An exploration of the influence of country of origin on perceptions of God in a multicultural church

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Certificate of authorship

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I agree that this thesis be accessible for the purpose of study and research in accordance with the normal conditions established by the Executive Director, library services or nominees, for the care, loan and reproduction of theses.”
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Ethics approval

Ethics approval for human research was received by the Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee Approval/Protocol Number 2010/150.
Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the relationship between “country of origin” and “perceptions of God”. The researcher’s own experience as a social and theological “other” in Brazil and personal observation in an Australian multicultural church led to this concern. It is this experience that gave rise to the research hypothesis that a person’s country of origin influences their perceptions of God’s relational attributes such as love, mercy, grace, judgement and wrath.

The thesis draws upon personal experience – “a poetics of witness” – as well as the emerging discipline of an ordinary theology. For the sake of a plausible research, the results of an ordinary theology have been set against a more formal academic understanding of Pentecostal theology and its doctrine of God.

The research hypothesis was tested through an ethnographic research of members of Inspire Church, a significant multicultural church in Liverpool, Western Sydney. Participants responded to a quantitative and qualitative questionnaire based on how they perceived the relational attributes of God. The responses were analysed through what is termed a triangulated procedure. The method was supported with open discussions held during what are called Connect Group meetings.

The research carried out at Inspire Church provides an initial contribution to further research of culturally and ethnically formed ordinary theologies within the Australian multicultural church. It allows such churches to be identified as havens of belief and belonging to those seeking diverse refuges in contemporary Australia.
Chapter One
Setting the Scene

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore how the country of origin can inform perceptions of God. Its setting is within the Pentecostal tradition of the Australian Christian Churches, formerly known as the Assemblies of God. It relies upon a case study provided by Inspire Church that gathers at Liverpool in Western Sydney. This particular church had its origins back in the 1970s. It is culturally diverse in its membership. It is because of this diversity that it is the specific site for this research project into a perceptual knowledge of God.

This reference to perception is inclined to privilege subjective experience. It has often been the custom in the past to play down such experience. It was felt that such an emphasis distracted attention away from the proper subject of theology – that is God. In more recent times, however, there has been a greater appreciation of the role of the subjective self in theology.

The subjective focus in this research is self-referential. I was raised in Australia; my father was Spanish and my mother Anglo-Celtic. For eighteen years I served the Pentecostal church in Brazil. On my return to Australia I became increasingly aware of how culture informs our understanding of God. It was time to explore why and consider what, if any, differences there might be between and among cultures.

A number of currents criss-cross this project. In terms of method there is a balance to be achieved between a sociological enquiry and a more explicit theological reflection. The sociological is mediated through an ethnographic approach in and through which a personal subjective experience is mediated. The emphasis on theology is not straight forward. The Pentecostal tradition has always been more experiential and noted for what will be described as its pragmatic immediacy. It has often been suspicious of the purpose and task of theology per se (Smail, Walker, & Wright, 1993, pp. 7-21).

For that reason this dissertation will necessarily draw upon the emerging discipline of ordinary theology that has recently arisen in the north-east of England. Its origins lie with Jeff Astley who made the case for an in-depth study of lay persons’ beliefs in a manner that wove together empirical research and theological reflection.
This particular movement is always seeking to relate the personal experience and beliefs of people with no (or limited) theological training to the more formal categories of a systematized theology. In this present case it becomes an invitation for ordinary people to explore their personal understanding of faith by what might be called a theography. What we mean by this term is the giving of an autobiographical account from the perspective of how the individual self understands God. In the service of this end, the thesis draws upon my personal story in order to explore and provide a foil for the theographic experiences of others who worship at Inspire.

The focus placed on the attributes of God may come as a surprise. The tendency of much Pentecostalism is to place a high priority on experiences of gifts of the Spirit as evidences of a unique connection with God. David Perry, an Australian Pentecostal theologian, notes that

> [0]ne of the themes that constantly recurs in testimonies of Pentecostal Spirit-baptism is that the experience results in a deeper relationship with, or feeling of connection to, God ...in a broad sense one could argue that this feeling of connection to God is to be expected considering that, in Trinitarian terms, the Holy Spirit is God. (Perry, 2017, p. 124)

This focus on the attributes of God also stands at a remove from the work of the Pentecostal theologian, Mark Cartledge, on an ordinary theology. His particular research is carried out against a fuller description of the Christian faith – in this instance the British Assembly of God’s *Statement of Faith*. This confession covers the range of Pentecostal believing from an orthodox evangelical/pentecostal perspective. It addresses the core fundamental beliefs which are based on the authority and infallibility of the Bible. These core beliefs include the Trinity, the virgin birth, ministry, the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ and his resurrection. These beliefs provide a framework in which to understand salvation for a lost humanity as well as “deliverance from sickness”. That salvation is experienced through the new birth: it is described as an “instantaneous and complete operation of the Holy Spirit upon initial faith in the Lord Jesus Christ” with a subsequent baptism by immersion. The Christian life that follows is characterised by a spiritual empowerment for service through the baptism in the Holy Spirit which is then evidenced by speaking in tongues. Christian ministry is accompanied by spiritual gifts and a life of

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holiness. Further, the believer “should regularly participate in Breaking of Bread.” The final destiny for the Christian is eternal life in heaven. By way of comparison the final destiny of the unsaved is “everlasting conscious punishment.”

Why then this focus specifically on the attributes of God? The readiest response to such an enquiry lies in the mix of cognitive and affective factors. The attributes of God necessarily turn attention to the relational nature of God. For migrant members of a culturally diverse church actual belief in God matters a great deal: experience of such is inclined to be felt or apprehended emotively and thus the nature of the attributes of God is privileged in what might be designated as a relational understanding of God.

In order to map the nature of that relationship a particular methodology was required. The process followed involved the use of survey questionnaires directed towards specific groups within the church. That statistical work needed to be set within some interdisciplinary work which involved a reading of Australia’s history. The task of surveying different perceptions of God according to culture of origin depended upon changes in immigration policies that transformed the nature of Australian society. Without these changes there would not have been much of the cultural diversity now found in the large cities of this country to explore. For the sake of a richer understanding of what has been happening at Inspire there was benefit in making comparisons with somewhat similar kinds of churches in the United States. The Mosaic Church in Los Angeles, in particular, provided a necessary foil.

This knot of tasks implied the need to make a number of definitions. For this purpose the thesis relied upon the ancillary work of sociology. The critical issues involved how to understand notions of culture and ethnicity as well as what is meant by perception. The importance of this work lies in the need to establish why the term ‘country of origin’ is to be preferred. For the case in its favour the alternatives must first be critiqued.

Culture is a notoriously difficult concept to define. Approaches to culture have moved between the extremes of culture in fixed and qualitative terms through to the recognition of multiple narratives within a culture that have to do with gender, age and class or status. There can be a sense of indeterminacy in the latter’s approach to the idea of what then constitutes culture.
The degree of difficulty in making a definition of culture is captured in the following comparison. For Giuliana Prato culture can be defined as “a set of rules, standards of behaviour and values ... which are shared and accepted as proper by the members of a society”. For Zygmunt Baumann culture is “a constantly changing entity” which “only exists in the act of being performed” (Prato, 2009, p. 4). This momentum or movement within cultures is also recognized by Kevin Vanhoozer.

The idea that cultures are closed systems, insular and internally consistent wholes that preserve a stable deposit of values and knowledge is a distinctly modern fiction. The reality is that cultures are contested and constructed and have ‘porous boundaries’. (Vanhoozer, 2005, p. 121)

Sheila Davaney likewise notes this complexity.

Increasingly, culture has come to refer to a multitextured network of relations or total way of life encompassing the myriad relations, institutions, and practices that define a historical period or specific geographical location or formative community or subgroups within larger fields...Hence, the notion of culture points simultaneously to the totality of relations and dynamics that constitute human life and to the specificity and concreteness of particular human historical configurations. (Davaney, 2001, p. 5)

Drawing on Davaney’s definition this research considers culture to be the way in which the social group that makes up a specific community interact with their historical narrative and contemporary surroundings. Common symbols and narratives are understood through the interpretive grid of community expectations.

Culture’s multiplicity of meaning brings a number of variables that impact on the focus of the research. The diverse cultural contexts of socio-economic factors, age and gender as well as life experiences such as marriage, divorce, bereavement and health have a significant bearing on how individuals perceive God’s actions. This intangible nature of culture makes it a difficult research item. It is doubtful whether information gained from such a variable source would be easily analysed. Instead, the research divided the participants according to countries of origin and not age, gender or other variable specifics. This practice fits better into the research structure as it corresponds to the way in which the congregation is organized.  

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2 The Australian Bureau of Statistics also uses the term country of origin. This will no doubt assist in statistical analysis associated with the research.
The research project was initially designed to explore the influence of ethnicity as a non-variable on the perceptions of God within a multicultural congregation. This assumption was tested at a seminar presentation as well as during discussions with participant Connect Groups.\(^3\) It was now obvious that ethnicity was not the non-variable I anticipated.

Ethnicity, at first glance, shares a high level of synonymy with culture. Like culture, ethnicity describes social aspects of the individual in terms of shared community relationships and experience (Mikula, 2008, p. 63). In keeping with culture, ethnicity reflects a similar flexibility. Ethnicity, like culture, may be impacted by the dynamics of history, community and individual experience. It is this shared sense of flexibility that distorts the contrasts between the concepts of culture and ethnicity.

Ethnicity contrasts with culture in a number of ways. Whereas ethnicity shares a common origin, culture identifies with a process of individual experiences of common community expectations and practices. Ethnic origin is associated with genetic origin, irrespective of whether that origin is accepted or rejected\(^4\) (R. Jenkins, 2003, p. 67). Culture, on the other hand, may, in fact, reach across ethnic origins. The resulting cultural adaptation or adoption may be reflected in a diminished sense of ethnic identity. From a biological sense ethnicity remains, however.

I experienced the dynamic inter-change between culture and ethnicity. Arriving in Brazil in 1984 with a decided Australian culture and ethnicity, I concluded my term of service eighteen years later culturally more Brazilian than Australian. I now spoke Portuguese: it had become the primary mode of expression. My wife and I had become immersed in Brazilian social and political happenings. They were of considerably more immediate concern to us than what was happening back in Australia. Our diet was modified in order to include more rice and beans. Our life before the internet meant that there was little chance of keeping abreast of events back in Australia.

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\(^3\) Connect Groups provide a closer sense of fellowship and community that may not be possible within a congregation the size of Inspire Church. Church members are able to select a Connect Group based on their specific interests or, as in the case of the project, country of origin.

\(^4\) There is an underlying hint of choice in the matter of ethnicity exemplified in the responses made by a participant in the Pacific Islander Connect Group. Though born a European New Zealander, the participant was raised as a Pacific Islander and disowned any ethnic connection with New Zealand.
And yet, at the same time, our ethnicity remained the constant identifier. Even then, the association of inflexibility with ethnicity on the basis of genetic origin is under question (R. Jenkins, 2003, pp. 66-68).

In such a scenario, ethnic biological identifiers are replaced by multiple identities based on concepts of social construction (Avruch, 2003, pp. 72-82). Ethnicity is less a static given but more a work in progress that often answers to perceived power needs of the social group. Kevin Avruch cites Abner Cohen's research of the social movement of the Hausa of Sobo who

[in order to protect their monopoly of the north-south cattle and cola trade from other groups, transformed the basis of their group solidarity from 'tribal' Hausa (the colonial locution) to 'religious' Tijaniyya-Muslim (acceptable in a post-colonial political environment that proscribed open appeals to tribalism. (Avruch, 2003, p. 75)

Research in cultural/racial/ethnic diversity encounters a multiplicity of terminology, namely multicultural, multiethnic and multiracial. While recognising various perceptual particularities, these terms may be used almost interchangeably in social research. Is a multicultural church multiethnic or multiracial, for instance? The challenge encountered in the research project was to arrive at a terminology that reflected the variables while, at the same time, enhancing the uniqueness of the specific non-variable. The solution was, as indicated above, to use the term “country of origin”.

The question of citizenship as a possible concept of the research must also be addressed. After consideration, citizenship was also found to be not quite appropriate for my task.

The impact of global migration on the idea of citizenship is itself a subject of much interest in sociological studies. Such research hinges on the idea of formal or informal dual citizenship and how citizenry rights and responsibilities function in multiple contexts. Tanya Sejersen expresses something of the tension involved in the title of her article, “I vow to Thee my countries…..” (Sejersen, 2008). Sejersen focuses on the status of formal dual citizenship. However, the flexibility or transference of rights and responsibilities across the duality of citizenship are discussed (p. 523).

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5 Tim Soutphommasane uses the term “nationhood” in a similar way (Soutphommasane, 2012, pp. 70-101)
It is this idea of flexibility that militated against the use of citizenship in this research. Whether formal or informal, a duality of citizenship identity remains. An example of this is where an immigrant may apply for Australian citizenship. The rights and responsibilities of Australian citizenship are accepted. Yet, an embedded sense of the same towards their country of birth may impinge upon or modify those felt toward the rights and responsibilities of Australian citizenship. It can lead to a sense of not being a ‘real’ Australian and not, indeed, being ‘Australienned’.

A number of benefits of the term “country of origin” became clear from the comparisons with the terms culture, ethnicity and citizenship. The first advantage is that of stability.

Culture and ethnicity carry with them elements of fluctuation, movement and change. Indeed, chapter 5 features the inevitable elements of movement and change in my cultural understanding and perceptions. Yet, throughout the processes of cultural adaptation and adoption Australia remained the constant identifier as my country of origin. In an age of global migration it is possible to acquire multiple identities bearing the marks of places of sending and arriving – along with possible times of transition in between those places. Yet, the actual country of origin does not change; it represents where you were born into life and is an undeniable constant identifier.

The term country of origin also provides the place where theography begins. Theography contributes significantly to my research. The idea and practice of theography undergirds the understanding of the primal and embedded influence on an individual’s understanding of God.

Finally, a statistical advantage was identified in the initial research process. The Australian Bureau of Statistics employs that term in its census data. The common referent, country of origin, facilitated the use of Australian Bureau of Statistics data in the research undertaken in this thesis.

In a similar vein some clarity needs to be assigned to the language of perceptions. Terms such as concept (Noffke & McFadden, 2001), image (Hoffman, Hoffman, & Dillard, 2008), perception and representation (Riegel & Kaupp, 2005) are applied to the study of ways in which individuals express their experience of the actions of God. For the sake of clarity, the term perception will be used throughout the project in order to indicate the way
that sensory information is understood, thus making personal the sense of experience. The term will be used in the project to indicate the ways in which sensory, or experiential information regarding the actions of God are received and interpreted within the parameters of specific countries of origin.

The research thus brings together essential elements of theology and sociology. The focus on the relational attributes of God is very much in line with the ethnographic nature of the research carried out at Inspire Church. The intention here is to link the theological and the sociological through common relational contexts. That is, theology addresses the research participants individual narratives of personal encounters with God while sociology addresses the cultural and ethnic relationships in which their encounters with God occurred and are interpreted.

What is evident here is what has been called the “cultural turn” in theology. Sheila Greeve Davaney has described the way in which this cultural turn involves

three overlapping arenas – claims about religious traditions and communities as located within and as dimensions of culture, and claims about theologians and theologies as producers of cultural artefacts or expressions. (Davaney, 2001, p. 4)

Echoing the sociological and theological foci of my research, Davaney concludes that

[b]roadly across the discipline of academic theology, there has been a move away from the study of ideas abstracted from their concrete histories and contexts and a turn to the thick histories and realities of religious communities and individuals. (p.9)

In a somewhat analogous manner Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen (Scharen & Vigen, 2011) claim a particular theological role for ethnographic studies. While recognising the peril of over-statement of the anthropological role in theology, they, nevertheless, propose that ethnographic studies provides “a way to take particularity seriously – to discover truth revealed through embodied habits, relations, practices, narratives and struggles” (p.xxi).

From a Pentecostal perspective Andrew Johnson’s research in the prison systems of Rio de Janeiro is yet another example of applied ethnography. This time, though, the intent was not so much theological but
sociological. His declared aim was “to analyse the social world in and around Rio’s prisons in order to explain why Pentecostalism flourishes” (p. 4).

Reading life in prison through the lens of sociology Johnson concluded that inmates discovered “a tight-knit community for believers, protection for vulnerable members, and access to scarce resources inside the cellblocks” (Johnson, 2017 p. 5). And, secondly, inmates were introduced to

a belief system and a set of practices that enable an inmate to embody a new publicly recognizable identity and a platform for prisoners to live a moral and dignified life both in prison and after they are released. (p.5)

This blending of theology, culture, sociology and ethnography lies at the heart of this research. The Christian community on which the relevant case study depends is a church comprising many diverse cultures and thus mediates experience of migration and diaspora.

Now this expression of diversity comes with a history. It needs to be understood in the light of an Australian history of immigration and citizenship. The fact of the matter is that the kind of fellowship found at Inspire could not have existed prior to the reversal of the White Australia policy first set in place at the time of Federation, 1901. That policy was designed to privilege those of a white Anglo-Celtic background and exclude Asians and persons of colour. The Inspire story into which these theographies are placed is indeed a consequence of the immigration policies put into effect during the 1970s. For this task to be viable and plausible the first step must of necessity engage with how Australia – let alone the church – became a country noted for its cultural diversity.

Here a distinction made by the Uniting Church in its revised preamble to its constitution is helpful. The distinction is made between first and second peoples – the first people refers to the indigenous peoples; the term second people refers to subsequent settlers, colonisers and migrants of various hues. In this way a distinction is made that assigns priority to Aboriginal nations. The discussions on a multicultural church can no longer

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Proceed upon the lack of recognition of first peoples. Australia was not the terra nullius, the empty or uninhabited land, of Captain Cook’s discovery.

The first peoples arrived some 65,000 years ago. Multiple and diverse societies were established based on nations and tribal communities. Rather than being simplistic and primitive cultures pictured in the White Australia narrative, the multiple and ordered nature of the indigenous culture and spirituality are now recognised. According to the Australian Government website

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are complex and diverse. The Indigenous cultures of Australia are the oldest living cultural history in the world – they go back at least 50,000 years and some argue closer to 65,000 years. One of the reasons Aboriginal cultures have survived for so long is their ability to adapt and change over time. It was this affinity with their surroundings that goes a long way to explaining how Aboriginal people survived for so many millennia.

This was not the way that the first peoples were seen by those who made up the initial members of the second peoples. Immigrants arrived in 1788. The indigenous cultures were deemed primitive by the new arrivals, a society destined for eventual demise a side-bar in the Australian story. Wadjularbinna Doomadgee, a Gungalidda leader in the Gulf of Carpentaria, for example, retells the historical failure to acknowledge the innate meaning of indigenous spirituality.

