal activity can be recognised as an expression of community life.

**Engagement with wider society**

The Anglican tradition has given rise to welfare agencies that deliver considerable governmentally funded social welfare. Church welfare agencies undertake to be the spokespersons for their beneficiaries and are the principal stimulators of public discussion. Agencies are also the principal advocates to regulatory decision makers. Agency relationships are complex as they: initiate public criticism; expect competent decision making; look to collaborate in good service delivery; but are constrained by regulators’ decisions concerning resources. Congregations rely on agency initiated public discussion and reportedly do little to originate discussion or communicate their community life for the common good.

Anglican communities already have potentially widespread engagement through and with Anglican welfare agencies. Individual Anglican communities cannot emulate
the scope of these activities and it would also be unnecessary duplication. Anglican communities can arrange ways to be involved in activities in co-operation with welfare agencies to bring a communal presence and supportive relationships. As I indicated in chapter eight, the parish partnership idea can offer considerable possibilities. Furthermore, (chapter nine) I indicated that both congregations and agency personnel would benefit from community celebration of agency activity and staff occupations. Anglican communities could celebrate the enriching of their community life, as they recognise their interdependence both with those who benefit and with welfare agencies.

Engagement with groups external to the community enables a community fully to recognise and practise interdependence. An Anglican community could seek a closer relationship with other local community groups or institutions. The members of Anglican communities are an existing overlap because they will have connections to other groups. Overlapping membership can better assist an Anglican community to understand other groups and the best way to connect to them. Anglican communities could seek better information about the aims of any other groups and be interested in conversations about common outcomes that could support the common good. A community could offer assistance and be willing to accept it. Joint activities to engage and even to act beneficially could be possible. Christian communities are led to good and increasing relationships that members could collectively experience the more they engage face-to-face, as I proposed in chapter seven. By seeking the common good an Anglican community gains understanding through common mutually dependent experience.

Community expression within wider society is an opportunity for demonstrating good relationships through which there can be advocacy for the common good. Anglican communities engaging in activities, in dialogue with other groups, can bring this experience to bear with decision makers. Communities can seek greater understanding of
specific concerns from Anglican welfare agencies. Together with other groups a community could agree on a common voice and demonstrate that there is already active co-operation within society. Where the community is already engaged, people are more likely to have extended connections that assist conversations to begin. This community could demonstrate knowledge and local experience in such conversations. The community would be more experienced and more connected and therefore more able to have a collaborative discussion with willing decision makers. The community could support public forums and governmental consultations where there is constructive discussion with institutional and governmental representatives. Such engagement can demonstrate to decision-makers the example of seeking the common good.

When the tradition of Anglican communities remains visible, people can understand the tradition and themselves within it. Some tangible involvement connects people with their tradition. Consciously understanding the generous, conciliatory, creative and faithful qualities that make the tradition possible could enhance people’s appreciation. Anglican communities could make their tradition visible for the common good by recognising its qualities, extending their activities through their communities as far as possible. Anglican communities would therefore also expect their tradition to be expressed in interdependent interaction within society. Communities could benefit from collaboration with Anglican welfare agencies and development of collective understanding and action with other groups. Communal engagement could enhance good community relationships and demonstrate the possibilities of collaborative discussion with decision makers for the common good.

Conclusion

Anglican conversations express limited appreciation for the worth of their communities. Faith in Jesus Christ continues to support activities of the unarticulated
Anglican Church tradition that sees itself situated in and well-disposed to all of society. But the benefit and potential of communities based on good relationships are understated and little encouraged. It is particularly noticeable when compared with the emphasis on leadership and membership growth. The role of church welfare agencies complicates the understanding of Anglican community expression because they provide professional expertise and delivery of welfare assistance. Both the lack of articulation of good Christian community and uncertainty concerning a community’s role reduces Anglican communities’ awareness of their own possibilities for the common good.