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7 Captain Cook claimed the land for the British Empire under the legal term “terra nullius”. The legality of the term is unquestioned. However, he was some 60,000 years too late. Jock Collins is indeed correct to say that “Australia has a long history of immigration” (Collins, 2008, p. 244). However, we may contend that the indigenous peoples that he refers to were, in fact, the descendants of the first wave of immigration. Indeed, a history of Australian migration acknowledges that the first immigrants arrived in Australian approximately 50,000 years ago (http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibition/objectsthroughtime-history/50000-years-before-present/index.html). The latest archaeological discoveries at Jabiru in the Northern Territory pushes that earlier by more than 18,000 years. Estimates are now that the indigenous population has lived in Australia for a minimum of 65,000 years. (http://www.smh.com.au/technology/sci-tech/aboriginal-archaeological-discovery-in-kakadu-rewrites-the-history-of-australia-20170719-gxe3gy). According to the article “The discovery also confirms that Australian Aborigines undertook the first major maritime migration in the world.” Accessed on the 24th July, 2017

8 The Australian Bureau of Statistics suggest we “imagine a country with 150 languages and a history of at least 50,000 years. This is Australia’s Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.” (http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/2024.0). Accessed on the 13th June 2017


10 Charles Darwin described a corroboree that he had witnessed as “a festival amongst the lowest barbarians”. Cited by Raewyn Connell (Connell, 2007, p. 77).

11 This was something accepted as fact as late as 1946 in a Cairns Post article titled “The Australian Aboriginal: A Dying Race”, (https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/42508269_accessed_4th_January_2018). And yet, “The proportion of the people who reported as having Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin has increased again in 2016, accounting for 2.8 per cent of the population. With 649,171 people indicating that they have Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin, the population size has increased by 18.4 per cent since 2011, and nearly doubled since 1996.” (http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/2024.0) 7. Accessed 4th January 2018
Our people before the white man were very spiritual people. They were connected to land and creation through the Great Spirit. There was a Good Greater and Great evil spirit. And Satan was the great evil one. So there wasn't much difference in what the missionaries brought with them and what we already had. (Doomadgee, 1996)

This thesis acknowledges the Aboriginal nations to be first peoples. Its focus, however, is on the second part of that distinction made by the Uniting Church, but with a proviso. The dominant Anglo-Celtic majority is excluded.

It is necessary now to turn our attention to the social context that undergirds my research at Inspire. To do this I employ Charles Taylor’s concept of the social imaginary. Taylor defined social imaginary as

[the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and images that underlie their expectations. (Taylor, 2004, p. 23)

A social imaginary recognizes the integral relationship between the individual and the social group or community (Baran, 2013, p. 79), Indeed, the concept is one of shared expectations and realities. Pearson also recognizes the common or shared nature of the social imaginary. He states that

[the social imaginary is a set of self-understandings, background practices, and horizons of common expectations that are not always explicitly articulated; nevertheless they give a people a sense of shared group life. (Pearson, 2017, p. 16)

Miriam Dixson has written on the critical importance of what she calls the Anglo-Celtic imaginary (Dixson, 1999). Here it is assumed that the settler/colonial society established a national imaginary of what it means to be Australian. That claim is not as innocent as it may first seem. It is not unusual now for other migrant cultures to lay claim to a more variegated understanding of what it means to be Australian.

Dixson sees the Australian imaginary as a process of emergence from the unitary Anglo-Celtic “core culture” to a “poly-ethnic one”. The insistence that the core Anglo-Celtic culture not be abandoned is one of the strengths of Dixson’s proposal for an Australian imaginary. Retention of the Anglo-Celtic core culture ensures the cohesive continuity she believes is necessary in the process of transition within the Australian imaginary through its essential interaction with immigrant poly-ethnicities. Dixson argues that an abandonment, or neglect
of the core, can only result in fragmentation and forfeiture of an identifiable Australian imaginary (Pearson, 2004, p. 13).

To avoid either social fragmentation or perceived Anglo-Celtic hegemony in the Australian social structure, Dixson proposes a two-pronged movement, one of transition and the other of consolidation. Transition recognizes the continued enrichment of the Australian imaginary through interaction with like-valued diverse ethnicities. Consolidation recognizes the continued consolidation of the Australian imaginary through the cohesive value of the Anglo-Celtic ethnicity. Thus, the Australian imaginary is in a continuing cohesive transition of re-imagining and reforming itself.

Dixson’s social imaginary does not lend itself to a simple empirical construct. More is at play here. Dixson recognises the “speculative quality” of her social imaginary model in which

> beyond the textual levels indispensable to understanding there exist prelinguistic areas which shape identity deeply and creatively. (Dixson, 1999, p. 5).

Dixson’s Australian imaginary model was adopted in this research because of this speculative quality. The Australian imaginary is not now a static Anglo-Celtic one. In its place is a transitional Australian imaginary narrative compiled from the contributions of diverse ethnicities with the Anglo-Celtic narrative providing the narrative cohesion. The focus of my thesis is upon those who find themselves in a minority and are on the edge of an Anglo-Celtic imaginary yet are themselves a part of their own communal imaginary; the Australian imaginary is an imaginary that is in transition open to the contributions of older and newer arrivals.

It is arguably the case that any enquiry into the practice of believing must respect sociology and history. In a way which may seldom be realised by the minority members of the church their presence and how they understand the life of faith is shaped by much larger factors beyond their immediate experience. For this reason, there is need to come to terms with how the Australian society was formed through patterns of migration and settlement. The current experience of cultural diversity masks the greater homogeneity of a formerly white Australia, the legacy of which is still to be found in both church and society. There is then a political and cultural history that is the setting for the theological exploration. It is likely that talk of community and being a haven,
which comes to prominence in churches like Inspire, is no accident. In this case it is a consequence of Australian history.

The arrival of the First Fleet in 1788 with “some 1030 migrants” (Pietsch, Graetz, & McAllister, 2010, p. 48) initiated what we might call the second phase in the Australian imaginary. With the establishment of the British Crown colony of New South Wales Australian society took on a new identity as a civilized European society. From now on Australia was to be an antipodean expression of an Anglo-Celtic imaginary deliberately imposed by the colonial governments during the nineteenth century “with great emphasis on public adherence to British norms of behaviour” (Mason, 2010, p. 817) – that is a civilized European society.

This Anglo-Celtic cultural identity remained a significant force throughout the development of modern Australia. The founding fathers of the Commonwealth of Australia enshrined Anglo-Celtic hegemony as the cultural identity of the new nation. The Immigration Restriction Act (1901), one of the first pieces of legislation passed by the new federal government, gave legislative protection to a white Australia. Juliet Pietsch, Brian Graetz and Ian McCallister describe the obvious racial intent of the legislation: “among those who framed the legislation, it was agreed that the measure would be used solely to exclude non-white migrants” (Pietsch et al., 2010, p. 49).

Warwick Anderson provides a telling excerpt from Alfred Deakin’s introduction of the Immigration Restriction Act to Parliament.

In another century the probability is that Australia will be a white continent with not a black or even dark skin among its inhabitants. The Aboriginal race has died out in the South and is dying fast in the North and West even where gently treated. Other races are to be excluded by legislation if they are tinted to any degree. The yellow, the brown, and the copper-coloured are to be forbidden to land anywhere. (Anderson, 2005. p.90)

Deakin was Australia’s second Prime Minister.

A number of drivers popularised the protection of an Anglo-Celtic culture (Tavan, 2005, p. 136). Amongst these drivers were the protection of living and working conditions as well as more strategic and security concerns. Public concerns reflected what Gwenda Tavan has described as a morally-imbued, social-liberal faith
in the capacity of governments to create an equitable, prosperous and cohesive society through various ‘population management’ strategies, including a selective immigration policy. (page 136). The appointment of Arthur A. Calwell as Australia’s first Minister of Immigration in 1945 signalled a series of challenges to a White Australia. Calwell initiated the post-World War II immigration programme under the banner of “populate or perish”. He was not, however, without his detractors evidenced in a letter sent to him at the time from the Australian Natives Society.

The Board of Directors has been requested to urge your government to take every precaution in the selection of a suitable type of immigrant to be introduced into Australia as the progress of Australia must certainly be retarded if our high standard of citizenship is considerably lowered by the introduction of a low type of individual particularly if of other than British stock. 12

Despite such resistance, Calwell continued his pro-European migration policy. Bipartisan approval of the post-World War II immigration policy was maintained until 1966. Consequently, Australia underwent a series of demographic changes that transformed an Anglo-Celtic Australia into one of the most culturally diverse nations in the world (Collins, 2008, p. 245).

The next step in the development of a multicultural Australia was not made until Harold Holt’s Migration Act (1966). This Act gave equal legal recognition to all migrants to Australia regardless of racial or ethnic identity13. An hegemonic imaginary was inexorably turning toward a future heterogeneous one paving the way for the emergence of multicultural churches such as Inspire.

The Migration Act (1966) signalled the emergence of the ideology of multiculturalism in the years 1966-1975 presented a valid context for re-forming the now diverse Australian social imaginary into an ideological if not sociologically cohesive national identity. A suspicious population of the day remained wary of a diverse cultural mix parallel with, but not part of an homogenous Anglo-Celtic Australian identity. According to Mark


Lopez\textsuperscript{14}, “The contemporary opinion polls suggested that about 90 per cent of Australians were opposed to multicultural ideas at the time they emerged” (Lopez, 2000, p. 22).

Lopez is the leading academic in the politics of multiculturalism in Australia. He strongly suggests that the movement to a multicultural society was not a popular recognition of ethnic or cultural equality. Neither was it recognised as an item on the national political agenda of either of the two major parties. Rather, “it was necessary for the multiculturalists to vigorously and strenuously promote it, even in the face of indifference or sometimes stiff opposition from those who supported other approaches” (p. 24).

Political changes in the Labour and Liberal parties in 1973 led to the inevitable rejection of the white Australia narrative and the inauguration of a multicultural Australia imaginary. In that same year Al Grassby, Minister of Immigration, delivered a speech entitled \textit{A Multi-Cultural Society for the Future}. Grassby moved his policy focus away from a singular Anglo-Celtic narrative of “the family of the nation” to plural narratives that embrace the diverse families of other nations that now come together as the family of the Australian nation. Diversity replaced unity as Australia’s imaginary. Later, in the same year, the newly appointed Opposition Spokesman on Labour and Immigration, Malcolm Fraser, adopted multiculturalism including it as a part of the Liberal Party platform for the 1974 Federal election. Here was

the first inclusion of multiculturalism in the immigration policy of a major party. This development also established a degree of bipartisanship sufficient to protect this new ideology from the rigours of adversarial parliamentary politics. (Lopez, 2000, p. 25)

Two years later the Racial Discrimination Act (1975)\textsuperscript{15} provided the legislative basis for a multicultural Australia. The Act brought Australia into line with international standards with regards to racial discrimination. The anti-discriminatory provisions of the Act are, however, broader than a multicultural society envisaged as comprising those from other shores, that is those of the second peoples. Chief Justice Robert French AC (French, 2015) in the inaugural Kep Enderby Lecture\textsuperscript{16} placed the application of the Act within the framework of

\textsuperscript{14} Lopez also authored \textit{The Origins of Multiculturalism in Australian Politics 1945-1975} published by Melbourne University Press in 2000.


\textsuperscript{16} Keppel Earl Enderby, the then Attorney General of the Commonwealth, introduced the Racial Discrimination Act (1975).
Australia’s historical narrative that includes the first peoples. That meant that the Act applies to discrimination against both the first and second peoples of the nation.

The Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 contrasts sharply with the Racial Discrimination Act (1975) upon which the racial and cultural imaginary of Australia today is now formed. A bipartisan policy of multiculturalism celebrates the Commonwealth’s cultural and ethnic diversity.

The turn to a multicultural imaginary is recorded in migration statistics available through the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Data indicates a continued numerical growth in migration with an accompanying trend away from a European to an Asian focus as the main source of immigration.

Media Release 063/2017 (27 June 2017) indicated that migration added 1.3 million to the population between 2011 and 2016. A total of 180 different countries of birth were registered in the 2016 census. Australia’s social diversity is further exemplified through ancestral identity. The 2016 census recorded more than 300 different ancestries. This figure would increase dramatically if the diverse ancestries of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were included.

The same census confirmed the growing trend toward an Asian predominance in migration away from the historical European predominance, something that Calwell would have rejected. While England remains the most common country of birth in the total population, China with 191,00 new arrivals and India with 163,000 are now the two most common countries of birth for new arrivals. The Australian Bureau of Statistics report concludes that Asia and not Europe is now the origin for the majority of those born overseas.

The graph below indicates this Asian prominence in migration. Three of the top five countries of birth outside of Australia are Asian. The information was sourced from the 1947, 2011 and 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics census reports.

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19 This is based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimation of 150 different languages within the heterogeneous grouping of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.
The table below highlights the move away from European migration in favour of Asia. Of note is the reversal between 2011 and 2016.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Associated with the dramatic turn to Asia as the main source of immigration there has been a significant alteration in the Anglo-Celtic identity of the Australian society. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016 Census report

England is still the most common birthplace of migrants to Australia (15%), but that share is less than half our 1966 number. The big movers over the past five years have been China (from 6.0% to 8.3%) and India (5.6% to 7.4%). Their combined figure (16%) means that, for the first time, there are more Australians of Chinese and Indian birth than of English birth.21

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20 The comparison is restricted to Europe and Asia as the two major geographical sources for Australian immigration. Other sources of migration were not included.

Seventy years is a relatively short period in a nation's history. In that time contact with the ethnic “other” has moved from isolated incidents to an almost unconscious reality across the broad spectrum of the Australian community. Simon Holt (Holt, 2007) observes that in larger cities, like Melbourne and Sydney, the ethnic stranger in our midst is likely to be our next door neighbour. In the case of Inspire and other multicultural churches, the ethnic stranger is likely to be the one sitting next to us during a Sunday service.

The sociological impact is even more dramatic if the time frame is reduced to the 1970s. Peter Kivisto noted that

Over the past quarter century, the nation has dramatically revised its national policies regarding ethnic minorities ... and in so doing has ... become a nation that is officially committed as a matter of national policy to the preservation and enhancement of ethnic diversity. What makes this transition all the more remarkable is that into the 1960s, Australia maintained an explicitly racist 'White Australia' assimilationist stance regarding immigration. (Kivisto, 2002, p. 101)

The paradigm shift from the preservation of an Anglo-Celtic cultural hegemony to one of active promotion of cultural diversity was, in fact, an admission of the shortcomings of previous cultural models to identify and interpret successfully the unique Australian imaginary (Mason, 2010, p. 819).

What might be the implications of such demographic change be for matters of religion? Prior to post-World War II the makeup of the Australian Christian constituency was divided between an Anglo-Celtic Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. The Anglican Church along with Presbyterians and Methodists represented 60% of the Australian population with 20% of the population Catholics (Bouma, 2002, p. 17). Cultural diversity within the Christian churches post-1947 challenges this historical duopoly between two types of churches, Protestant and Catholic (England et al., 2002). Pamela Welch argues that identifying the Australian Christian church from the colonial period simply as transplants or “relocated versions of their churches of origin is not historically accurate” (Welch, 2008, p. 234). Instead, she promotes the idea of variation in which specific Christian communities responded to the impact of the ever changing cultural milieu of the Australian community so that “each evolved in its colonial setting into something new, which both resembled and also differed, sometimes
considerably, sometimes subtly, from the original model” (p.234). Welch proposes the recognition of the cultural moves within the nation's churches through which

settler Christianities are placed alongside other forms of migrant religion, as a few among many carried into the modern by people who have moved, voluntarily or involuntarily from their countries of origin all over the world. (Welch, p. 239)

The diverse cultural mix of the Christian community is then enriched by a process of “interacting and intermingling. That is an essential characteristic of the church as a social unit. Diverse social sub-units based on such items as gender, age and ethnicity interact with each other identifying as a congregation. In such a way, "[t]he Church, as a living body, is always enculturating and interculturating at the same time.” (Rademacher, 2009, p. 115).

Rademacher makes the point that the terms enculturation and interculturating define the dynamic human response to culture in which “enculturation refers to the individual in culture; inculturation refers to the culture itself (Rademacher, 2009, p. 112).” Therefore, as Rademacher contends,

[w]e cannot live in a culture without being influenced or even transformed by it. But individuals appropriate (enculturation) the culture's signs and symbols (inculturation) in their own way. The individual’s act of receiving the culture’s message reshapes it in the image of the receiver.(Rademacher, 2009, p. 112)

Rademacher's suggestion that the church is “enriched by the processes of interacting and interculturating” (p.115) is very much applicable to ethnically and culturally diverse Australian churches.

The theological context of this research is directly related to the cultural and ethnic diversity of the Christian faith in contemporary Australia. Christianity in Australia began as an immigrant faith: it was the faith of the second people. As such

the expression of this Christian faith was essentially derivative rather than unearthed in this strange new site. Well into the second half of the 20th century there was little in the way of a theology that was emerging out of the distinctively Australian experience. (Pearson, 2003, p. 604)

Multicultural churches such as Inspire tell us that Christianity is still an immigrant faith in Australia with the added distinctive that the immigrant comes from diverse cultures and ethnicity. The Christianity they bring
with them is not now solely a European one but a Christianity worked out through diverse contextual peculiarities, a “sort of sympathetic theological infrastructure” (Pearson, 2003, p.604). Here is Goosen’s first criteria for successful Australian theologies (Goosen, 2000, p.297). An Australian theology, written in the Australian idiom is “an inculturated theology” (Goosen, p.297) which not only recognises the input of the dominant culture but also the significant contributions of what he terms the “many subcultures” (p.297). My research recognises the unique contribution of immigrant faith to the rainbow (borrowing Goosen’s metaphor) of an Australian theology.

With regards the cultural diversity of the Christian faith in Australia, there is much to learn from the similar occurrence in the United States of America. As a nation of immigrants, the United States of America encountered periods of social change according to the ethnic mix of historical periods of migration. In a similar way to Australia, post-World War II migration largely came from non-European nations. Kathleen Garces-Foley (Garces-Foley, 2007) and R.S. Warner (Warner, 2004) considered the consequences of what Warner described as the “the de-Europeanization of American Christianity” (Warner, 2004, p. 20).

Warner further observed that “the new immigration is bringing about not so much a new diversity among American religions as diversity within America’s majority religion” (Warner p.20). Is there not a challenge here for the Australian Christian community to recognise, not only the sociological contribution of immigration but also Christian immigrant contributions to the faith and practice of the Australian Christian community? The voice of the Christian “other” needs to be heard and heeded.

Significant changes occurred in the Anglo-Celtic identity and denominational duopoly of the Australian Christian church post-1947. “Christianity became more plural at this time as new denominations arrived or were formed and new ethnic subgroups of previously existing denominations came into being.” (Bouma 1995, p.286). By 2007, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics,22 “One in five people who recorded Christianity as their religion were born overseas.” Bouma likewise observed that

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Since 1947 the pattern of Australia's religious identification and religious cultures has changed radically.... There has been a significant rise in religious diversity reflecting a decline in the hegemonic power of the Protestant establishment to shape Australia's religious culture. (Bouma, 2002, pp. 17-18)

Current immigration continues to add ethnic and cultural diversity to the Australian social and religious identities. While the research is focused on the multicultural Christian community, religions other than Christian also contribute to Australia's contemporary religious imaginary. The following statistics are derived from the ABS 2016 census report, Religion in Australia.23

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Affiliation</th>
<th>2011 (as percentage of population)</th>
<th>2016 (as percentage of population)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Christian</strong></td>
<td>61.1%</td>
<td>52.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniting Church</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian and Reformed</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Orthodox</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Christian</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Religions</strong></td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikhism</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judaism</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three percentages stand out in the above table. The percentage of Australians identifying as Christian between 2011 and 2016 decreased by 9%; those identifying as non-religious increased by 8.8%; and those identifying with other religions increased by 1%. The Australian Bureau of Statistics notes that

[i]n 1966, less than 1% of the population reported having a religion other than Christianity compared with 8.2% in 2016. Islam and Buddhism were the main contributors to this increase, although the proportion of Australians reporting Hinduism also increased over this period. These trends reflect changes in the countries of origin of recent migrants, where these religions are more predominant.

From the perspective of this thesis, the expansion of religious diversity since 1947 impacted Christian and non-Christian religious expressions (Bouma 1995; Bouma, 2002, p. 17). It is during this period that we see “the rise of Pentecostal groups from virtual non-existence in 1947 to over one percent in 2002” (Bouma, 2002, p. 19). While the percentage of 1% appears somewhat insignificant, the actual number of Pentecostals in the Australian population grew from virtually nil in 1947 to 195,000 in 2001.

The emergence of Pentecostalism in Australia may, first, be attributed to a move away from what Bouma calls “the dry rationality characteristic of mid-20th century English Protestant Christianity” accompanied by “the growing demand for experiential spiritualities and religious expression” (p.19). Secondly, there is the increasing ethnic and cultural diversity of the Australian population. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 32.6% of the 238,000 who indicated Pentecostalism as their religion in the 2011 census were born overseas. That statistical evidence confirms anecdotal witness. Personal discussions with pastors of the Australian Christian Churches in a number of states indicate the relatively recent phenomena of ethnic diversity within local churches stretching across the denomination. The Inspire story both depends upon and reflects this statistical evidence.

The narrative of an Australian imaginary describes the historical development of cultural and ethnic diversity at the national level. It also connects at the personal level; who seek their sense of identity within the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0.4%</th>
<th>0.4%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religion</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

24 The increase reflects an additional 2 million respondents classifying as “no religion” in the 2016 census.
context of a culturally diverse imaginary. The Australian social narrative intersects with that of the “other”. My research is very much built on that interconnection based on my own personal experiences of being the social “other” and in discussions with those of diverse countries of origin who encountered the same sense of “otherness” at Inspire.

In terms of its composition, 60% of Inspire’s membership belong to minorities. There is only one Aboriginal family. The church experience of indigenous cultures and peoples is limited. It is highly unlikely to understand issues of *terra nullius*. The way in which migrant cultures operate – which is to seek out those who are similar – means that they would often accept what is already there. They do not have the time and language capacity to delve into the aboriginal cultural origins of Australia and how it affects them.

It is here that the national narrative intersects with that of Inspire Church’s adherents. The current level of cultural and linguistic diversity at Inspire flows from decisions made in 1973. The irony is that this history is also hidden from most members’ understanding of self and their communities. It is never talked about – and yet the changes in immigration policy at that time made possible their lives and that of subsequent generations in Australia. That legislation also altered the religious landscape of Australia. From the specific perspective of the thesis it opens up the prospect of a more varied theology.

It is now time to consider how and why this project possesses an autobiographical dimension that surfaces at various points throughout the thesis. It is an accompanying theme which makes itself first felt through a consideration of being “the other”- and thus being more than a statistic. I had to become the “other” to appreciate the full meaning of the experience of difference, of being apart from, implied in that term.

In 1984 I became what is termed the “other” within the Brazilian church and society when I was appointed to be a missionary from Australia to Brazil. Apart from anticipated language and cultural challenges I encountered there were unexpected issues arising out of differences between the expressions of faith and practice of the Australian Christian Churches and those of the Brazilian Assemblies of God. It would seem that God’s free grace featured in the Australian church was contradicted by a perceived severe legalistic approach to earning and maintaining God’s favour. The Brazilian church expected me to wear more formal clothing, my wife
should not cut her hair or wear “slacks”. I was appointed by the Australian counterpart of the Assemblies of God denomination to serve alongside its Brazilian counterpart. But, how could I? I was the “other”, strangely out of place.

Assimilation and a sense of not being the “other” took place over many years until the perceived contrasts and contradictions were replaced by appreciation of the unique cultural and spiritual contexts within which they occurred. I had found a spiritual haven in which cultural and ethnic differences were valued within a commonality of faith and practice. My Australian imaginary developed a decisive Brazilian texture.

On my final return to Australia in 2000 I realized how the Brazilian culture, both secular and religious, had altered my perspectives on civil and Christian matters. I returned to an Australian church that had developed a culturally contemporary relevancy while my perspective had developed in a diametrically opposite direction. I had returned home. But home was no longer what I had remembered it to be. My expectations of returning to an Australian church culture that somehow had remained unchanged over eighteen years were severely shaken by the reality of what the Australian church had become. I had not realised until then how much of a rigid conservative I had become through my religious experience in another culture.

I was now, unexpectedly once again the “other.” I identified more with those of other cultures and ethnicities than my own Australian ethnicity and yet, not fully identifying with one or the other. I was, in fact, a remigrant looking for a place to belong.

On my return to Australia I attended Inspire Church. The cultural and ethnic diversity of the members indicated that there may be others who shared a similar narrative of cultural otherness. Perhaps the Nigerian dressed in his best formal attire on Sunday morning sitting next to an Australian informally dressed in jeans and t-shirt shared my cultural disquiet. Did he likewise discern a contrast, not simply in attire but also between his formal and the Australian informal approaches to God? Here was something at the very heart of faith and practice in the diverse Australian Christian community.

Inspire Church reflects the multicultural diversity of Western Sydney. And yet, apart from special cultural celebrations, Sunday services feature a monocultural Western approach to liturgy and worship. My perceptions
of God had certainly been shaped by my pre-Brazilian experiences, modified by my time in Brazil and now reshaped by my post Brazil experience. Were there others in the congregation struggling with similar cultural modifications? How much of a culturally impacted perception of God may be modified or even abandoned through exposure to another culture without forfeiting one's unique cultural or ethnic identity.\textsuperscript{25}

I bought back with me a certain weight of Brazilian cultural luggage. How much should I have left behind? And what now of the members of the congregation from India, Samoa, Chile or any of the more than forty countries represented in the congregation? How much did they bring with them of their distinctive culturally and ethnically impacted perceptions of God? When an Australian pastor speaks of a God of grace how is this filtered through his hearers’ distinctive cultural experiences?

Exposure to diverse cultural experiences may result in changed perceptions as in my case. Similar changes may also occur within the local church membership. Resistance, on the other hand, to diverse cultural influences in order to preserve ethnic identity may encroach on the sense of community within the church congregation. Such members may leave the church and form their own diasporic church community; a concern expressed by the senior pastor of Inspire Church. How then may cultural fluidity and ethnic identity impact on key theological concepts such as the nature and actions of God expressed in the local church? The senior pastor indicated that he had initially encountered challenges in maintaining a congregational sense of unity and religious community in the light of the diverse experiences of God’s actions within the diverse countries of origin represented in his congregation. Following our discussions, I asked myself the question, “Could there be other Australian pastors of multicultural churches who faced the same challenges?” What started out as personal curiosity now took on a much broader context and purpose.

\textsuperscript{25} Daniel J. Adams discusses the question of unique cultural identity and salvation from a Myanmar perspective. His article posits the question on the possibility of a Myanmar convert to Christianity continuing their cultural identity which is philosophically Buddhist. (Adams, 2008)
Chapter Two

Seeking a haven of inclusion

Our perceptions of God are deeply informed by our lives of personal experience and the kind of churches to which we belong. It is the church variously constructed and organised that forms and reforms the very nature of us through its words and acts. This business of formation and re-formation matters then a great deal for our perception of God. It determines how the church understands itself and what kind of image and message it seeks to project. For this reason our enquiry into perceptions of God must delve into the often implicit ecclesiologies of churches like Inspire. That is not the normal practice for a Pentecostal church. For that reason Mosaic Church in Los Angeles will provide a foil.

The emphasis placed on the church as a means of formation is only part of the story where there is a high proportion of members who have migrated from one part of the world to another, however. That act of migration is itself a kind of disruption. It marks the end of one way of being and the beginning of another. The way in which God is perceived is not necessarily the same as it once was due to a change in experience. There is a need then to consider also the role that migration plays in the shaping of perceptions of God. The focus of this thesis on country of origin is one part of that ongoing work.

The role the church as an institution can play in the lives of migrant and diasporic communities is not the same as it is for the longer settled population of a given society. The life of faith can ease the process of moving from one culture to another. It is now recognised that a diasporic church especially can fulfil functions that the church back in the sending country does not perform. These extra functions can be ones of providing a place where one’s own language and cultural identity in an otherwise alien society are both respected and performed: advice on immigration, taxation, banking, health can be sought for and provided. It can as a consequence become a haven.

Susanna Snyder (Snyder, 2012) looks at similar assistance provided for asylum seekers who see the church as a sanctuary. In practical terms, asylum seekers are provided with pastoral care that includes
“befriending, listening, visiting and service provision” (2012, pp.37-39) as well as advocacy with governmental and institutional authorities (pp.39-43). Snyder further highlights two functions that relate to the multicultural aspects of Inspire Church. The first involves “engagement with people seeking sanctuary in the context of Christian liturgy and prayer” (p.43). The second is “engagement with people seeking sanctuary through theological reflection” (p.45).

That the church can provide these services lends itself to becoming a haven. Now the claim may be made that faith in Jesus Christ is, in effect, the ultimate secure haven. Such a confession lies at the very heart of the evangelical Protestant experience wherein the individual believer is justified by faith alone. The same evangelical stance on salvation by faith alone recognizes that this same faith is expressed, encouraged and developed within the fellowship of the church community. The New Testament models of the church examined in this chapter clearly reflect the community aspect of the Christian life. Salvation is by faith alone. But that salvation is not meant to be lived alone.

According to this reading the church becomes the community that seeks, however imperfectly, to mediate that experience. Such a rendering of the role of the church is not necessarily at odds with what happens in and through the experience of migration. The Pentecostal experience of the church is more one of relationality and a response to the Spirit. Here the case can be made for the church itself being a haven: those who have migrated and settled in a new land find their security not only in a personal response to Christ, but also in a network of relationships with those who share the same or similar experience in Christ. The use of haven in the context of the thesis expresses the outworking of that sense of haven realised through a sense of belonging to and identifying with a particular Christian community. The emphasis on particularity provides a sense of specificity, intimacy, and an engaged relational sense of belonging.

This designation of being a haven is not beyond critique. Orlando Espín (Espín, 1996) takes a decidedly different perspective, a perspective “from below”, with regards the functions and nature of the multicultural church. It is proper that we give space to consider his contribution to the discussion of the multicultural church. In doing so we recognise that the vision and mission of the multicultural church unfolds as a process of mutual
recognition and respect of the “other” whether or not that “other” is from “below”, the minority culture, or from “above”, the majority culture. Espín defines the term “below” as “the perspective of the dominated half in the American church” (Espín, 1996, p. 56). Conversely, from “above” represents the dominant half within the American church.

Espín’s recognition of the dynamic nature of cultural definitions leads to his rejection of multiculturality within the church in favour of cultural diversity. An imposed cultural definition is, in Espín’s perspective from below, a destruction of the very humanness of the defined culture (p.62). As he states

[t]he imposition of an external symbolic system on a socially weaker people is tantamount to the conquest of their socially constructed reality and meaning. (Espín, 1996, p. 62)

The challenge to the concept of the multicultural church as a haven is striking, if indeed, “multiculturality is ... a mechanism to corrupt the dominated into accepting as most real the social constructs and meaning of the dominant” (p.63). The end result is the denial of the multicultural church as any form of haven at all. In its place Espín proposes a church of diversity:

a church that is a community of culturally diverse communities, each with its own symbolization of what it means to be, and each with its own means and ways of unveiling the human in their humanness. (p.70)

It is difficult here to see how Espín’s claim for cultural diversity contra multiculturality corresponds to his own anticipation of an ecclesiological mestiza (pp.63, 71). Espín borrows the word mestiza\textsuperscript{26}, the Spanish term for someone with a mixed racial heritage to indicate a culturally mixed ecclesiology. Social processes inevitably result in cultural fluidity and movement. Such processes of change inevitably challenge any concept of cultural monogamy, either from above or from below. The cultural changes that occurred, and still occurring, in the Australian society from 1947 onwards bear witness to cultural fluidity and movement; they present a level of cultural diversity which pose a critique of any Anglo-Celtic attempt to impose a normative Australian identity from above.

\textsuperscript{26}The words mestiza and mestizaje are used extensively in Latino/a theology to identify the uniqueness of the “other” as living between two worlds. Justo González defines mestizo as “belonging to two realities and at the same time not to belong to either of them” (J. González, 2016, p. 15).
From my own experience in Brazil I could not remain a diasporic “other”. Inevitably, if unconsciously, culturally formed ecclesiological expectations were re-formed. Indeed, to use Espín’s term, I was going through a personal *mestizaje*, my journey in cultural diversity and appropriation. The research carried out at Inspire indicates that the same process of formation and re-formation takes place within the multicultural church community.

The idea of a haven is not one of the normal images of the church. Nor is it a mark of the church. Nor is it a model of the church. The same could be said for being a multicultural church or for being called Inspire. Nevertheless, these images, and models can help us ascertain how the particular experience of being the church at Inspire fits in with the more universal understandings of being the church.

The language of Inspire is most likely to commend itself to the fellowship of the Spirit. It implies a haven. The purpose of being this kind of haven is not simply about cultural inclusion and the feeling of support. It is part and parcel of being called the body of Christ. These cells or havens do not exist in isolation. They come under an overarching authority. That is, the institutional nature of Inspire Church itself.

In the particular instance of this research project the focus falls upon the Inspire Church. In terms of denominational allegiance it is a member of the Australian Christian Churches, the Australian branch of the Assemblies of God. From its very foundation the congregation was part of a worldwide fellowship. The church began in 1982 as the Christian Life Centre, replacing a church that had been closed the previous year. The initial membership was seventy people compared with a current membership of 6,000. John McMartin has been the senior pastor since the church’s inauguration.

The church did not deliberately set about to be a multicultural church. Nor did it seek to become a haven. Instead the development of its cultural and ethnic diversity reflects the cultural and ethnic diversity of its broader community, the western suburbs of Sydney. Currently 40% of the church adherents were born in Australia with 60% born overseas representing some seventy-nine countries of birth. The global makeup of Inspire adherents is demonstrated in the pie chart below.

27 [https://worldagfellowship.org/](https://worldagfellowship.org/). Accessed 17 February 2018
In 2008 the church was renamed Inspire Church. That name was designed to reflect its growing influence within the denomination and broader community. It sought to express the church’s fresh dimension and recognition of its culturally inclusive vision and mission which is “to love God, love people and to inspire our world”.

Various strategies have been devised to enhance the church’s mission of ethnic and cultural inclusiveness. The language of haven was not used, but it was implied in diverse implicit ways. At one stage the church membership was grouped according to cultural clusters. Cultural group leaders were encouraged to develop their ministry within their cultural cluster. It was found, however, that cultural clusters acted against the integration of cultural groups into the life and fellowship of the whole church. Particular cultural groups that were culturally attuned to an authoritative form of leadership responded directly and almost exclusively to their appointed leader who, in fact, became a *de facto* pastor for the cultural group. Tensions and divisions resulted

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with a number of ethnic groups breaking away from the local church to join one of the thirty diasporic church communities in the Liverpool area, or to form their own.

The current priority is to maintain the community identity of the church within the context of appreciation and recognition of the “other”. In some respects it may seem to be a minimalist approach. However, the intention is to prioritize the individual’s sense of identity within the local church with provision for the necessary cultural and ethnic identity being seen, not as an addition to the church community but as an integral part of the whole community.

The cultural clusters gave priority to the cultural group. The cultural clusters acted as diasporic communities that happened to meet together at the same place at the same time. As a result, there was a disconnect with the larger church community. A new strategy was formed through the establishment of Connect Groups.

Connect Groups are essentially informal, voluntary gatherings composed of like-minded members of Inspire. The groups are made up of a number of different interest groups. The intention is to provide expressions of fellowship that are unique to each group but, at the same time, ensuring the connectivity with the Inspire community, something that had not functioned well with the previous cultural clusters. They function as havens. Culturally identified Connect Groups were invited to participate in my research. Discussions at the participating Connect Groups clearly indicated a strong sense of identity with Inspire’s culturally diverse community. The secondary nature of the Connect Group community encourages a primary identity within Inspire’s ministry to its culturally and ethnically diverse community.

Inspire Church Connect Groups are based on social groupings such as age, language, location, special interests as well cultural and ethnic identity. The full church membership is not assigned to Connect Groups. Rather, members are encouraged to join a Connect Group that addresses their specific interest as is also the case with the diverse cultural Connect Groups. While not mandatory for church adherents, such groups provide opportunities for closer relational activities within the larger scope of the church congregation. The Connect
Group ministry is co-ordinated by an assigned pastor with a number of group co-ordinators assigned from amongst the congregation.

What this description amounts to is one aspect of an ecclesiology. In the theology of the church the distinction can be made between its ontology and its phenomenology. The former concerns what the church “ought to be”. Its ontology is a way of addressing its divine vocation: what is the theological purpose of the church? What role does it play in the economy of God, that is, in God’s redemptive plan? The comparison can be made with its phenomenology. Here the concern is with what the church “happens to be”. It is widely recognised that the church is an all too human affair. Its visible life is deeply flawed and yet it is still a part of the salvific plan of God. The above description of Inspire Church is a partial reading of its phenomenology. That claim should nevertheless be set alongside what normally happens in a Pentecostal theology of the church. The practice of Inspire being a haven can then be seen in a more fully developed understanding of what it means to be the church.

Ecclesiology is inclined to attract scant attention. Pentecostalism is much more liable to focus on experience of the Spirit (and thus pneumatology). It is also likely that the focus will fall on the kingdom of God. The church is more of a community and looked on more as a place of fellowship and worship.