Anglican communities have a tradition of communal engagement for the common good. This tradition could be better articulated and celebrated so that people recognise that contemporary expression of the tradition needs their active support. I maintain that the theological resources are available to affirm a community in a disposition that seeks the common good. Such a disposition could make the community relationships more robust, and thereby enable action. Mutual support in the tradition enables people to demonstrate the common good by presence and action within their community and to wider society.
Conclusion

Jesus Christ, the good community and the common good

This thesis provides a Christian theological elaboration of the common good. The common good is a perception of the conduct of earthly society. Within Western society there is at least a notion that a purpose for earthly society leads people to expect to agree on benefits that extend beyond individual gain but do not entirely accrue in specific institutions. I consider that this notion of the common good is under pressure within modern Western society with a consequent impact on Christian communities. I maintain that the common good needs contemporary theological elucidation for the sake of Christian communities who, potentially, thereby benefit wider society.

The common good concept has a long history in Western society and is intertwined with the Christian tradition. Existing Christian thinking concerning the common good has made use of Aristotle: for whom the common good is decided by at least some of the community for the whole of the community in order that people might reach their human goals within that community. Aristotle indicates the benefit of collaborative decision making for society lead by specified purposes, but his view limits who may be involved and what they might aim for, thereby limiting the common good. St Thomas Aquinas adopted but transmitted Aristotle with a Christian perspective. People seek a provisional earthly common good as they are drawn to divine fulfilment in communion with God, although it can seem that individual heavenly fulfilment overshadows the worth of human life and relationships. From Aquinas, such a common good could be achieved by discernment of the natural law; a discernment of what was good for all people including their common agreement for a common good. I suggest it is God’s revelation of loving purpose for people’s fulfilment that determines Christian recognition of natural law. More recent alternatives suggest that the Divine communion
assures people of their fulfilment through and in the example of perfect relationships. Again, God’s revelation in Jesus Christ makes it possible for people to be led towards the model of perfectly good relationships because revelation in Christ engages people in relationships. Lastly, it could be considered that Christian communities direct people to the common good because their good relationships and people’s virtues develop in accordance with the community narrative. Here also, it is the Christian narrative of reconciliation in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that gives rise to a distinctive community that acts towards the good of all society. I propose that God’s revelation in Jesus Christ of reconciliation with God underpins all these perspectives — whether through recognition of fulfilling love in the law or through a model of relationships or through a community narrative. I explore therefore, how revelation through reconciliation in Jesus Christ demonstrates and enables a Christian concept and practice of the common good.

The common good concept requires defence and attention in modern Western society in which other ideas have predominated since the enlightenment. The liberal idea defends individualism and pluralism which enables a competition of ideas; there is no common good except the common standard for competition. While communitarian ideas have criticised liberalism, they themselves have had limited traction and any identified purpose is limited to a human end; sometimes a similar end to civic republicanism that can only encompass a national common good. None of these ideas support Christian notions of the common good, demonstrated in a good community that recognises a prior purpose. Liberal thinking rejects a common good but demands a commonly agreed standard for competing plural ideas. Republicanism demands a common good for a national entity whose borders may be too exclusive, and gives governmental institutions priority that cannot provide sole support for the common good. Communitarian thinking supports a common good that may have a limited human purpose. Each claim lacks
credibility due to: a contradictory denial of a common standard; or an unsustainable claim to exclusive determination of the common good; or a limited purpose. Additionally, as these claims for the common good contradict one another, they further undermine the concept. Furthermore, in the climate of these ideas, good community has suffered from loss of the circumstances under which a denser network of relationships is possible. Without good communities that sustain people’s formation through tradition and purpose for good relationships, their ongoing community life diminishes and with it the potential of a concept of the common good.

In an environment where wider society has paid less attention to the common good, the concept becomes less approachable for Christian communities. Wider society, described as post-Christendom, no longer assumes everyone is Christian and, therefore, no longer automatically identifies with or supports Christian ideas. There is a danger for Christian communities if they do not recognise their difference from wider society and if they assume that ideas in wider society remain largely compatible with Christianity. Ideas supportive of the common good may no longer counter ideas that undermine the concept.

The pervasive role of governments has led to concern about the extent of Christian community perspectives permitted in public dialogue, or in the regulation of not-for-profit welfare activities. In their behaviour communities may, either passively or actively, assume the common good is solely in the hands of governments. Christian community members expect less from their community’s understanding of divine purpose, and regard for the good community in wider society, when they accept that governments can administer all aspects of the common good.

There has also been concern that the attitude of competing ideas has led Christian communities to seek security through success in growth. Competition for affiliation may lead to communities defining themselves more distinctly compared to wider society. A
greater focus on a Christian community’s growth and distinctive identity as their main aim may reduce the community’s interest in wider society and a more common good.

There are also indications that Christian community members view salvation more individualistically and concern that members are religious consumers choosing individually. Where it is merely a matter of individual consumption of religion, people’s lives reflect the fragmentation of wider society. The Christian community does not provide mutual support in all aspects of life nor beneficial activity across society. Individualism reduces the importance of a community and fragmentation separates aspects of even an individual life, so there is less support for the concept and manifestation of the common good.

With such concerns and indications, it is urgent that Christian communities draw on their theological foundations to affirm relationships, collaborative community and the priority of divine purpose, to counter bureaucratic purposes that oversee individualistic and competitive attitudes. In the context of the plurality of ideas in wider society, Christian communities could be confident in the foundation and therefore the importance of God’s revelation as the driver for Christian theological understanding. As such, Christian thinking for the common good would draw on revelation in Jesus Christ.

Theological understanding rests ultimately on God’s revelation. I commence with Barth’s perspective that knowledge, understanding and experience of God rely on what God discloses and on God being utterly free concerning the purpose of human reception of such revelation. I concur that God is ultimately the source of knowledge of God and scriptural experience indicates humankind does not anticipate the revelation. Barth considers Jesus Christ the ultimate divine revelation made humanly present and received in the created order. Williams considers that revelation in Jesus Christ does not simply impart knowledge but with the Spirit provides experience of the divine engagement with
humankind for a dynamic relationship. Christ’s revelation actively engages people for a corresponding response. The Spirit brings the truth of God’s forgiveness of human sin and adoption into the life of Christ, which transforms people’s relational experience in a community. I propose that divine revelation engages with people and transforms their relationships in a community with an ever-widening reach that can demonstrate the common good.

Divine revelation entails relationship with humankind overflowing from the relationality of God’s life. Barth also indicates that the Triune interpersonal life is self-revealing in engagement with people. It is truly the relationality of God’s life that reveals divine intention for relationship; one, common, reliably consistent life of relationships that underpins the common good. The outward movement of divine life reveals divine relationships that engage with humankind. Divine self-disclosure therefore provides people with purpose as they aspire to fulfilment in their relationship with divine life. I maintain that the potential disposition in this fulfilment directs people to relationships that can support the common good.

Jesus Christ’s participation in human life affirms fulfilling relationships for all humankind. God’s care for creation is freely to affirm what God creates, so creation will be fulfilled for good. Divine concern is such that God is present in creation in Jesus Christ, freely undertaking the risk of human history. Barth further indicates that in Jesus Christ human life is present with God and through him all humankind is chosen for relationship with God. All human life may be involved in this disclosure of relationship with God. There is a new possibility for human relationships mediated through Jesus Christ as people are reconciled with God and can be reconciled with one another. The theological foundation for the human common good rests on human participation in the relationships
God reveals. I propose that as people share these good relationships, common to all, they demonstrate the common good.