Any endeavour to define clearly a Pentecostal ecclesiology, whether Australian, Brazilian or other cultural Pentecostal expression, will reflect the flexibility of approaches to what the church is. Pentecostal churches define their denominations as “movements”. As Wolfgang Vondey explains:

> The notion of ‘movement’ as a designation of Pentecostal ecclesiality arose from the concrete experience of what was frequently described as the ‘stagnation’ and ‘institutionalism’ of the so-called old churches. Pentecostals found the existing use of the term ‘church’ itself to be a sectarian designation, since it was typically attached to a particular form of ecclesiastical institution in order to validate its own authority. (Vondey, 2010, p. 151)

Vondey continues his discussion of Pentecostal approaches to ecclesiality outlining contemporary approaches and acceptance of generally recognised structures of the church (p.155). The primary motif of the Pentecostal church as a movement remains as the definitive concept of the church, however. The United
Constitution of the Australian Christian Churches 2013 Article 1 contains the following definition: “the name of the Movement shall be the Australian Christian Churches”.29

It is not a usual practice then to apply the tools of a formal ecclesiology to a congregation like Inspire – and yet there is some benefit in doing so. The provision of a theological template, or design, can sharpen up insights into what is happening in the phenomenology of the church and how that might (or might not) serve its ontology. Of particular value is the work initially done by Avery Dulles (Dulles, 2002) and taken up by Daniel Migliore (Migliore, 2014).

We concur with Espín’s contention that ecclesiology is as much a social construct as it is a theological one. As he notes

[e]very ecclesiological model reflects the culture of those who create and find it meaningful. This implies that ecclesiological models are not, necessarily and of themselves, endowed with universal validity. (Espín, 1996)

Or, as Martyn Percy succinctly states, “there is no version of Christianity that is without a local accent” (Percy, 2016, p. 94)

The standard approach is to begin with some form of description that identifies the social or corporate nature of faithful discipleship. We are not called to be pilgrims on a solitary journey. Seen from this perspective Daniel Migliore describes the church as the “exodus people of God” (Migliore, 2014, p. 263). The people of God of both Testaments are connected through common covenantal promises. Like the people of God of the Old Testament, the people of God of the New Testament are “a pilgrim community, a people called out for a special task and set on their way toward a new homeland” (Migliore, 2004, p. 253).

It is arguably the case that the 60% of Inspire Church born overseas could be seen as an exodus people. The mere act of migration and settling in a new land indicates a people moving out, along the way, towards a promised land. That claim, though not as yet applied within Inspire, could be made and could serve as an appropriate template for the communal life of discipleship.

This call to be an exodus people is closely related to the call to be a servant people (Exodus 8:1, 9:1, 10:3; Matthew 20:25-26; 2 Corinthians 4:5, Galatians 5:13; 1 Peter 4:10). Once again Migliore observed that "(t)his particular community has its reason for being not in itself but in its task, which is to serve God and the world created by God" (Migliore, 2004, p. 253). The task, the mission God gave the Church, is propelled to its culmination through the ministry of the Spirit (Luke 24:45-49; Acts 1:8, 2:4). Migliore concludes that

[in the New Testament the Church ('ecclesia' or 'congregation') refers to the new community of believers gathered to praise and serve God in the power of the Holy Spirit in response to the Gospel of the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. (Migliore, 2004, p. 251)

The church in any given place is, of course, also reckoned to be the body of Christ. (Romans 6:5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Ephesians 4:9-16; Colossians 1:18, 3:3). Those who gather together for worship and witness exemplify an interdependence of the separate parts of the body with an accompanying mutual dependence on the head of the body, Christ himself (Schnelle, 2007, pp. 330-331; Schreiner, 2001, pp. 335-337; 2008, pp. 714-717). This language of interdependence is represented by Erickson as interconnectedness. This way of thinking echoes Inspire’s commitment to Connect Groups. Erickson observes that

[the image of the body of Christ also speaks of the interconnectedness between all the persons who make up the church. Christian faith is not to be defined merely in terms of individual relationship to the Lord. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul develops the concept of the interconnectedness of the body. (Erickson, 2013, p. 1047)

Conceived in this way, the church as the body of Christ transcends cultural and sociological difference. The idea of the haven becomes embodied in Christ. Furthermore, the body concept of unity in diversity fits well into the unifying identity of a multicultural church.

Murray Harris associates Paul’s community modelling with the church’s socio/cultural inclusiveness. He rightly concludes that

[communal imagery is extensive throughout Paul (especially body imagery), and even more deeply any incorporation or participation in Christ will invariably draw all involved into relationship with one another. The outworking of this in social contexts where masters and slaves, differing ethnic identities, and a strongly delineated culture of social orders and status are drawn together inevitably created tensions. At the same time, a profoundly counter-cultural social dynamic was established from the outset, and familiar expressions of partnership and association were applied to surprising
and scandalous groupings in which there were neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female (Gal 3:28). (Harris, 2013, p. 383)

Of all the images the most likely to commend itself to a Pentecostal church like Inspire, however, is fellowship of the Spirit. The Pentecostal experience naturally privileges the Spirit. It is the image and model that is most obviously bound to the experience of the church being a haven.

The importance of the Spirit to an ontological understanding of the church is well drawn out by the Orthodox theologian, John Zizioulas.

The Holy Spirit, in making real the Christ-event in history, makes real at the same time Christ’s personal existence as a body or community. Christ does not exist first as truth and then as communion; He is both at once. All separation between Christology and ecclesiology vanishes in the Spirit. (Zizioulas, 1985, p. 111)

Zizioulas highlights what he terms the “constitutive” identity of the Spirit and the Church in which

[t]he Spirit is not something that ‘animates’ Church which already somehow exists. The Spirit makes the Church be. Pneumatology does not refer to the well-being but to the very being of the church. It is the very essence of the Church. The Church is constituted in and through eschatology and communion. Pneumatology is an ontological category in ecclesiology. (Zizioulas, 1985, p. 132)

Migliore also recognises that the unifying ministry of the Spirit of God within the church bridges socio-economic and cultural divides.

The pneumatological/eschatological community reflects the inclusive nature of God’s Chosen people. Race, gender and class distinctions that played a significant role in the social mix of the Greco-Roman-Judaic cultural contexts of the New Testament period are negated by the unity in diversity of the Spirit in the inclusive social sense of the Christian community. (Migliore, 2004, p. 254)

Central to the church as the community of the Spirit is the place given to the Spirit’s operation within and through the community of believers. Paul especially highlights the mutuality of the spiritual ministry in 1 Corinthians 12 within the specific of community (Erickson, 2013, p. 1047). Erickson further adds that “one simply cannot account for the effectiveness of these early believers ministry on the basis of their abilities or efforts. They were not unusual persons. The results were a consequence of the ministry of the Holy Spirit” (p. 1050).
The evident attraction of that model is the immediacy of the Spirit’s ministry as it was for the Connect Groups. Such home-centred fellowships encourage congregants to participate freely in the more charismatic expressions of Pentecostal liturgy than may otherwise be expressed in a larger congregational service. The small fellowship of the Spirit is more congenial and spiritual, less sacramental than a priestly or any other model suggested by Dulles (Dulles, 2002).

This predilection to think of the church as a movement and a fellowship of the Spirit can be placed alongside Avery Dulles’ models of the church. The sharpest contrast can be made with the church as an institution of salvation.

The church is an "institution of salvation" (Migliore, 2004, p.255). Migliore rightly notes, “Some kind of structure and order is a necessity in any historical community. It is sheer romanticism to suggest otherwise” (Migliore, 2004, p.255). The question may not be the necessity of an institutionalized church but the degree to which the level of institutionalism has progressed to the detriment of expressions of freedom within a perceived authoritarian power structure.

The institutional models of the Assemblies of God in Brazil and Australia reflect the necessity of order and structure about which Migliore speaks. The demonstrate the pressure that can be bought to bear upon the church as havens. The denomination in both countries has had to deal in varying degrees with the excesses of political and financial power structures arising from denominational growth.

The institutional structure of the Assemblies of God in both countries is very much centered in the local church. How the principle of local church autonomy worked out in Brazil and Australia is influenced by the comparative contrasts in the size of the denominational in the two countries. The Australian church has a current national membership of 300,000. The Brazilian church underwent a period of rapid growth especially during the decades of the 1960s and 1970s and now has an estimated national membership 15 million.

The structure of the local church in Brazil is actually similar to an episcopalian format. There is a senior pastor who presides over the local church which is made up of the mother church and various daughter churches which are supervised by pastors, elders or evangelists appointed directly by the senior pastor ("pastor
president”). Once a daughter church is able to maintain financial and administrative independence from the mother church and is capable of developing its own daughter churches it is generally, though not necessarily, granted autonomy.

On a national level the institutional structure of the Assemblies of God of Brazil was not realised until some thirty years after the commencement of the missionary work that was to result in the foundation of the Assemblies of God in Brazil in 1918. Leadership was at first in the hands of Swedish missionaries linked to the Filadelfia Church in Stockholm (Stanley, 2018, pp. 305-306). Denominational leadership was finally ceded to national 1930 through the establishment of the General Conference of the Assemblies of God of Brazil (Daniel, 2004, pp. 27-29).

Local church autonomy in the Australian Christian Churches is enshrined in the foundational principles of local autonomy. Each local church is represented at state and national conferences through its credentialed ministry and appointed church representatives. The Australian Christian Churches does not utilize the mother-daughter principles to the extent of the Brazilian church. However, recent developments have seen the establishment of multi-campus churches. Inspire Church reflects this growing trend with campus churches in five locations in New South Wales.

This ecclesiological template based on images and models of the church has been helpful in clarifying two matters. The first has been the nature of the Pentecostal church being a movement and a fellowship of the Spirit. The second has been its capacity to draw out differences between the Brazilian and Australian experiences of being a Pentecostal church. The template has provided a means of measurement. This kind of analysis only goes so far, however. The very nature of Inspire Church requires some further reflection on the nature of what it means to be a communal haven made up of many discrete cultures.

The postmodern “turn to relationship” (Grenz, 2003, p. 252) provides a continuum of identity of the New Testament church as a Trinitarian focused community with the contemporary church. A relational or community paradigm, in contrast to an individualistic paradigm, provides an opportunity for a further look at the church in
the light of current research. Michael Bird refers to Zizioulas’ significant contribution to the understanding of the integral nature of humanity as expressed in community when he writes that to be in a relationship is to be authentically human as both Creator and creature are relational beings so that relationality is what links God and humanity together. (Bird, 2013, p. 729)

Migliore adds:

While flawed and always in need of reform and renewal the Church is nonetheless the real beginning of God’s new and inclusive community of liberated creatures reconciled to God and to each other and called to God’s service in the world. (Migliore, 204, p.249)

How is the church modelled in the contemporary community?

The church is an elite community of the Spirit which, as Migliore explains is “a closely-knit group whose members share a common experience of God’s revivifying Spirit” (Migliore, 2004, p.256). Migliore’s model of the church is not confined to Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal denominations. The pneumatological context of the contemporary church cannot be ignored.

Migliore’s comments are well suited to the Brazilian context: “many people in modern society are desperately lonely and battle-scarred. They seek a safe refuge and a community where they can feel at home” (Migliore, 2004, p.257). His comments reflect the communitarian nature of the Brazilian Assemblies of God.

Internal migration from the northern states to the industrialised cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro beginning in the late 1950s resulted in the establishment of communities of displaced people around the fringes of the cities. Pentecostal churches established daughter congregations in these communities of the displaced, providing them with a potentially new community identity, a place of belonging. To use Migliore’s words, the daughter congregations became “a safe refuge and a community where they can feel at home” (p.257). They became havens of inclusion.

Men and women from the lowest echelon of the social scale, uncharacteristically to the Brazilian social structure, were recognised and encouraged to participate in the faith and practice of the church community. The

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congregants were participants, not spectators, in the spiritual life of their faith community. Thus, the Assemblies of God of Brazil was established as a movement from below. As such membership comprised of the marginalized, the illiterate and politically powerless. Nevertheless, the *raison d'être*, of the Assemblies of God is evangelistic, not economic. Kärkkäinen captures well the essential need: “the marginalized – especially children and young people – are seeking identity, meaning, acceptance, relationship and a sense of community. They yearn for more than economic assistance” (Kärkkäinen, 2009, p. 61).

The need for self-identity and fulfilment are the rudiments of social and community function within even the poorest church community. The daughter church is linked directly to the mother church providing a broader sense of community belonging. The church member in the daughter church located on the very fringe of the city has a sense of belonging to something tangibly larger than would otherwise be possible. And yet, in a very real sense, self-identity within community finds active expression within the daughter church community. Members are actively involved in all areas of local church ministry. The young people are members of the mother church youth group as well as their own local church group. The women are members of the women’s prayer circle both at the mother church as well as in their local daughter church. The local ministry members are integral members of the church ministry comprising of all ministers, both paid and volunteers within the mother-daughter community.

Kärkkäinen describes such a community in the following manner:

If new converts’ experience is, on the one hand, intensely personal, spiritual, mystical and eternal; on the other hand, it is corporate and practical, permeated with opportunities that empower them to function effectively in the here and now. The local church provides a safe place where people can find security, acceptance, wholeness, recognition, and even rights and privileges of membership. Personal discipline, acceptable conduct, and accountability provide basic rules of pedagogic importance. New converts typically find themselves involved in a great deal of structured activity. They must accept individual responsibility for their actions and exhibit willingness to contribute or sacrifice for the common good of the community. (Kärkkäinen, 2009, pp. 60-61)

Being a church made up of many cultures makes it potentially more difficult for it to be a haven. So often being a haven depends upon similarity rather than difference. The idea of being a haven seemingly relies upon a
similarity of being known and belonging; the practice of cultural diversity supposes difference, otherness, that which is not known.

Multicultural churches operate dynamically across a spectrum of homogeneity and heterogeneity. In practical terms, the outcome may not necessarily be an either/or option. Instead there is a blending of homogenous and heterogeneous models to fit into the specific characteristics and ministry requirements of the local church community.

Homogeneity, as cultural or ethnic unity, and heterogeneity, as cultural or ethnic diversity can be held in varying degrees of tension (Appadurai, 1993, pp. 217-226). Those tensions that arise are not simply theoretical. They are lived expressions of the community in which we live. How well these tensions are negotiated creates the degree of social cohesion and sense of belonging and safety.

Homogeneous theory defines unity as essentially and exclusively focused on sameness. There is something inherently the same in all members of a social unit that provides the unifying force. The sources of “sameness” are variable, including such social units as football clubs sharing support for a particular team, a political party united around a specific cause or causes, a social unit based on a religious idea or ideal or a diasporic ethnic community either secular or religious. Mark Branson and Juan Martinez refer to the historical development of the North American society as initially reflecting the homogenous principle (Branson & Martinez, 2011, pp. 13-14). The same may be said for the Australian society.

David Goldberg (Goldberg, 1994, pp. 20-22) suggests that homogeneity is identified as the normative, even necessary, condition for the sociological unit or community. Here is homogeneity is seen as the natural condition of human social existence by which the common is chosen in preference to the different, “kin rather than non-kin”; its effectiveness in maintaining values and vital traditions and customs that are guarded or protected by the commonality of the social unit.

Nevertheless, Goldberg rejects the inevitability of the sociological necessity of homogeneity on historical grounds. Social identity is not homogenous at all but migratory, not simply in the geographical sense but, in particular, the social sense. Ethnicity is a dynamic relationship, not a static identity. That which may be held in
common, the homogenous, may over time be sifted through multiple experiences and subsequently altered or even rejected (pp. 22-28). This tendency was also recognised by Branson and Martinez in their historical overview of North American society (Branson & Martinez, 2011, pp. 13-14). The Australian society historically moved from a heterogeneous indigenous society to an imposed homogeneous “white Australia” returning to a heterogeneous society of ethnic diversity.

Might this homogenous social theory be acted out in the Christian community? The homogenous principle is worked out in local church congregations that, despite changing social demographics, maintain a specific ethnic or cultural identity. Two types of congregations are in play here – those that maintain the majority social identity and the ethnic minority that maintains ethnic identity within diasporic communities.

David McGavran (McGavran, 1990) and C. Peter Wagner (Garces-Foley, 2007, p. 211; Wagner, 2010) popularized the homogenous church principle as the most effective way to develop the local church. In theory at least, churches demonstrate greater and faster growth if congregants have a common social identity. According to this model, a shared ethnicity unites the local church community providing strength and stability for future growth. Such a model promotes an exclusivism based on race or ethnicity.

In practice, homogeneity was not always the case at the local church level. Branson and Martinez look back to the primitive church to argue against ethnic homogeneity within the church: “In the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Mediterranean, the Church repudiated any attempts to create culture-based fellowships.” (Branson & Martinez, 2011, p. 37). Indeed, the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 provides an historic glimpse of the internal struggle and the resolve to maintain ethnic/cultural diversity within the context of maintaining the essential elements of the Gospel of free grace.

One contemporary example of the inadequacy of the homogeneous principle in local churches can be seen in the experience of Willcrest Baptist Church in Houston.

The homogenous church principle was initially in response to the changing ethnic demographics of the local community. Church facilities were made available to ethnic African-Americans and Chinese congregations. A separation from the primarily white congregation was maintained based on perceived insurmountable
language and culture barriers. The outcome was unsatisfactory for all involved. The dominant culture, in this case, the white culture, retained the power structure with the ethnic groups subservient. The local church, rather than growing, continued to decline. The congregation recognised the decline and responded with a dramatic turn to a heterogeneous church. The story of the church’s response has been well documented (Branson & Martinez, 2011; Emerson & Woo, 2006; Woo, 2009).

The “melting pot” church is a variant of the homogenous church principle. Ethnic differences of belief and practice are resolved by the adoption of those of the dominant group (Emerson & Woo, 2006). The subsequent power dominance results in the suppression of the “other’s” characteristics of belief and practice. Here is not a case of learning from the “other” and absorbing that into the life of the church community. Rather, it is the required acceptance by the minority group(s) of the beliefs and practices of the majority culture as the “normative” belief and practice for all congregants. Cultural assimilation is advocated in the broader community, such as in the case of the call for the ethnic “other” to become “Aussies”, whatever that term may imply. In the same way, the ethnically “other” congregant is to become an “Aussie” believer, in faith and practice.

The result is a singular identity that self-destructs on the fractured unity in diversity. Unfortunately, if such a congregation is large enough to support a high level of membership turnover it may maintain a multicultural veneer while in practice being monocultural. The congregation proceeds on a course of obliterating cultural otherness while at the same time maintaining ethnic differences (Emerson & Woo, 2006).

Diasporic churches are homogeneous communities. Such communities seek to maintain community cohesiveness, and individual identity within their shared cultural and ethnic symbols and social structures. They seek a particular kind of being a haven. Language is a pivotal item of identity within diasporic church communities. This is not surprising given that ethnic identity is characterized through the vernacular language. Unique ethnic religious symbols and liturgy are practiced within the vernacular. Members of diasporic communities may look with trepidation at the dynamic challenges to normative symbols and structures imposed on their second and third generation members.
The collective identities of those living in diaspora are dynamic as they adjust to new threats and fresh opportunities in their external environment. Members may attempt simultaneously to share two identities, the inherited and the new, thus acquiring a hybrid identity. With successive generations, the balance shifts as the diasporic culture adjusts to changing conditions. Individuals may reaffirm their inherited collective identity and endow it with fresh meaning; or they may abandon diaspora altogether (Esman, 2009, p. 168).