It is the distinctive nature of the relationships God reveals that indicates the common good. Through the most widespread good relationships, co-operation for benefits beyond individual achievement and accumulation are possible as the common good. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ reveals God’s intention for relationship with humankind; moreover, through Christ there is a pivotal change in the relationship and the possibility of lasting fulfilment. In such relationships, God reveals the greatest good for humankind, salvation. Reconciliation is the metaphor for salvation that evokes God’s intention for relationships, describes what God accomplishes, and characterises the ensuing relationships. While Barth overall refers to reconciliation and does indicate restored relationships, his principle metaphors, judgment and justice, are not so closely connected to a discussion of reconciled relationships. Among others, Brümmer describes reconciliation in which people freely forgive and repent. Consequently, I consider the characteristics of relationships, involving forgiveness and repentance revealed in Jesus Christ, that give rise to the common good.

Jesus Christ reveals the nature of the relationships made possible by, and imbued with, the goodness of God, making the common good possible. God’s goodness is a startling generosity to engage with God’s creatures beyond their expectation so that they are reconciled to God. The life of Jesus exposes human sin in people’s flawed reactions to him, misguided and divided decisions that are a barrier to reconciliation, and that make reconciliation necessary. Jesus Christ literally lives the divine intention to engage with people, forgiving and receiving them. Jesus’ life and death indicate the hurt of disclosing and weight of forgiving the division between God and humankind. At the same time, Jesus identifies with and admits people’s sinful situation. People can share in the
humanity of Jesus Christ, participating in reconciliation with God and in the relationships of the new humanity of the risen Christ. People may be free to recognise the goodness of conciliatory relationships. The resurrection assures people of God’s reconciliatory goodness and a new humanity; giving hope in the ongoing presence of Christ through the Spirit. This reliable hope enables people in the present to respond to their fulfilment in God’s goodness. God’s goodness, which in surprising creativity is generous, conciliatory, and reliable, fulfils their relationship with God. In Jesus Christ people are able to reflect these good qualities of relationships that make possible the common good.

People aware of their reconciled relationship with God in Christ consciously respond. As Barth indicates, reconciliation is complete in Christ, so people can respond to what Christ has accomplished rather than attempt a contribution. As Christ has completed what people cannot attempt, people can appreciate how much God cherishes them and their response. Barth points to people’s joy because God has bestowed such worth on humankind. People are humbled because the generosity of Christ is far beyond their own achievement. Barth also indicates that people are grateful because God’s goodness is so far-reaching and without obligation. Fiddes describes the way people who recognise both Christ’s total exposure of human sin and his complete forgiveness, respond with willing repentance of behaviour which damages the relationship. God’s selfless, reconciliatory, surprising and unfailing goodness draws out people’s behaviour such that they are conformed to be generous, creative, conciliatory and faithful in their response in relationship with God. These qualities may appear in all aspects of people’s lives; the goodness of God can transform all their relationships by reconciliation through Jesus Christ.

People’s transformed relationships interact in a good community. Constantineanu considers that the Holy Spirit draws people together in the presence of the reconciliatory
Christ. By the Spirit, people living in Christ can reflect the example of Christ that demonstrates the conduct of good reconciled relationships in his selfless, surprising, faithful and reconciliatory life. Each person’s individual reconciliation with God can lead them to be well disposed towards other people. As each person recognises the worth of others and receives indication of their own worth, their transformation can lead people to demonstrate the qualities of good relationships that form and permeate a good community. Additionally, this community led by the universal goodness of God may seek ever-widening good relationships that overflow to provide unexpected benefits. This good community could recognise members’ mutual formation and gift to one another; reject competition, work at restoring relationships and seek peace with one another and wider society. There is a common good in such a community that extends as widely as possible.