The Australian experience parallels that of the Assemblies of God in the USA. According to that denomination’s Department of Ethnic Relations website, 36% of the denomination's churches are diasporic with 42% of its national membership identifying with an ethnic minority group. While Australian statistics are not as readily available, the New South Wales State Conference reports that a third of all Assemblies of God churches in that state are non-English speaking churches with the potential of being fifty percent in the very near future.

Given Australia’s continued migration policies we may assume that ethnically focused homogenous churches will remain a feature of the Australian ecclesial landscape. The Australian Christian Churches, along with other church denominations, has an opportunity to demonstrate the dynamics of a co-operative fellowship that embraces the ethnic diversity of diasporic churches alongside of multicultural churches within the unity of denominational identity and mission. We now turn our attention to heterogeneity and multiculturalism.

Heterogeneity recognises the cultural and ethnic diversity of society while at the same time promoting a sense of unity between the varied expressions of diversity. It is the foundational principle of multiculturalism. David Goldberg (Goldberg, 1994, p. 22) affirms heterogeneity as the historical foundation of human society based on mobility and migration. He sees the “human condition as one of going and resting” in which “groups of people or subgroups … move into new spaces or territory and become part of or integral to that space or society”. Over time the society, made up of the resident and the stranger, is transformed.

31 www.ethnicrelations.ag.org. Accessed 14th June 2017
Anselm KyongSuk Min (Min, 2004) discusses the concept of heterogeneity in sharp contrast to the idea of assimilation and consequent destruction of the identity of the “other” in alternative homogenous sociological structures. Instead, he advocates “some sort of heterological imperative as an essential condition of living in a multicultural, pluralist world” (p61). He defines a “heterological imperative” as the willingness to subject all our convictions to the challenge of others, their views, their needs, their identity; not in the sense of giving up our convictions and beliefs as condition of dialoguing with others, as some pluralists tend to argue; but in the sense of a culture of readiness to live in the tension between our own ultimate beliefs and the challenge of those who differ, with the willingness to modify our views and behaviours if necessary, and otherwise always to take the other into consideration. As postmodernists argue, we do not indeed possess God’s vision of totality, and we must learn to live with the challenge of the other, sometimes in the light of others so that we may learn from them, often in the shadow of others so that we may be challenged to repentance and conversion. (Min, 2004, p. 62)

It is within the interchange of beliefs and experiences of God that the heterogeneous multicultural church may be a vanguard of transformative belief and practice in an ecclesial as well as a sociological sense. This is not to say that heterogeneity is without flaw. Goldberg warns

Heterogeneity may be dangerous … because it places distinct limits on the comfort and easiness of the established and already ordered, of the familiar and the controlled. It threatens the safe confines of disciplinarity with transgressive disruption, shifting the balance of power, occasionally challenges prevailing forms of power altogether. (Goldberg, 1994, p. 26)

The multicultural church, while rejecting homogeneity, at least in the sociological sense, does not necessarily practice a strict form of heterogeneity, particularly in the theological sense. Min flags the idea of a middle position in the homogeneity/heterogeneity spectrum.

It is true that our solidarity and our perspectives are ordinarily limited to the members and perspectives of the group or culture to which we belong, in this case we are...'ethnocentric' in our sympathies and perspectives. It is crucial, however, not to reify either the boundaries of groups or the perspectives inherent in them. History has been eroding such boundaries by bringing different groups, cultures and religions into common social spaces, as it has been bringing ethnocentric perspectives into dialectic with changing realities, thereby modifying them, eliminating them altogether or incorporating them into an integral part of a new synthesis to come. (Min, 2004, p. 79)

The implications of Min’s words for the research project are clearly expressed in the potential for the interplay, or dialectic, between the host’s belief system and those of other groups. This is a process supported by
Tim Soutphommasane (Soutphommasane, 2012) as a means of enhancing a sense of patriotic citizenry in a multicultural society and Rodney Fopp on the basis that understanding the “other” is an imperative in a cross-cultural society such as Australia (Fopp, 2008). As Min further states

[the alternative to a belief in absolute universal, unchanging truth is not complacent frankly relativistic ethnocentrism; instead, it is holding on to one’s own belief as true insofar as there are reasonable grounds for it within one’s own perspective while also remaining open to its further self-critical expansion as a result of the dialectic of interaction with other groups, cultures and perspectives in the dialectic of the real world. (Min, 2004, p. 80)

As the offspring of theoretical heterogeneity, multiculturalism may be criticised, or even in some locations, considered a social failure (Connolly, 2010). Yet, global mobility and migration continue to enforce societies to assess the most effective and appropriate responses to their changing social dynamics and multiple identities. Social cohesion will only be an elusive goal otherwise. Multiculturalism cannot be ignored by either the social community or the church community (Janmaat, 2011, p. 61; Kauff, Asbrock, Thorner, & Wagner, 2013).

The multicultural church is an expression of a heterogeneous society. Multicultural churches are defined as those in which less than 80% of members share the same racial background (Emerson & Kim, 2003, p. 217). In a similar way to J.G. Janmaat’s expressed concerns of social cohesion within the broader multicultural society (Janmaat, 2011) attention in current research of multicultural churches focuses on the critical issue of developing a sense of community while at the same time encouraging a continued sense of self identity within a church community of diverse cultures and ethnicities (Branson & Martinez, 2011; Deymaz, 2007; Dougherty & Huyser, 2008; Emerson & Woo, 2006; Garces-Foley, 2007; K. Jenkins, 2003; Marti, 2005; Rademacher, 2009). They seek to be havens of fellowship and belief in a world of globalization where time and place are collapsed.

Gerardo Marti raised the question, “how do members of disparate ethnic and racial heritages come to identify and achieve stable affiliation within multiracial congregations?” (Marti, 2009, p. 6). Answers to Marti’s question demonstrate the diverse ways in which multicultural churches respond to their demographic challenges.
Marti suggests a model based on the subservience of individual ethnic identity in favour of a communal identity linked within the identity of the congregation based on newly acquired “religious racial integration” (Marti, 2009, p. 54). In such a way homogeneous religious belief and practice serve to bridge the cultural and ethnic divides of the heterogeneous community. Cultural and ethnic distinctions are recognised but minimalised as the congregation develops towards a “theology of oneness” common to all congregants (Dougherty & Huyser, 2008, p. 26). Homogeneous religious belief and practice serve to bridge the cultural and ethnic divides of the heterogeneous community. Ethnic diversity is left behind as the congregation develops towards a “theology of oneness” that is common to all congregants.

The approaches to cultural diversity suggested by Marti and Dougherty are similar. Cultural absorption of the minority culture into the majority culture, however, lies suspiciously in the background. Further, there is the possibility of a power scenario.

The power element is very much in evidence in the “melting pot” model. The idea of diverse cultures merging, or melting, into a “third” cultural may, in reality, be something like an acceptance by the minority of the culture of the majority. There is a potential subservience of individual ethnic identity.

The multicultural church is not exempt from a cultural/ethnic power scenario. Marti’s suggestion of individual subservience to a communal “religious racial integration” may, in fact, mask a covert cultural power scenario. Dougherty’s goal of a “theology of oneness” has similar undertones to those discussed previously regarding the “melting pot” church. The question needs to be asked; who decides what constitutes the unified theological identity?”

The sustainability of the transfer of self-identity and social belonging away from ethnically significant family or tribal networks characteristic of many non-western societies may not be viable in the long term, however. Research carried out by Kathleen Jenkins concluded that an authoritative thrust to a new cultural conformity may be at the expense of “the individual's own culturally formed identity and perception of religious belief and practice” (Jenkins, 2003, p. 401). The result is a challenge to cultural or ethnic priority.
The prospect of a loss of cultural or ethnic identity may encourage the formation of diasporic church communities. Priority here is to maintain cultural and ethnic identity. Cultural priority is challenged, however, by the seemingly inevitable progress of cultural assimilation encountered by second and third generation members. Liberty Hill Christian Centre affiliated with the Australian Christian Churches exemplifies the generational challenge encountered by a diasporic church. The church was initially formed in 1958 as a church for Italian immigrants. Changing demographics along with generational changes within the Italian community caused the church to re-form as “a multi-national, multi-cultural and multi-generational” church.33

These pressures brought to bear on diasporic communities raises deep-seated questions to do with belonging. Where might the sense of safety and security, intimacy and nurture, be once the homogeneous tendency gives way to the principles of heterogeneity. It is here that the image and model of becoming a haven of inclusions can help. This is the idea and practice that was taken up by the Mosaic Church in California. Mosaic Church established social networks or havens as means of enhancing social cohesion across racial and ethnic divides. Marti defined such havens as “safe places for building relationships” (p.5). Five havens are identified - the theological, the artistic, the innovation, the age and the ethnic. For the purpose of my research, attention is drawn to the ethnic haven as a possible response to the challenge of social cohesion in a multicultural church. That this approach has met with success is noted. Yet, it will also be seen that the “haven” approach exposes Mosaic to the risk of maintaining a transcendent ethnicity that may, in fact, nullify ethnic identity and priority.

Marti (2005) researched Mosaic (www.mosaic.org), a significant multicultural church 34 with multiple church campuses throughout Metro Los Angeles (Garces-Foley, 2007). Marti wanted to find out why people from various cultures attend Mosaic. His research highlights individual disappointment with the local church which the research participants previously attended as a key reason for joining Mosaic. Marti’s research indicated that new members were leaving something behind that had caused levels of disappointment or dissatisfaction and finding such disappointment or dissatisfaction resolved through the new community they joined. In this sense,

34 There are a number of churches in the US, as well as Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan Kenya and Central Europe (Marti, 2005, p. 59) that are linked with Mosaic through a shared “ideological framework”
Mosaic became a haven where the new congregant found “a refuge or sanctuary for a significant aspect of their religious desires, personal identities, and value systems” (Marti, 2005, p. xvii) that was lacking in their previous church community.

Three levels of religious racial integration were identified at Mosaic that the new congregant may not have found in their previous church. He terms these elements as affinity with the congregation, identity reorientation and ethnic transcendence (Marti, 2009). These three elements will be further discussed in this chapter.

Mosaic did not set out to be a multicultural church. Rather, the changing demographics of the surrounding community required a response. The invitation to Erwin McManus to take leadership of the Church was an opportunity to refocus the mission of the church on reaching the ethnically diverse community. A change of name to Mosaic in 1997 indicated what sort of church the new pastor wanted to develop: to be an inclusive church community seeking to fulfil its mission to its diverse community through innovative contemporary expressions of worship that result in “creative resourceful, artistic and pioneering corporate action” (Marti, 2005, p. 4). Consequently, Mosaic's focus is on the individual's felt needs and not those of the ethnic groups within the church. The priority of the individual's community of fellowship is essentially the church fellowship and not the ethnic community identity.

Marti identified varied “havens of inclusion” as the unique contributors to the sense of new belonging at Mosaic “through selective accommodation to its social environment, Mosaic creates multiple havens of inclusion and communality which render ethnic differences inconsequential” (Marti, 2005, p. 3). Such places of refuge are focused on five points of attraction and inclusion - the theological, the artistic, the innovative, the age-related and the ethnic. The Mosaic website lists the diverse community groups available. Of the groups listed, only one was cultural, the Spanish speaking group. Marti’s research at Mosaic, and later at Oasis (Marti, 2008), led him to conclude that the fluidity of ethnicity provides the multicultural church with an opportunity to refocus the diverse cultural identities of their constituency toward a new community identity (Marti, 2008, p. 13). For Mosaic, this construction of identity occurs through the community groups as havens of belonging. Participation
in a specific community group, for example, learning to dance, focuses the group’s attention and identity away from disparate cultures to a common goal and identity, minimalizing cultural differences while, at the same time, maximizing group similarities. According to Marti, the havens are “situationally specific arenas of interaction” (Marti, 2010, p. 204). He proposes that member participation in havens obscure their ethnic identification and bring out other valued aspects of their personal identity, and ultimately a shared religious identity becomes more important than their disparate racial identities (p. 203).

Such havens are not ethnically identified. Nor are they necessarily ethnically affirmative. Rather, they provide an alternative common identity locus for the ethnically diverse congregants and, thereby, transcend ethnicity.

Like Mosaic’s community groups, Inspire Church’s Connect Groups are not restricted to countries of origin or culture groups. Rather, the diversity of the groups is designed to capture as wide a cross-section of the church membership as possible in order to enhance the community identity and the individual sense of belonging.

Membership at Mosaic, a personal choice and not a matter of social or family ties, is the key factor in the multicultural identity of Mosaic. While cultural and ethnic identity is recognised Mosaic, as a haven of belonging, integrates the individual into the church community. As Marti states “ethnic identity is selectively accentuated or obscured according to context” (Marti, 2005, p. 6). The distinctive multicultural role of Mosaic, according to Marti, is “shaping people toward a new identity framed around new interests. In all cases, a person’s race-ethnicity is displaced (but never removed) for the purposes of interaction and affiliation” (Marti, 2009, p. 63). Marti points out that individual choice is not intended to by-pass cultural and ethnic identity. Mosaic provides multiple havens of belonging in the context of the church community while at the same time recognizing the diversity of ethnic and culturally specific communities within. This somewhat ambiguous approach seems to be at odds with cultures or ethnic groups that exhibit strong family and social ties in which decisions to join or even stay at a church are made by the group, not the individual.
Mosaic exists within a tension between a pragmatic approach to cultural and ethnic distinctives and a western, conservative allegiance to clearly defined theological distinctives. Marti further noted that activities within Mosaic are guided by an overall ideological framework that emphasizes certain aspects of the nature of God, what human beings are intended to be, their individual role in redemptive history, and their role in relation to other people who are working together for the purpose of the God they have committed to follow. (Marti, 2009, p. 59).

Membership of Mosaic requires a commitment to the doctrinal position of the church that Marti describes as a “theological haven” (Marti, 2005, pp. 60-67) for “those who have fled boring conservative Christian churches with vengeful gods and find a place where orthodox Christian beliefs are articulated in a culturally relevant manner (p.60). There is a similarity of approach, with a charismatic or Pentecostal emphasis on a relational theology of God. God is and God acts on behalf of believers. The analogy of God as servant used at Mosaic explains the way that God acts or serves in which “God desires to bring the overwhelming force of his essence into a form that aids and empowers humanity, not oppresses and exploits” (p.71).

Consequently, there is hegemony of belief and practice within the church community. Theological commitment is expressed within the spirituality of the Mosaic community. McManus defines the relationship between natural and spiritual cultural identities:

Cultures sing their own songs, tell their own stories, and carry their own aromas. A culture is a beautiful art piece that uses people as its canvas. A culture’s formation is both spiritual and natural. Uniting a crowd into a community requires spiritual leadership, and what emerges in the process is the generation of a common culture built upon commonly held beliefs, values, and world views. (McManus, 2013, p. 175)

At the same time however, is there not a forfeiture of the potential contribution to the church’s understanding of God in action toward his people that comes from listening to the narratives of God experiences filtered through the multiple voices of the culturally other? Mosaic constructs a multicultural community around a core theological organizing principle which resulted in a “shared identity” that intends to supersede ethnic designations. Could it not be said, however, that such a principle of theological conformity may result in a “shared identity” that, in fact, conforms to the majority theological identity?

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35 Mosaic is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention.
The end result at Mosaic is “ethnic transcendence” (Marti, 2009, p. 14). The multicultural church promotes a diminishing diverse ethnic identity in favour of a congregation or church community identity in which diversity is eliminated or rendered “non-obstructive” (p.15).

Mosaic recognises the diverse ethnicity of its congregants without elevating community ethnicity above other communal/social factors: “since a person's social identity has multiple layers, congregational leaders potentially draw on multiple bases of affinity to encourage potential members to contribute to the on-going ministries of the church” (Marti, 2008, p. 13). For Mosaic these “multiple bases of affinity” are found in the multiple opportunities of active participation in the ministries of the churches.

It is at this point that multicultural churches such as Mosaic and Inspire develop a missional identity. Potential diversity of mission is avoided as the diverse church community focuses on core values and mission. The mission becomes the catalyst for community. Marti affirms that [charismatic authority in these churches continually seeks to catalyze diverse groups toward a common mission that supersedes other group identities in favour of highlighting a core organizational identity. (Marti, 2008, p. 13)

It has been argued that Mosaic's ethnic transcendence is actually another term for ethnic exclusion that ignores ethnic uniqueness and identity in favour of a new religiously focused culture. Garces-Foley recognised the flaw, a possible fatal one for ethnic identity, in Mosaic's ethnic transcendence.

Through the strategic promotion of ethnic transcendence Mosaic effaces the distinct ethnic identities of members and integrates members into the congregational culture of Mosaic, which stands in sharp contrast to the secular world. This culture is not created de novo, however, since it rests squarely on the white popular culture of middle American culture. The shared culture of Mosaic, then, derives from the members’ common identity as evangelical Christians and consumers of American pop culture. (Garces-Foley, 2007, p. 215)

Not surprisingly, Marti disagrees. He responds that ethnic transcendence at Mosaic does not destroy ethnic uniqueness but subsumes that uniqueness under a unifying religious culture making local church community in diversity possible.
Multiethnic/multicultural congregations ... successfully reorient personal identity such that people of various ethnic and racial heritages subdue their distinctions in favour of one common religious identity within a diverse congregation. (Marti, 2008, p. 14)

Inspire Church indicates a similar outcome. Members interviewed at the Connect Groups identified primarily with the church community. There is the sense here of Inspire as a haven. However, unlike Mosaic, the idea of haven does not require the relinquishment of cultural or ethnic identity. The cultural Connect Groups provide opportunities for ethnically-focused fellowship and community identity. The primary identity is as members of Inspire Church, however. For example, Pacific Islander Connect Group members identified themselves as members of Inspire Church while maintaining their cultural identity. At this point a form of ethnic or cultural integration has occurred. The individual’s identity within the church community is not related to ethnicity or other externals but to a common grace relationship with God expressed in faith and practice in the church.

The criticism that multicultural churches destroy ethnic and cultural uniqueness and identity may be partially correct. However, the fluid nature of such identity anticipates an ethnic adaptation or even modification according to changing contexts. Rather than a criticism of ethnic negation would it not be more appropriate then to use terms that recognise ethnic fluidity and responses to the variables of human experience within community?

The research project provides an opportunity for the Australian Church to consider the implications of the interchange of ethnic diversity within the broader theological context as well as within the localized church community context. What has been noted as the process of “the de-Europeanization of American Christianity” (((Garces-Foley, 2007, p. 209; Warner, 2004, p. 20) may be applied to Australian Christianity.

Why do people attend Mosaic? While the multicultural dimension of the church is undeniable there is a contemporary cultural homogeneity which may replace, or to use Marti’s terminology, “transcend” the diverse ethnicities represented in the church community.

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An aspect of Mosaic that is not discussed in detail yet is significant against the background of the diverse ethnicity of the broader North American community is the very low percentage of African-Americans in the church (Garces-Foley, 2007, p. 215). The apparent failure to bridge the ethnic divide between white and black America may support the conclusion that Mosaic’s attraction is not so much to a multicultural diversity but to an artistic and younger generation for whom ethnicity may not necessarily be the prime divider or unifier (Branson & Martinez, 2011, p. 164).

Marti recognized the failure to attract a significant number of African-Americans (Marti, 2005, p. 11) without providing a definitive answer to the problem. The African-American narrative is a distinctive one still able to divide and shame despite contemporary social advances. The small number of African-American members in Mosaic indicates the difficulty of finding a “haven of belonging” which would attract them to the church community. Continued research by Marti (2010) and others (Emerson & Woo, 2006; Warner, 2004) indicate the unique African-American relationship with the Caucasian church community of North America. Emerson and Woo explain the historical divide as representative of two “indigenous/cultures/races/ethnicities” (p.139).

Kathleen Jenkins (Jenkins, 2003, p. 393) suggests that the growth and stability of multicultural churches depend on the establishment of “cross-race social networks”.

The creation of strong cross-racial and ethnic social networks in a religious organization clearly influences group ability to sustain diversity as members rely less on outside social networks and become more dependent on, comfortable with and committed to in-group relationships(p.394).
It is questionable, however, if the church community can sustain itself as a viable alternative to other culturally significant social networks. The transfer of self-identity from the culturally significant family or tribal network which is a feature of many non-Western cultures may not be sustainable for the individual in the long term. Jenkins warns against an authoritative push to cultural assimilation which causes the forfeiture of the “individual’s own culturally formed identity and perception of religious belief and practice” (p393).

Indeed, the ethnic diversity within the Mosaic membership may be the result of factors other than those directly related to multicultural specifics. Erwin McManus, senior minister of the church and himself a first-generation immigrant from Salvador, emphasises the creative and transformative context of story, beauty and artistic design. It may be suggested, given the unique demographics of the Mosaic membership that the compelling force behind the growth of Mosaic may not be its multiethnicity, but, rather, its homogeneity as an “artistic haven.”

The church is a microcosm of its social contexts. It is inevitable, therefore, that ecclesial discussions in the Australian social context include matters pertaining to multiculturalism. It is these diverse social expressions that provide the formative foundations for the development of perceptions of God. Theology, either of a systematic or an ordinary kind, is done in social contexts.

Faith and practice in Inspire church are identified with a Pentecostal theology. By its very nature, such a theology is linked very much with the oral narratives of its adherents. To understand this connection it will be necessary, in the first placed, to identify the unique character of Pentecostal faith and practice within the context of its pragmatic immediacy.

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36 McManus’ artistic direction is indicated in an interview dated 12th June 2014 with Religion News Service. He is quoted: “Being a pastor is a beautiful thing, and I love the church. I just don't like titles, institutional categories, and jargon—and unfortunately these terms carry a great deal of cultural and historical baggage. We hope Mosaic and “The Artisan Soul” can be a part of creating new language that makes the beauty of the church and the movement of Jesus magnetic to the world we are committed to reaching with Christ”. http://religionnews.com/2014/06/12/pastor-erwin-mcmanus-took-six-year-public-hiatus-decided-come-back-now/. Accessed 24th July 2017.
Chapter Three

A Pragmatic Immediacy

One of the havens Marti nominated was theological in nature. The underlying assumption here is that a sense of identity, a sense of belonging, flows out of how the basic beliefs are understood and made one's own. Whether members of Mosaic - or for that matter the adherents of Inspire – are especially aware of differences in how God can be understood is a moot point.

It is highly unlikely that the members of Inspire would have been asked in the past about what kind of attributes feature in their understanding of God. By the same token they would not have been asked what ones may have gone missing. Why this should be so is not some personal faults. The fact of the matter is that Pentecostalism has usually been suspicious of theological endeavor. That suspicion is grounded in what might be regarded as its own distinctive theological habitus. It is only relatively recently that Pentecostal theologians have begun to situate this type of faith inside a formal academic discourse. The lack of an academic Pentecostal approach to theology is addressed, especially in the volume of academic literature over the past two decades. Recent theologically focused works by Christopher A. Stephenson (Stephenson, 2013), Kärkkäinen (Kärkkäinen, 2009), Yong (Alvarado, 2016; Yong, 2002, 2005, 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2014a; Yong & Alexander, 2011; Yong & Anderson, 2014) as well as critical studies of global Pentecostalism (Anderson, Bergunder, Droogers, & van der Laan, 2010).37

The tendency in the past has been to emphasize an immediacy of redemption, a spiritual immanence and an eschatological imminence. For the sake of convenience these three things can be gathered together under the umbrella term of a pragmatic immediacy.

37 This is a very brief list that obviously leaves aside works by many other Pentecostal theologians. The list is intended as representative of works related to Pentecostal theology only. The weakness of this list is not in those included, but the many that are not.
This enquiry into the attributes of God must begin to negotiate its way through several considerations. Alongside the historical reserve towards theology in the first instance lies the recognition of some diverse patterns of belief within Pentecostalism itself. These particular matters need to be seen also in the light of what normally happens within the Christian doctrine of God. The Pentecostal understanding does not exist apart from what has been received in the past nor how the rest of the church understands its beliefs. In order to understand how Inspire Church can be seen as a potential theological haven the intersection of these discrete threads need to be woven together in the light of its own particular history and cultural composition. Its diversity in that respect signals a difference from the way in which Mark Cartledge organises his theological concerns in his recent work on *Narratives and Numbers* (Cartledge 2017). In his empirical approach his focus falls upon matters to do with prophecy, gender and family, socialization and glossolalia. He does not deal with the kind of cultural or ethnic factors that are all too evident at Inspire.

With regards the purpose of theology across the church, Migliore rightly advises that

> [t]he central task of a Christian theology ... is to clarify the understanding of God that is proper to the Christian faith, to describe its own peculiar “logic” of God. (Migliore, 2014, p. 66)

What he means by this reference to the peculiar logic of God has to do with a number of inter-related questions: does God exist? How can we speak rightly of God (and thus use human language) and describe the mystery of God? What kind of God do we seek to bear witness to? – in other words, what attributes do we assign God? And, as a consequence, how do we balance the otherness or transcendence of God with his immanence or nearness? In a variation on this theme of transcendence and immanence Michael F. Bird has argued that theology is neither wholly an objective nor a descriptive science: it speaks “about God while in the very presence of God. We are intimately engaged with the subject of our study” (Bird, 2013, p. 30).

Of particular concern for this thesis is the relationship of the attributes of God to Migliore’s peculiar logic. The doctrine of God attracts to itself a set of biblical and philosophical attributes, or characteristics. These attributes represent both how God is revealed and perceived. They help us clarify what kind of God we believe
in. These biblical attributes are inclined to include the likes of love, mercy, just, wise, holy, jealous, patient, almighty. By way of comparison more philosophically ones are inclined to Greek philosophy and there bear the prefixes of the Latin language. Such attributes are omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, immortal, infinite, immaterial, invisible.

In the Pentecostal tradition it is highly likely that the attributes which are relational and biblical rather than abstract and philosophical fit in best with its pragmatic immediacy. That this should be so does not undermine Migliore’s understanding of a peculiar logic. In seeking to address the question of how do we know God and what kind of God that might be, Migliore notes that

[a] Christian doctrine of God responds in the light of the scriptural witness to God’s history with the people of Israel and God’s new covenant with all humanity in Jesus Christ. (Migliore, 2014, p. 66)

This scriptural reference naturally favours those biblical attributes: it is also an approach to theology that is much more likely to commend itself to a Pentecostal audience. It places the immediacy of Pentecostal experience in close association with a canonical story of how God engages, firstly with the people of Israel and then with Jesus of Nazareth and those who bear witness to his redemptive significance.

The Old Testament narrates Israel’s testimony to the story of God, humanity and the cosmos, initiated in creation and moving forward in redemptive purpose and cosmic re-creation. The human relationship with Yahweh, exemplified in the history of the people of Israel, fluctuates between apostasy and reconciliation mediated through prophets, priests and kings. Nevertheless, the narrative is one of continued personal and dynamic interchange based on redemptive love (Brueggemann, 1997).

The New Testament continues the narrative of divine-human relationality. This time it is intensified and personalised in Jesus the Messiah – the incarnate God with us. The church extends the narrative, embracing personal and community relationality with God through the presence and empowerment of the Spirit of God (Bartholomew & Goheen, 2004, pp. 129-213).
The theological question of God, then, at the heart of this thesis brings into play a critical discipline that is designed to reflect on the human encounter with divine reality. The context of that encounter is not the individual in isolation, but the individual in “a community of faith” (Bird, 2013, p. 30). The identity and context of the community of faith 38 is crucial to its “peculiar logic of God” (Migliore, 2014, p. 66).

What is rather important for the development of a theological haven is a coming to terms with a diversity of belief. The default position has been to imagine that Pentecostals share the same beliefs and are organized around the experience of baptism in the Spirit. That is not so.

The Pentecostal theologian Amos Yong observes that Pentecostalism is not alone in its global diversity.

The fact is, of course, that even from its origins, Christianity has been constituted by a plurality of languages, cultures and traditions. The one faith in Jesus Christ has taken on many forms from the first to the present century. (Yong & Anderson, 2014, p. 11)

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen has likewise discerned that

[a] critical facet of the question of identity is the overwhelming diversity of Pentecostalism – to the point that one should probably speak of Pentecostalisms (plural). The diversity arises in two dimensions: the cultural and the theologico-ecumenical. Pentecostalism, unlike any other contemporary religious movement, Christian or non-Christian, is spread across most cultures, linguistic barriers, and social locations. (Kärkkäinen, 2010, p. 224)

The obvious task for a potential theological haven is how to reconcile unity and diversity. In terms of its own title deeds the day of Pentecost promised a duality of unity and diversity. Peter’s application of Joel’s prophecy (Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:17-18) carries with it an anticipated cross-cultural, cross-gender and cross-generational potentiality as the Spirit is “poured out on all flesh.” Kärkkäinen explains, however, that in the context of diversity there is also a singularity of person and purpose that has to do with the ministry of God through the Spirit to the individual in community.

38 It may be argued that the concept of a “community of faith” is consistent with God’s self-disclosure in the word-acts (Vanhoozer, 2005, p. 177) of the biblical narrative (Migliore, 2014, pp. 36-40) to Israel as the community of faith in the Old Testament and the Church as the community of faith in the New Testament. In such a way, the biblical narrative records a social intercourse between God and humanity (Vanhoozer, 2005, p. 176).
The ministry of the Spirit is always particular, specific. The one Spirit of God is not a numinous power hovering above the cosmos but a person living in and permeating people in various life situations and contexts. Even though the purpose of the work of the Spirit always remains the same – to glorify the Son and to bring into fulfillment the new creation of the Father – the Spirit relates to each person and people group in a very specific way. (Kärkkäinen, 2002b, p. 147)

If, as Kärkkäinen suggests, “the Spirit relates to each person and people group in a very specific way” (p.147) we may conclude that cultural factors played a significant role in the foundation of the Pentecostal movement. The implications for Inspire can at this point be seen through a comparison of Pentecostal experience from one originating context to another.

The socio-economic inequalities of Latin American societies provided fertile soil for the Pentecostal message of redemption, freedom and spiritual empowerment. The answer to social injustice and class and racial inequality in the continent was not a call to radical social revolution but to radical spiritual transformation that anticipates a societal transformation.

Western Pentecostalism was also founded amongst those most affected by social inequalities or distortions. The narrative of racial division within Pentecostalism began in the United States of America in 1905, forty-four years after the conclusion of the Civil War. This history is like a parable of how culture and race can impose itself on Pentecostal experience. William Seymour, a son of former slaves, attended Charles Fox Parham’s Bethel Bible College, Topeka, Kansas (Espinosa, 2014, pp. 41-51; Jacobsen, 2006, p. 45). At that time, though he was a student, he was not allowed to enter the classroom. Instead, he sat in the hallway and listened to the classes through an open window. Seymour was to later take what he had learned in the hallway and then preach it at the Azusa Street Faith Mission (1906-1909).

The two unlikely pioneers, Parham and Seymour, were united in experience and doctrine but divided by Parham’s racial prejudice (Thiselton, 2013, pp. 331, 332). Racism and its divisive impact on early Pentecostalism continued despite Seymour’s hope for a racially united movement (Espinosa, 2014, pp. 96-108, 126; Jacobsen,
Seymour wrote of his encounter with racial divisiveness, which may have even been incited by Parham:

Very soon division arose through some of our brethren, and the Holy Spirit was grieved. We want all of our white brethren and white sisters to feel free in our churches and missions, in spite of all the trouble we have had with some of our white brethren in causing diversion and spreading wild fire and fanaticism. Some of our coloured brethren caught the disease of this spirit of division also.

(Seymour, 1915, p. 53)

Seymour’s anticipated racial equality through social transformation was a long time coming. Barely ten years after the beginning of Pentecostalism in the United States the fledgling movement was torn apart on racial grounds. In 1914 two Pentecostal denominations were formed: The Assemblies of God, a predominantly white denomination and the Church of God in Christ, a predominantly African-American denomination. It was only as recently as November 2013 that leaders of the two denominations met together for official dialogue and cooperation.40

It is evident that these cultural and contextual factors can become problematic. That this should become the case led Walter Hollenweger to be critical of global Pentecostalism’s failure to resolve issues of unity in diversity: he lamented that “Pentecostalism has not yet found a mode of global co-operation and communication which effectively expresses its coherence and its pluralism” (Hollenweger, 1992, p. 8). For Frank D. Macchia the level of diversity “had led to Pentecostal theology’s becoming “a disconnected cafeteria of ideas” (Thiselton, 2013, pp. 457-458). In a somewhat similar vein Allan Anderson bluntly described how “Pentecostals have defined themselves by so many paradigms that diversity itself has become a primary defining characteristic of Pentecostal and Charismatic identity” (Anderson, 2004, p. 9).

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39 Parham described what he saw at Azusa Street as being nothing more than “crude negroisms” furthermore “declaring that what he saw as a work of Satan rather than a movement of God.” (Alexander, 2015, p. 128)
40 The official website of the Church of God in Christ described the historic meeting; “Yesterday leadership of the Church of God in Christ met with the executive leadership of the Assemblies of God at the AG national office in Springfield, Missouri. This historic gathering is the first time these two denominations, which are two of the largest in the United States, have met specifically to dialogue together.” http://www.cogic.org/blog/uncategorized/historic-meeting-between-cogic-and-ag/. Accessed 7th July 2017
This distinguishing feature of diversity should not come as a surprise. The Pentecostal experience is liable to accentuate the subjective mood of feeling the nearness of God apprehended in and through the Spirit. This diversity, though, is not simply a product of individualism. In his work on global Pentecostalism, Kärkkäinen has noted that:

“African Pentecostalism gleans from the African spirit world, similarly to the way Latin American Pentecostalism conceptually encounters folk Catholicism and spiritism; some Korean Pentecostals have made use of shamanistic traditions in the culture” (Kärkkäinen, 2010, p. 232).

What is evident through these expressions of cultural sensitivity is the extent to which ethnicity and country of origin can inform and shape the Pentecostal experience.

Whatever sense of unity is then to be found in a world Pentecostalism must take into account these cultural filters. It is a unity that must be found in the midst of cultural and theological diversity. At the very heart of Pentecostalism’s uniqueness is its spirituality. That which unites the diverse expressions of Pentecostalism is its unique idea of spirituality expressed in a nearness to God, specifically associated with the baptism in the Spirit and speaking in tongues.

There is a potential ambiguity here. It lies implicit within Yong’s interpretation of the day of Pentecost. At face value the bestowal of the Spirit at Pentecost lends itself to a cohesive and inclusive manifestation of a global Pentecostalism.

The many tongues of the Day of Pentecost event signal how the salvation of the Spirit recaptures the many human languages for the purpose of giving glory to God. But if languages are constituted by and perpetuate cultural realities and traditions as well, then the redemptive work of God involves also the redemption, renewal and sanctification of these domains. This is not to say that all cultures and what each includes are thereby rendered pure, as if concluding toward a universalist soteriology; it is to say that there can be no a priori demarcation of the Spirit’s regenerative and that there is always the possibility of any language and its cultural milieu being apprehended to bear the gospel message and be reoriented toward the reign of God to come. (Yong, 2015, p. 176)
There is a wonderful irony that then follows from Yong’s claim. The focus on the day of Pentecost and glossolalia provides both a common experience of the Spirit and a reason for linguistic and cultural diversity.

Pentecostal spirituality is linked very much to its Pentecostal hermeneutic. Amos Young (Yong, 2002, 2014a, 2014b), Kenneth J. Archer (Archer, 2009), Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (Kärkkäinen, 2002b) as well as Christopher A. Stephenson (Stephenson, 2013) and J. William Oliverio (Oliverio, 2015) represent a vigorous academic approach to Pentecostal hermeneutics. It is a hermeneutic which recognises an intimacy and immediacy of God’s self-revelation through what Yong’s proposes as a tridactic dialogue among Word, Spirit and the Pentecostal community. 41 Archer prefers the idea of a trialectic conversation between the Spirit, Word and community. With this set of hermeneutical agents the key elements of Pentecostal theology – immanency, immediacy and imminency – can be passed on into the life of the believing community.

Immanency here contrasts with the theological concept of divine transcendence. While the latter term indicates separation, immanency indicates God’s pervading presence and active involvement with his creation (Thiselton, 2007, pp. 477-478). Immediacy is linked with immanency. God’s personal presence is direct and unmediated. Furthermore, the consummation of God’s redemptive presence is perceived as unhindered and eschatologically imminent. This thesis emerging out of Inspire suggests the definitive role of the personal narrative in the articulation of a trialectic Pentecostal hermeneutic. The individual in community narrates, or testifies to, what God has done in and through their life. This testimony plays its part in the building up and defining the nature of the theological haven.

It was indeed the case that a narrative testimony historically formed the foundation of Pentecostal hermeneutics: “it was primarily through personal testimonies that the Pentecostal community participated in the hermeneutical process” (Kärkkäinen, 2002b, p. 5).

Kärkkäinen further noted that

41 Vanhoozer describes a similar hermeneutical approach in which” the goal is to hear what the Spirit is saying to the church through the Scripture today, not simply to recover what the human author meant yesterday”. (Vanhoozer, 2005)
Because our knowledge of God is relational, and not merely informational, theology can be better expressed orally, because that is the primary mode of relational communication among ordinary people in the community of faith. (Kärkkäinen, 2002b, p. 6)

The oral narrative (Neumann, 2012, pp. 110-112) separates a pragmatic Pentecostal theology from a propositional discursive theology. To understand Pentecostal theology, it needs to be approached from the perspective of oral discourse rather than formalized theological discourse. To access this oral discourse one must enter into the personal narrative of the Pentecostal believer expressed in community (Neumann, 2012, p. 112).

It is Pentecostalism’s oral witness embedded within the larger biblical narrative that affirms the correspondence of “this is that” of the oral witness.