This reconciliation in Christ brings a good community that is the occasion for sanctification and virtue development, and which manifests and reinforces the common good. As with people’s response to reconciliation with God, cautious protestant theology, such as Barth’s and Berkouwer’s, indicates that people’s goodness and virtue is not a measurable achievement but springs from God’s goodness; while Pentecostal theology upholds the work of the Holy Spirit; and for Roman Catholics the Spirit imparts gifts that change people. People’s behaviour is neither passively accepting nor intentionally inert, so even the most cautious allow that people’s development involves their conscious effort and interaction — that people can be willingly involved in their sanctification. The Holy Spirit enables this sanctification within the community that the Spirit calls people to be. The Holy Spirit brings people together in Christ’s presence in which people may participate in a new humanity for the journey of sanctification among the good conciliatory relationships of a robust community. Hauerwas, among others, proposes that each person’s character develops virtues consistent with sanctification. Each person’s
consistent character through good relationships can strengthen their neighbour’s virtues. Therefore, people can recognise and accept mutual support in their development. Such a community, could seek everyone’s good and may teach, admonish and reconcile. The community maintains a narrative and is the context for each to develop virtuous character as portrayed in that narrative. The community can witness to the call of the Holy Spirit not by regarding sanctification as exclusive, but by intending that the good relationships that sustain the community enable members to seek out those on the periphery. This community is a common good for the common good.

This good community sees no barrier to extending good relationships and the resultant common good to wider society. I engage with the reformed perspectives of Kuyper and Dooyeweerd, taken up by O’Donovan, that maintain there is order in creation directed to the purposes of God’s kingdom. Jesus Christ is sovereign of this order that he has revealed and affirmed through good relationships in which all people have worth. Under Christ’s sovereignty, rather than an overarching human institution, all people’s spheres of activity make a valuable contribution in their interdependent relationships. I also consider the principle of subsidiarity introduced by pope Pius IX that emphasises the contribution of many diverse activities so as not to dismiss their worth. I concur that there is a good order in creation in which people’s interdependent formation leads to recognising the worth of diverse activities. Alternatively, concerned with the impact of wider society, Hauerwas indicates that a Christian community would be so certain of its identity and purpose that it does not need to work to or through any agenda in society even if that leads to separation. I maintain that Christian communities can be conscious of their formation through good relationships and, recognising their impact in all directions, can therefore intend indiscriminately good relationships with all individuals and groups. Christian communities could expect that interaction that recognises the worth of other groups would rely neither on rigidly predefined roles nor on bureaucratic
regulation. Christian communities could expect the common good to arise from good interdependent relationships throughout society.

Christian communities’ expectations for good relationships may give rise to varying degrees of positive interaction with wider society. Communities live in accordance with the good order of Christ’s sovereign purpose and would expect purpose to be prior to human institutions. Communities would therefore wish for recognition of Christian purpose and cannot accept without question the purpose of decision makers. Following or employing a humanly constructed purpose accepts coercive means that undo the order of good relationships. There may be times when other groups act so that the only good is their interest, without positively engagement with others. In an extreme situation, Christian communities, even at the risk of their safety, can consider engaging with those who suffer from the loss of good relationships, for the common good. Where other groups are willing to recognise some interdependence, Christian communities can engage through good relationships, advocating such relationships to sustain the vulnerable. Christian communities can therefore recognise the benefit of a regulated society that allows for all groups to interact and defend the space where they can work for the common good.

Christian communities can seek the common good in good interdependent relationships and benefit whether they give or receive. Both Williams and Gascoigne indicate the importance of willingness to build relationships in dialogue; for Williams dialogue provides insights for the community and for Gascoigne taking people seriously affirms their worth. I concur that the intent for good relationships and recognition of other perspectives, enables communities to be generous and experience surprising creativity. Any common agreement concerning good relationships discovered between a community and another group can be the foundation for increased interaction and even better
relationships. Gascoigne also proposes that intention, experience and formation are complimentary, so I consider that as the community seeks faithful and conciliatory support for those with most dislocated relationships, people can discover how to conform to their intentions to be a good community. The more communities selflessly regard others well, the greater the opportunity to concur with others in good relationships that reflect God’s goodness. The increasingly widespread benefit of such good relationships brings a truly common good.

I investigate the concept and practice of the common good in a case study of Christian communities. I examine practical theology that demonstrates the common good and any associated theological concepts; compared with the potential practice that would express the theological explanation I provide; thereby highlighting those concepts that are reinforced or unsupported. As I perceive that the common good to be little supported across society I indicate where the theological concept and practice may be enhanced.

My area of study is the Anglican Church of Australia. I examine the behaviour of Christian communities and associated Anglican organisations within the three most populous dioceses in Eastern Australia, which represent the diversity of expression within its prevalent urban setting.

This study illustrates the relative degree of interest in activities and opinions that are indicative of the common good. Some activities may seem of too little importance to report. Undoubtedly a thorough examination of actual parish activities would provide an accurate rather than indicative illustration.

The common good as a term is seldom present in Anglican public discussions. Most references refer to a predominant governmental role in material distribution so that goods in common are shared equitably. Contrastingly, I propose that there are theological
reasons for people to work willingly together and recognise their interdependence in relationships that are good. Without people’s endorsement of and involvement in these kinds of good communities, I do not think that governmental resources can be solely relied upon to support the common good.

Anglican organisations do express practical concern in activities that benefit society at a number of levels. Individual Anglican congregations organise themselves as volunteers to provide activities to assist others in their local area. These activities, which must rely on generous, creative and faithful behaviour present in conciliatory relationships, in individual communities, are a minority of reported congregational activity. Welfare agencies founded within Anglican dioceses have become significant providers of professional social assistance resourced and therefore directed by governments. While church media may make it easier to identify with these particular agencies, the motivation for and selection of specific activities is not substantially directed from within the Anglican context, and endorsement of their activities is conceptually no different to support for other governmentally funded programs. Agencies have more recently initiated partnerships with individual Anglican congregations. These activities combine the agencies’ service delivery capability with the relational capacity of community volunteers. There has not been prominent reporting that these partnership activities are an exciting opportunity for the demonstration of community relationships. Anglican community activities that benefit others and may demonstrate good community relationships, could be taken for granted and are reported as a minority topic. Anglican agencies conduct a considerable range of social welfare under the banner of the Anglican Church but with little initiative from the life of Anglican communities.

Discussion within the Anglican context about the origin of activities that benefit society is also limited. There are occasional references to a Christian tradition of care for
others but little clear indication of the way this care arises from faith in Christ and God’s love or of what maintains their behaviour or community activity. Any theological reasons for practical concern are scarce and do not recognise the importance of the Christian community.

In more depth, I explore themes that may indicate support for the common good and their relative importance. Discussions in the Anglican context recognise the quality of people’s relationships as important, but do not emphasise their significance for communities, and admit that good inclusive relationships are not always a priority. Interdependence and mutual learning, arising from good relationships, gives way to strong emphasis on training leaders. There is little indication of congregations’ mutual learning with other groups. In these themes, there is limited appreciation of good relationships and of the demonstration of the consequent good community.

The role of advocate for practices supporting the common good is conducted by Anglican welfare agencies. The relationship with decision makers is complex, both casting judgment through public campaigns and desiring good relationships for co-operative welfare delivery.

Reported roles for Anglican communities places less emphasis on their socially supportive qualities. Co-operative activities demonstrate benefits that are seldom explicitly recognised. There is a largely assumed and unarticulated tradition arising in the Christendom era of participation in beneficial activities, which is also the historical origin of the welfare agencies. As service providers, agencies are not well placed to advocate strongly for community formation, but their size and professional distance may
overshadow the activities of congregations. There is limited appreciation of a tradition nurturing people in and for good community whose benefits overflow.

Contrastingly, the role of growth for Anglican communities is strongly emphasised. The quality of relationships in communities is not necessarily mutually exclusive with the enthusiasm for growth, but there is not much reference to the kind of communities that might eventuate, apart from their continued ability to grow.

Theological elaboration of good relationships that create good communities and their extended benefits is not prominently aired in Anglican communities. Neither the default intercessions in the *A Prayer Book for Australia*, nor Anglican public discussions strongly connect the common good with Anglican organisations; or good relationships in community; or that these arise through and in reconciliation in Jesus Christ. There is very little encouragement for Anglican communities to consider such demonstrations of God’s good purposes as a common good.