This narrative function of testimony is bound up in the very DNA of Pentecost where, in Acts 2, we see Peter and the disciples making sense of their experience by weaving it into a larger received narrative: to be able to say that ‘this is that’ (Acts 2:16 pointing to Joel 2:28-32) is to frame and make sense of the phenomenon by situating it within a narrative. (Smith, 2010, p. 51)

The narrative testimony identifies the struggles of the individual with the struggles of God’s people, the disenfranchised and dispossessed of both Testaments. The disenfranchised and dispossessed of the contemporary community reflect the continued narrative of God’s personal and empowering interventions on their behalf.42

As a hermeneutical function, narrative testimony requires an epistemological foundation. James K.A. Smith locates such a foundation within the framework of a post-modern epistemology in contrast to a modernist rationalism. He looks back at early Pentecostalism identifying

[a] kind of proto-postmodern intuition about knowledge that constitutes a performative critique of modern criteria for knowledge – a Pentecostal critique of the rationalism (cognitivism or ‘intellectualising’) that characterises modern accounts of knowledge. (Smith, 2010, p. 52)

42 Smith cites Wacker: “The testimony forcefully asserted that the believers passage on this earth formed part of a magnificent drama in which cosmic good vanquishes evil… each person’s private struggles somehow soared above the merely private and reappeared in a framework that spanned the millennia.” (Smith, 2010, p. 51).
Cartledge (Cartledge, 2010, p.272) also suggests a postmodern epistemological context for Pentecostal narrative testimony in the research carried out by Jean-Daniel Pluss citing Paul Ricouer’s three aspects of testimony: “its quasi-empirical character, the struggle of opinion each testimony evokes and the notion of false testimony”.

The epistemological model may be taken a step further with the oral narrative taking on a dual reflective and instructional role: “what God did for me (reflective), he can do for you (instructive)”.43 Neumann has further observed that “when you become a Pentecostal you talk about how you have been healed, or how your very life has been changed” (Neumann, 2012, p. 116). A hermeneutic based on narrative informs a pragmatically-based Pentecostal theology that can be distinguished from a cognitive propositional theology- and, indeed the fine points of Migliore’s peculiar logic Neumann affirms this significant role of narrative in that “the role of the narrative, normally important in ethical formulations and developments becomes much more important as the source of knowledge and understanding (Neumann, 2012, p. 111).

The idea of a community hermeneutic goes beyond the sociological idea of many cultures and communities coming together in a common expression of a spiritual experience as the community of the Spirit (Zizioulas, 1985, p. 132). A community hermeneutic identifies the interpretative function of a local Pentecostal fellowship. In this way the interpretive community shifts the hermeneutical emphasis away from the individual hermeneut and her commitment to an acceptable and correctly applied method and places primary emphasis upon the community as the spiritual cultural context in which interpretation takes place.(Archer, 2009, p. 213)

It can indeed be argued that it is within the context of diverse communities of Pentecostal narrative(s) that a Pentecostal identity is located.

43 There is a hermeneutical danger in such an approach that requires earnest attention in the development of a Pentecostal hermeneutic. Allied with the “what God did for me, he can do for you” witness is the implication of an attached authority; “God told me” or “God showed me”. How may such an assertion, a Pentecostal infallibility, be challenged? A likely response will be proposed in the following two elements of a Pentecostal hermeneutic, community and authority.
The Pentecostal family resemblance transcends locality and denominational loyalty and displays striking similarities in different parts of the world. The vast majority of Pentecostals are situated in places where local cultural characteristics are resilient in the face of globalization and where local perceptions are often very different from those found in Western contexts. (Anderson, 2010, p. 26)

That inclusion should be seen in the light of a hermeneutic of the Spirit. Kärkkäinen applies a pneumatological hermeneutic as the platform for a theology of God through the empowering presence of the Spirit of God (Kärkkäinen, 2002a, p. 228). It is this “empowering presence” that allowed Pentecostals to introduce “a dynamic, enthusiastic type of spirituality and worship life to the contemporary church, emphasizing the possibility of experiencing God mystically” (p.228).

The Spirit-Word duality in the Pentecostal hermeneutic utilizes the biblical narrative to address the contemporary setting of its readers. The historical context forms the backdrop to the contemporary meaning and application. Vanhoozer describes the process in this way: “while evangelicals try to preserve the original textual meaning, Pentecostals want to preserve the original experience of the Spirit” (Vanhoozer 2015, p. 155).

To do so without abandoning the authority of Scripture, or the integrity of the text, remains an ongoing challenge for the Pentecostal exegete.44 Vanhoozer’s criticism is a valid one; “when it comes to giving a nitty-gritty account of the Spirit’s role in hermeneutics, there is less a mighty rushing wind, than a whispering shrug of the shoulders” (Vanhoozer, 2015, p. 158).

Vanhoozer’s cautious approach to the Spirit/Word duality introduces the role of Scripture in Pentecostal hermeneutics. The potential for implausible, unsubstantiated and unmediated claims of a Spirit inspiration must be critiqued in the context of objective mediation and assessment (Yong, 2002, p. 245). Both Yong and Archer objectify the authoritative mediator in the Scriptures (Archer, 2009; Yong, 2002). It is to be noted that both authors identify the Scripture’s hermeneutical role well within the context of the Spirit-Scripture-community. It is out of the Pentecostal tridactic of Spirit-Word-community (Yong 2002) that Pentecostalism finds its theological voice and praxis.

44 Consider Gordon Fee’s exceptional work in this area (Fee, 1994, 2007).
Yong's proposed tridactic dynamic in Pentecostal hermeneutics features a mutual interaction between the three agents. Reflecting Vanhoozer's previously mentioned cautious approach to the Spirit/Word duality in Pentecostal hermeneutics, Yong posits a strong caveat that aligns with a conservative Pentecostal and evangelical approach. He rightly affirms that:

The interdependence of the Spirit and the Word in the divine economies means that we should take Scripture seriously as the primary means through which the Spirit's liberative activity is accomplished. (Yong, 2002, pp. 226-227)

Thus, within the tridactic hermeneutic the essential authoritative function of Spirit and Word is rigorously maintained. Archer locates a Scripture-Spirit authority within the context of the Pentecostal community. He asserts that while the text is in a sense at the mercy of the reading community, that community, as a Pentecostal community affirms the Bible as "the inspired authoritative word of God" (Archer, 2009, p. 214). Archer further notes that

the Pentecostal community will read the Bible as 'Sacred Scripture' which speaks to its culturally specific needs and concerns enabling the community to live faithfully before and with the living God. (p.214)

In this regard, Archer's approach to the tridactic hermeneutic is very much text dependent (p.216). With a stated reliance on Umberto Eco (p.217) Archer proposes that the meaning of a text is identified through two inter-related hermeneutic exercises - one cultural and having to do with semiotics and the other linguistic having to with semiology. This semiotic semiologic process ...

[refers to both how a sentence conveys meaning according to the rules of the language of which it belongs and to the word/sign's social-historical-cultural reference. (pp219-220)

Archer's proposal at first glance challenges the hermeneutical capability of the ordinary Pentecostal community, reserving the right of interpretation to those who possess semiotic and semiological knowledge. Archer, however, recognises a limitation in the semiotic-semiological hermeneutic duality. Eco's idea of a "model" reader is an aspirational one. In "reality ... no actual reader is or can become the model reader “(p.221).
It is here that the tridactic Pentecostal hermeneutic takes on its specific community identity, or, as Archer recognises, its multiple community identities. Archer's recognition of the diversity of the Pentecostal community aligns very much with the intent of my research at Inspire Church. Archer’s hermeneutical strategy is “concerned with the multicultural and interracial dimensions of the community “(p.212) in which “all interpretative readings are culturally dependent and inherently contain the ideological perspectives of the community” (p.223). For Archer, his hermeneutic strategy is also identified as a hermeneutic of the marginality in which “the poor (both economically and spiritually) will be given a voice as they participate in the making of meaning” (p.212).

Yong’s concern for the participation of the Pentecostal community in the tridactic hermeneutics is an historical one. For Yong, the reality of the hermeneutical outcome is not limited to a contemporary community. Rather, the community identifies with its historical antecedents. For the Pentecostal community these antecedents begin with the church of the Book of Acts. The development of Christian doctrinal traditions is a cumulative process: “one continuous work of the Spirit” (Yong 2002, p.265, 268). The tension here is to preserve the local while identifying with the universal. L. William Oliverio explains:

This situation of locality within tradition provides a tension between the local and the universal which needs to be respected without collapsing either pole. A variety of local confessions serve to provide accountability for one another, criticising the parochial, ideological of partisan agendas of other local theologies. (Oliverio, 2015, p. 244)

Once again, a Pentecostal hermeneutic intersects with the research project. In Oliverio’s terminology, the local relates to Inspire Church a local church community that further exhibits profound multiple localities of origin in its multicultural adherents. The universal identifies Inspire Church with a classic Pentecostal tradition which, in turn, identifies with a conservative and evangelical tradition.

This description of a Pentecostal hermeneutic can help clarify how and why a local congregation can become a haven. The emphasis on testimony, the role of the Spirit and the correspondence of experience with scripture enables a particular identity and sense of belonging. The trialectic nature of this everyday

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45 David Womack’ *Wellsprings of the Pentecostal Movement* (1968, Springfield: MI, Gospel Publishing House) identified the historical roots of Pentecostalism in early church movements. He proposed an historical continuum rather than a contemporary shift as the foundation and proof of veracity of the contemporary Pentecostal Movement.
hermeneutics (it happens without people being aware that this is happening) is not compromised through cultural difference. How this hermeneutical practice plays itself out in a Pentecostal theology is the next step. To talk about a Pentecostal theology is not without its problems. There are a number of unique issues that have impacted on Pentecostalism’s often uneasy dialogue with theology. The reason for this hesitancy lies in the distinctive practice of Pentecostal faith and practice. This distinctive is centred on the experience of Spirit baptism, accompanied by glossolalia, and present-day operation of the gifts of the Spirit. Public worship is intended to be expressed in non-liturgical spontaneity through the empowering act of the Spirit in the community of worship.

The prospect of a Pentecostal theological haven may have been inconceivable to early Pentecostal theologians. And yet, from the days of Seymour’s Apostolic Faith Mission, the Pentecostal church has been somewhat of a haven for those who adhere to a Pentecostal theology. Seymour’s strident opposition\textsuperscript{46} to what he called “dead forms and creeds of wild fanaticism “ (Robeck, 2006, p. 120) was met with equally strident opposition\textsuperscript{47} so that

[t]he mission’s members were subjected to regular and frequent ridicule, both public and private. Viewed as fanatics, many of its members were arrested, fined, and jailed on grounds that they were “insane. (Robeck, 2006, p. 12)

Faced with such hostility, Pentecostal believers found a haven in which their faith and practice was protected; a haven of belief and belonging.

Pentecostal theology entered the theological landscape very much as a biblical defence of the Pentecostal experience perceived as under threat from a hostile academic theology. A direct appeal to the Bible was

\textsuperscript{46} Kärkkäinen quotes the October 1906 edition of the\textit{ Apostolic Faith} magazine; “God does not need a great theological preacher that can give nothing but theological chips and shaving to people.”(Kärkkäinen, 2002b)

\textsuperscript{47} The late P.B. Duncan described a similar public uneasiness with the Pentecostal ministry on the occasion of revival meetings held in Sydney in 1952 with the evangelist A.C. Valdez (Duncan, 1978). An article in the Sydney Morning Herald dated Friday 14\textsuperscript{th} November 1952 relates the concerns of the Health Department and possible subsequent police action against the meetings: \url{http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/18290702}. (Accessed 5\textsuperscript{th} May 2017) Vondey (Vondey, 2010, p. 186) noted the widespread public (mis)conceptions of early Pentecostalism; “The revivals among Pentecostals were seen as immoral, childish, deluded, frivolous, and even demonic.”
seemingly the only defence. The intent was to defend biblically the Pentecostal experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the accompanying speaking in tongues. Stephenson calls this pioneer period in the articulation of a distinctive Pentecostal theology the “Bible doctrine” period (Stephenson, 2013, pp. 11-27).\(^48\) In this way the Pentecostal church served as a Bible-focused theological haven for the early Pentecostal believers.

Now this is not to say that such an apologetic strategy however, meant that early Pentecostalism was insensitive to the implications of orthodox Christian doctrine. For instance, the so called “oneness” controversy amongst Pentecostal churches in the USA in 1913 tested the fledgling Pentecostal movement’s adherence to a classical Trinitarian orthodoxy. According to Archer

[o]neness Pentecostalism came into existence as a result of a new way of harmonizing the Lukan baptismal formula (Acts 2:38) with the Matthean baptismal formula (Mt.28:19). This had a direct impact upon the traditional Trinitarian view of God and the early Pentecostal understanding of salvation. Oneness Pentecostals emphasized the singularity of God’s identity and the singularity of God’s name, Jesus was the divine name for God and the final revelation of God’s identity. (Archer, 2009, p. 112)

Supporters of classical trinitarianism recognised that more than doctrinal contention was at stake. Denial of the Trinitarian actuality of God forfeits the ontological reality of God.\(^49\) The division remains today, despite some attempts to bridge the doctrinal divide (Vondey, 2017, p. 46; Yong & Anderson, 2014, p. 301).

The contemporary situation has changed. As Hollenweger noted: “it is now possible to speak in tongues and to be a critical thinker at a university at the same time-this was not possible in the past” (Hollenweger, 1999, p. 33). And, again,

Pentecostalism has come of age. It is now possible to be filled with the Spirit, to enjoy the specific Pentecostal charismata and Pentecostal spirituality, to believe in Pentecostal mission and at the same time to use one’s critical faculties, to develop them and to use them—as other charism—for the kingdom of God. (page 17)

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48 Stephenson provides extensive notes (pages 134-143) in which he engages with the writings of the earliest pioneers of Pentecostal theology.

49 Early adherents of Oneness Pentecostalism went so far as to propose that baptism according to Mathew’s formula (Matthew 28:19) was “an act of disobedience”. Furthermore, any one baptised according to Matthew 28:19, need to be re-baptized in Jesus’ name alone (Archer 2009, p.115).
The need to engage in theology came gradually to the Pentecostals. Orthodox theology, in a sense, was being done for the Pentecostals through their adherence to an evangelical theology with the addition of a biblically focused defence of the Pentecostal dimension. The Pentecostal movement has only recently initiated an academic foray into theological disciplines other than a defense of the baptism of the Spirit and Pentecostal spirituality. Perhaps Simon Chan’s suggestion has been heard:

Pentecostals are quite understandably afraid that the ‘letter’ might kill the ‘spirit’. But they need not fear if they understand that this dualism between letter and spirit is itself a product of a certain kind of modern epistemology. What they need is to recover the ancient art of spiritual theology, where reflecting on the nature of God and praying to him are indistinguishable acts. (Chan, 2000, p. 12)

It is now at this point that we return to the differences between Marti’s theological haven and Migliore's peculiar logic. From the perspective of a more formal and systematic theology Pentecostal theology would align with Migliore’s insistence on an orthodox Trinitarian doctrine of God. As Simon Chan (Chan, 2000, p. 32) succinctly, but effectively noted: “We think best as Pentecostals if we think in the context of the Trinitarian faith rather than apart from it”.

Where Pentecostal experience might differ – and thus become that theological haven – is in three key elements that it is inclined to accentuate. Those three have to do with immanency, immediacy and imminency. Each one of these three now needs to be teased out in order to show how it contributes to that sense of belonging that comes with being a theological haven. The subsequent question becomes what kind of attributes are privileged within the haven. A pragmatic Pentecostal theology begins with the key element of spiritual immanency. By this is meant the reality of the transformative presence of the triune God in the daily affairs of the believer. God is personally experienced in his immanence. A pragmatic theology of spiritual immanence is developed in the Pentecostal distinctive of Spirit baptism.
Yong draws attention to the baptism in the Spirit as “one of the chief, if not sole, elements historically setting apart classical Pentecostalism from charismatic or other renewal expressions of Christianity (Yong & Anderson, 2014, p. 81).50

Pentecostal theology emerged from its period of apologetic defence of the baptism in the Spirit to a welcomed broader pneumatological approach to the Spirit’s presence and ministry in and through the contemporary church. The challenge, of course, is to retain and, even more, to encourage the identity of the baptism in the Spirit as the distinctive dynamic of Pentecostal spirituality.

Anderson identifies the challenge associated with a broader pneumatological approach. Contemporary Pentecostal churches are less focused on the historical Pentecostal distinctive of Spirit baptism and consequent speaking in tongues. As he notes:

[This experience of being ‘filled’ or ‘baptized’ with the Holy Spirit is that which distinguishes many Pentecostals, in their own opinion, from most others. But there is a difference between Pentecostalism in its first, ‘Charismatic’ generation and that in the second, more formalized one. It is usually in the third generation that a revitalization movement arises promoting ‘revival’, which often has a different emphasis from that of the first generation. In later forms of Pentecostalism this so-called distinguishing doctrine is given less prominence – in fact, insistence on tongues is often absent and certainly of relative minor significance. In any case, many contemporary Pentecostal churches seldom use speaking in tongues in public worship. (Anderson et al., 2010, p. 25)

It is for this reason that Chan (2000) calls for a return to a more traditional approach to Pentecostal spiritual theology. Only by doing so, according to Chan, will a successful transition of the Pentecostal “tradition” of the baptism in the Spirit to the next generation be ensured.

The Christological focus of Pentecostal spirituality expressed by Chan is extended within an inclusive of the doctrine of God in full Trinitarian context of Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Chan, 2000, p. 7). Vondey quotes Ralph Del Colle whom he says “has argued ‘that a taxonomy of the religious affections within the Pentecostal-charismatic experience is profoundly Christocentric in its orientation” (Vondey, 2010, p. 105). The Trinitarian

50 Neumann quotes Macchia’s statement of the baptism of the Spirit as “the crown jewel of Pentecostal distinctives” (Neumann, 2012, p. 169). For this reason, the consequence of spiritual intimacy is discussed prior to the distinctive of redemptive immediacy.
dimension is recognised in that “the Father is ... glorified and manifested in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit by the Son and, conversely, in the revelation of the Son by the Holy Spirit” (p.105).

Global Pentecostalism is united around an experience of the baptism in the Spirit. Yet, it is hard to find a common theological expression of what constitutes that experience (Chan, 2000, p. 10). The challenge is to locate a common historical concept that may then be examined in the light of a developed theological understanding(s).

Parham (1872-1929), as well as other contemporary holiness preachers, examined the Scriptures “to identify the signs of the Spirit’s sanctifying and empowering works” (Yong & Anderson, 2014, p. 88). He was the first, at least according to Hollenweger, to identify the reception of the baptism in the Spirit with the initial (and continuing) evidence of speaking in tongues. Classical Pentecostalism maintains Parham's idea of empowerment (Yong & Anderson, 2014, p. 91) while rejecting his idea of tongues as xenolalia or speaking in an otherwise unknown human language.