The common good is not at the forefront of conversation within the Australian Anglican Church. There are activities that reflect good relationships within an outward looking community contributing to the common good but these do not receive a high profile. Clearly even with little currently explicit intent, the response to the Gospel engenders such activities within Anglican communities and have led to an assumed tradition. For some it may seem that all there can be is an unarticulated tradition that transmits ideas about communal service provision. This reflects either complacency or helplessness; not concerning the tradition but concerning the supportiveness of wider society’s influence in Anglican communities. Much is expected of governments to enable the common good. And governments do in fact resource the majority of Anglican welfare agency activity, and under the Anglican Church name, provide considerable professional benefit to society. Concerns with leadership and growth have a higher priority than the
nature of Anglican communities. The worth of good relationships or the benefits of good communities are not explicated well and there is little corresponding theological formulation to encourage and support. I think it is difficult for congregations to be motivated for practices, or consider the concepts supportive of the common good.

Anglican Church communities have a tradition that indicates possibilities for supporting the common good. Their tradition could benefit from the theological elaboration I propose so that is better articulated and celebrated. There could be encouragement for people whose good relationships are founded in Jesus Christ, to be a community that demonstrates the common good by presence and action. Wider expectations of good communities interacting well for the common good could be part of the intercessions within the liturgy. The tradition could be more explicitly visible and tangible; where people deliberately organise collectively for activities suitable to their circumstances and capacity to express the initiative of each community. Such activity can be in co-operation with other groups. Stronger relationships and greater experience of engagement within society could enable and demonstrate discussions and possibilities for the common good, and provide much more good to people than their individual striving. I propose a theological foundation for Christian communities to seek the common good and I consider that the Anglican Church exemplifies the possibilities for more such theological elaboration, reflection and practice within Christian communities.

This theological foundation begins with God’s freedom to reveal by engagement with humankind, experienced in Jesus Christ. The truly divine outwardly engaging triune life discloses human fulfilment through this engagement. Revelation in Jesus Christ affirms human life as participants in this engagement. This engagement, in which the
human good of salvation can be described as reconciliation, presents the possibility of the truly good relationships that enable co-operation and a common good.

Reconciliation is God’s surprising and creative engagement in Jesus Christ that exposes human sin through Christ’s costly admission and forgiveness. People participate in reconciliation as Christ shares their humanity and leads them to new life. The resurrection therefore, assures people of God’s forgiveness as the Spirit brings Christ’s reconciliatory presence, changing people’s present lives by its promise. People are conscious of their response to Christ’s completed reconciliation. They respond in joy, humility, gratitude and willing repentance. God’s goodness draws out their generous, creative, conciliatory and faithful response in relationship with God that transforms all their relationships, thereby enabling the common good.

The Spirit draws people both into a community and to the example of Christ’s present life of reconciliatory relationships. People recognise the worth of others and receive the same indication from others, their behaviour conveying benefits that overflow beyond mere reciprocation. People can recognise the essential significance of the gifts of the mutually supportive, conciliatory and peace-making community. This community is the occasion for sanctification and virtue formation. The Spirit enables sanctification in the community in which people consciously strive. Virtues develop through sanctification consistent with reconciled relationships which support the mutual development of virtues.

Such communities see no barrier to this interaction extending throughout wider society. All groups within society may be endorsed in the dignity of their activity under Christ’s sovereignty. Christian communities could expect to demonstrate their intent for good relationships. Christian communities would seek to interact according to their own identifiable prior purpose; even at their own risk where there is hostility towards those most disregarded; but where well received, positively, so that these interactions enable
and contribute to the common good. Communities can give and receive benefits as they concur concerning good relationships that enable the common good. Christian communities can also give and receive as they engage with those with the poorest relationships; experiencing their own formation as good communities; whose ever-expansive relationships build a truly common good. Consequently, I maintain that the revelation in Jesus Christ, which Christian communities receive, provides a firm theological and conceptual foundation upon which to build the common good.
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