Classic Pentecostalism prefers to recognise a spiritual or heavenly sourced identity of tongues as glossolalia, “unaccustomed words of heavenly coherence” (Horton, 1968). Harold Horton’s definition echoes that of another English Pentecostal pioneer, Donald Gee, who identified speaking in tongues as a quite logical outcome from an intense fullness of emotion, and a perfectly reasonable cause for such a fullness of spiritual feeling is provided in the gift of the Holy Ghost. There is nothing illogical in men and women speaking with ‘tongues’ under the spiritual conditions portrayed in the New Testament. (Gee, undated, p. 57).

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51 Amos Yong contends that “the heterogeneity of renewal specially across the global south means that no one understanding of Spirit Baptism has attained consensus” (Yong & Anderson, 2014, p. 91).
52 Interestingly, Hollenweger uses the term “invent”.
53 According to Article 9: of the World Assemblies of God Fellowship Statement of Faith; “We believe that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is the bestowing of the believer with power for life and service for Christ.”
54 Parham based his idea of tongues as xenolalia being the Holy Spirit’s unique gifting in preparation for missionary service. (Jacobsen, 2006, p. 35)
55 It is to be noted that this text was initially published in 1934.
Horton and Gee recognised a broader aspect to the baptism in the Spirit than the initial concept of empowerment for service. Chan's definition brings the idea of the Spirit's immanency through the baptism in the Spirit which he states is “a certain kind of spiritual experience of an intense direct and overwhelming nature centering in the person of Christ” (Chan, 2000, p. 7).

Chan further alludes to the divine initiative and the receiver's passivity in the reception of the baptism in the Spirit evidenced by speaking in tongues. He applies Karl Barth's 56 Trinitarian concept of “active passivity.” He references Barth’s explanation of active passivity through the Incarnation. Within the context of the Trinity, the Son is active in his obedience, humility and submission to the redemptive will of God. And yet, it is only through the Spirit of God, the Spirit of love, that such acts of obedience are possible. In this sense Jesus is passive.

Chan turns to Spirit baptism and particularly glossolalia as active passivity. In a similar way to conversion in which “one acts and yet feels that one could not have acted otherwise” (p. 51), glossolalia “is also an active passivity ... we speak, yet it is a speech that comes from yieldness and surrender to the will of God” (p. 51).

Chan's use of active passivity is significant particularly for Pentecostal churches where animism is a dominant religion. For example, Brazilian forms of African animism, particularly Umbanda and Candomblé, initiate various levels and forms of spirit possession in which the adherent is, as it were, “taken over” by the spirit. Recognizing that a majority of Brazilian converts to Pentecostalism would have been aware of, if not had been actual participants in such ritual practices, the implied human/divine participation in the baptism in the Spirit is uniquely appropriate. The terminology “active passivity” recognizes the human aspect of seeking or tarrying after more of God and passively accepting the physical signs of receiving what was sought after through the baptism in the Spirit and speaking in tongues (Chan, 2000, p. 78).

The central element here is an experience of God as a specific event (Neumann, 2012, p. 112f). It is a progressive experience that is not mystical in the technical sense of the term (Neumann, 2012, pp. 112-115) but

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one that personally permeates the whole theological enterprise. Pentecostal spirituality, in the terms of its adherents, provides an intensely personal relationship with God through the Spirit. We are dealing here with what has been termed a “primal spirituality” that is

[The very nature of spiritual experience behind the Christian faith specifically and the very essence of religiosity generally... For Pentecostals, ‘primal spirituality’ amounts to a return to a distinct cultural worldview that can be described as ‘restorationist’.... A return to the Pentecostal experience of the early church. (Hunt, 2010, p. 195)

Paul’s discussion of personal and corporate worship (1Corinthians 12-14) includes the tantalizing phrase: “For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit” (14:2). Within the context of corporate fellowship, the individual may experience a linguistic conversation with God in which divine mysteries are broached. Exegetical questions are yet to be resolved regarding the word “mysteries” (Fee, 1994, p. 218). What is clear, is that Paul recognises the Spirit’s personal presence in the individual and corporate sense through the spiritual encounter.

The idea of Pentecostalism’s “primal spirituality” leads into the next aspect of key theological themes. This time, attention is drawn to the practical outcomes of Pentecostalism’s message of redemption: the impact the message has on the life of the individual and his community?

The second of these three accentuated elements within the Pentecostal habitus of belief is personal redemptive immediacy. It is an element that highlights the understanding of redemption through Christ as a personal, present and immediate experience and not solely as a future hope. The term applies to the immediacy of the transformative benefits of redemption that come to the individual believer and the community to which the believer belongs.

Aspects of the redemptive immediacy may include healing, deliverance from demonic forces, a new identity and social status. Contemporary Western Pentecostalism may not see the essential nature of such aspects of personal redemptive transformation and spiritual empowerment. However, based on the fact that
Pentecostalism is now a third world phenomenon, I suggest that personal redemptive immediacy remains a key element in global Pentecostalism.

J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, an African Pentecostal theologian, locates a sense of the personal immediacy of redemptive transformation and power within the context of a continent that “holds ardently to belief in a universe alive with benevolent and malevolent powers” (J. K. Asamoah-Gyadu, 2009, p. 33). In such a context, “Jesus is, above all else, the one who rescues people in the power of the Spirit” (page 33). The sense of personal redemptive immediacy is brought out in the Akan expression of Christ as Agyenkwa or Saviour. Asamoah-Gyadu cites Mercy A. Oduyoye's explanation of the African context:

The Agyenkwa, the one who rescues, who holds your life in safety, takes you out of a life-denying situation and places you in a life-affirming one. The Rescuer plucks you from a dehumanizing ambience and places you in a position where you can grow toward authentic humanity. The Agyenkwa gives you back your life in all its wholeness and fullness. (J. K. Asamoah-Gyadu, 2009, p. 33)

Interestingly, Asamoah-Gyadu also locates a redemptive immediacy within the context of neo-Pentecostalism; “in new paradigm Pentecostalism, salvation may be presented as something that is as existential as it is eschatological” (J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, 2014, p. 51).

He brings together what he apparently sees as the two approaches of classical Pentecostalism and neo-Pentecostalism as he concludes: “The Spirit of God is a Spirit of revitalization and empowerment and achievement in terms of personal ambitions and aspirations in the same breath” (J. K. Asamoah-Gyadu, 2009, pp. 32-46).

Personal redemptive immediacy in the Latin American context is illustrated through a comparison with liberation theology. McGrath (McGrath, 2002, pp. 36-37) observes that liberation theology takes on an academic

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57 “Pentecostalism today is ... both fundamentally and dominantly a Third world phenomenon. In spite of its significant growth in North America, less than a third of its members are white and this proportion continues to decrease” (Ma, Kärkkäinen, & Asamoah-Gyadu, 2014, p. 14)


59 See also his text on contemporary African Pentecostalism: Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretation from an African context.
approach to the socio-economic inequalities that continue to plague Latin American societies. While his comments do not address the work done through the Base Ecclesial Communities, particularly in the Brazilian context, his comments are valid. Liberation theology is an academic and political response to the realities of social inequality. By way of contrast, the rapid growth of the evangelical and particularly Pentecostal churches results from a grassroots approach to the same situations. McGrath explains the essential contrast between Latin American Liberation theology and the Pentecostal theology of personal redemptive immediacy:

Rather than transform society – which they see as a laudable, but decidedly long term goal-they would change themselves, their families and their communities. (McGrath, 2002, p. 38)

Johan Mostert draws on the work of Miller and Yamamori⁶⁰ in contrasting the redemptive/transformative approaches of liberation theology and Pentecostal theology:

While both attempt to address poverty, Pentecostals were addressing it one person at a time through a message of personal transformation. Liberation theology draws heavily on the story of the Exodus out of Egypt as an analogy for structural liberation, whereas Pentecostals draw heavily on the life and teachings of Jesus that promise peace, harmony, and personal salvation. ⁶¹ (Mostert, 2014, p. 169)

The third and final distinctive element is an eschatological imminency. Pentecostal eschatology’s sense of imminency is acknowledged in the Assemblies of God World Fellowship Statement of Faith⁶²; “The imminent and personal return of Jesus Christ ...” Yong comments that Pentecostalism’s “eschatological orientation is critical and should not be overlooked “ (Yong, 2002, p. 178).

Steven Jack Land has considerable support for his contention that eschatology is the foundational element that distinguishes Pentecostal theology and praxis.

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⁶¹ Mostert provides a summary of Miller and Yamamori’s suggested seven ways in which “the Pentecostal ethic transforms the economic circumstances of people and results in an upward social lift for its members.” (Mostert, 2014, pp. 177-178)

It is only within the gestalt of the apocalyptic narrative, the narrative of which the Pentecostals now saw themselves as being a significant part, that the meaning of the spirituality can be known. To locate the theological center of Pentecostalism in Spirit baptism, as Brunner does, or to see tongues as the only thing that distinguishes the spirituality from that of the Holiness of evangelical movements is to miss the point altogether. It is the eschatological shift within the Holiness movement toward premillennialism that signals what is decisive. (Land, 2010, p. 54)

That Jesus may return at any time and much sooner than anticipated is an underlying motivation in Pentecostal life and practice (Warrington, 2008, p. 309). Personal holiness or sanctification is the paradigm for preparation for Christ’s imminent return (Warrington, 2008, p. 313). The missiological paradigm, according to Kärkkäinen, motivates an intense and urgent Pentecostal global mission:

From the beginning, Pentecostals were convinced that the twentieth-century outpouring of the Spirit marked the beginning of the return of Jesus Christ to establish the kingdom. In the meantime, based on biblical promises such as Acts 1:8, Christians were supposed to be empowered by the Spirit to bring the gospel to all nations. As a result of this ‘eschatological urgency’, a massive missionary and evangelistic enterprise emerged, a main factor in the continuing rapid growth of the movement. (Kärkkäinen, 2010, p. 229)

It may be questioned, however, if the initial eschatological enthusiasm has been maintained. It has been argued that the “upward social mobility” evidenced in western Pentecostal society has negatively impacted “on ... apocalyptic fervor and urgency.” (Anderson, 2004, p. 219). In contrast, historical eschatological fervency remains amongst third world Pentecostals.

Whether the eschatological passion for mission has waned, there remains a suspicion of contemporary theological and social issues fostered by the idea of an imminent apocalyptic consummation. Why be concerned with ecological issues such as climate change and care of the environment? After all, all will be destroyed and made anew anyway (Rice, 2014, p. 360). So runs the argument although it is one which Jonathan W. Rice refutes.

... human beings are symbolically related not only to the animal world but also to the environment in its many layers of complexity. While the science may be disputed by some (a minority), we ignore environmental and ecological issues at our own risk in the long run. Even if our dispensationalist eschatology led us to believe that the end is near, that does not justify environmentally harmful behaviours and ways of life. (p.360)
The eschatological imminency of classic Pentecostalism is not an argument against an emerging Pentecostal eco-theology exemplified in Rice's chapter. Environmental stewardship, Rice argues, is also the responsibility of the Pentecostal believer. As such, participation in a Pentecostal eco-theology may not only redress historical neglect. It may also privilege Pentecostal believers in participating with other believers, in an ecological preservation for future generations; should Jesus tarry.


Like William Atkinson (Atkinson, 2013) we begin by assuming the conclusion. Atkinson assures his readers in his introduction that they will not discover a novel or new theology of the Trinity. His conclusions are very much in accord with historical trinitarianism. What he hopes to encourage is a fresh understanding of the Trinity from the perspective of Pentecost. Steven M. Studebaker (Studebaker, 2012) developed a similar proposal. Priority is given, not to the development of a distinctive Pentecostal doctrine, but a witness to the distinctive Pentecostal experience.

Many Pentecostals deny that Pentecostalism can be defined in theological terms and must rather be understood in experiential categories. According to this view, Pentecostals are about religious experience and not theology. (Anderson, 2004, p. 12)

Christian theology expresses an ontological understanding of God in triune terminology. A relatively late starter in Trinitarian studies, Pentecostal theology offers a unique contribution to an understanding of triune ontology from a pneumatological perspective.

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63 To the point, especially within the World Assemblies of God Fellowship Statement of Faith (article 2a), to recognise the Western *filioque* clause (Yong & Anderson, 2014, p. 302).
64 New works by Vondey (Vondey, 2017) and Macchia (Macchia, 2018) further develop the use of Pentecost as a Pentecostal theological paradigm.
Pentecostalism’s pragmatic theology articulates the Triune God in an active and intimate presence that is immanent through the personal presence of the Spirit of God, immediate in redemptive transformative and imminent in its hope of Christ’s return. The challenge faced by a pneumatological emphasis is a possible *de facto* enhancement of the Spirit of God to the detriment of the equality in unity of the Godhead. May Pentecostal theology be charged with a pneumocentric bias? Studebaker’s recent text would claim otherwise.

If the economic Trinity is the source of the Christian understanding of God, with what economic activity should we begin? The conventional answer is Jesus Christ. However, I suggest that a Pentecostal contribution to Trinitarian theology should begin with the Holy Spirit and especially the Spirit of Pentecost, though without ignoring Christ. (Studebaker, 2012, p. 6)

Studebaker takes the economic and immanent Trinitarian metaphors further in pneumatological contexts of redemption and relationality.

The Spirit both completes the economic work of redemption and the immanent fellowship of the Trinitarian God. Rather than primarily having a derivative and passive identity and function in the immanent Trinity, the Spirit’s eschatological nature means that the Spirit consummates and constitutes the fellowship of the Triune God. In doing so, the Spirit not only participates in fellowship with the Father and Son but also contributes to the constitution of their personal identities. (Studebaker, 2012, p. 9)

There is a necessary link, for Yong, between an expansive pneumatology and continued recognition of the Triune nature of God;

A robust doctrine of the Trinity needs nothing less than an equally robust doctrine of the Holy Spirit; simultaneously, the development of Pneumatology also pushes forward the discussion of Trinitarian theology. (Yong & Anderson, 2014, p. 305)

Yong defends a Pentecostal doctrine of the Triune God that seeks, not to confine the ministry of the Spirit but to recognise the cosmic as well as the ecclesial dimensions. (Yong & Anderson, 2014, pp. 317-322)

A Pentecostal theology of pragmatic immediacy provides a theological certitude for the church as a haven of belief and belonging. It is possible to delve deeper now into core theological concerns to do with an
understanding of the Holy Spirit, the role of glossolalia in a life in the Spirit and the Triune nature of God. It is possible to explore the eschatological dimension of Pentecostal believing. The former suspicion of an academic theology is slowly giving way to this second order style of a more critical enquiry. These things may be possible and happening but they do so while the movement remains committed to immanence, immediacy and imminence.

The experiential and the relational retain priority. In so doing they enable a congregation to be a theological haven. Inclusion is accompanied by a theology of God that assures the believer of the immanent presence and intervention of the transcendent God in the ordinary narratives of faith and practice.

As such, a theology of pragmatic immediacy may be utilized alongside of an ordinary Pentecostal theology to explore the responses of the research participants to their diverse experiences of God’s redemptive immediacy and interventions.
Chapter Four

Ordinary Stories

The emphasis upon experience inevitably turns attention to the emerging discipline of an ordinary theology. This term came into being through the work initiated by Jeff Astley and colleagues in Durham in the north-east of England. The term has become more widely used in order to focus attention on the beliefs of ordinary church goers. With reference to this thesis an enquiry into the practice of an ordinary theology forms a disciplinary basis for the evaluation of perceptions to do with the divine attributes held within a congregational setting. The discipline of an ordinary theology can thus play a part in describing how a particular theological haven has been established and what kind of shape does it assume. The members of Inspire who agreed to complete the questionnaires upon which this thesis depends, all fall within the category of believers associated with an ordinary theology. The work of those in this field – that is Astley and his associates – provide both a method and a framework for interpreting the perceptions of these members and how that perceptual knowledge then relates to the categories of a more formal theology.

Astley defines an ordinary theology as “the theology and theologizing of Christians who have received little or no theological education of a scholarly, academic or systematic kind” (Astley, 2002a, p. 25). He has adopted the term ‘ordinary’ “as an honourable word, connoting what is ‘regular’, ‘normal’, ‘prevalent’ and ‘common’ (in the sense of ‘belonging to the public” (Astley 2002a, p. 24). Astley is not dismissive of the essential nature of scholarly theological education. He does propose that ordinary theology has a depth and breadth, nevertheless, that an academic theology may define but not replicate. Ordinary theology expresses the context of the experience of God that is, a spirituality of encounter, in other words, - with the divine majesty and mystery.

In fact, ordinary theology has a religious or better, a spiritual priority. It is our first theology, which arises directly from our faith, our experience and our relationship with God in worship and prayer. (Astley, 2014, p. 3)
An ordinary theology should not imply any inferiority to academic theology. There is, after all, an element of the “ordinary” in the academic articulation of theological proposition. Astley notes that

[Even academics normally begin by doing theology in an ordinary way, and this ordinary theology often continues to underlie their more academic theological expressions. (Astley, 2013, p. 1)]

A theology of the ordinary, even the seemingly mundane (Astley 2002:47-48) is still very much in the full sense of the term, a theology. Peter Ward and Heidi Campbell agree: they have observed that

the contemporary interest in the ordinary emphasizes the extent to which the expression of Christian communities is already theological. (Ward & Campbell, 2011, p. 226)

Ordinary theology draws attention to a theology that permeates everyday life. In this sense, individuals live out their lives making theologically oriented, though often covert, decisions and choices. Astley himself recognises ordinary theology as a product of a lived faith encountering God in moments that shape and form the meanings given to those moments on a continuous basis. It can be said that an academic theologian’s perception of God is as much (if not more) formed through such moments of God as through the propositional understanding of God.

Astley rightly contends that “the ultimate object of theology (God), and its proximate object (faith), are not necessarily better known by the experts than by those who do their theology outside academia” (Astley, 2002b, p. 52). That claim is not intended to exclude the academic theologian, however. Theology is tried and tested in the arena of daily life. The academic and the non-academic demonstrate a lived ordinary theology.

It is arguably the case that an ordinary theology finds expression at four discrete levels. These may be described as the primal, the vernacular, the autobiographical and the embedded. Ward and Campbell suggest that these elements of an ordinary theology share a common construct that is “based on an opposing other” (Ward & Campbell, 2011, p. 227). In their view, a vernacular theology, for instance, is framed within a dialectical approach over and alongside “a powerful or formal or privileged or colonial construction of faith” (Ward &
Campbell, p.227). In this, case we may apply Archer's terminology to the vernacular as the language of the marginalised.

The contrasts suggested by Ward and Campbell are as follows. The vernacular element in an ordinary theology draws a contrast between an internalized expression of a perception of God and an external conceptualized theology of God. Similarly, an autobiographical approach contrasts the elemental personal reflective narrative with a learned explication of God. In this case, it is a lived rather than a learned understanding. The embedded element in ordinary theology contrasts the continued presence of formed perceptions of an ordinary theology with acquired external information. An embedded ordinary theology relates to its primal foundations. The element in ordinary theology contrasts the perceptual knowledge with propositional knowledge.

The reflective process of an ordinary theology, then, contrasts with the cognitive process of an academic theology. The embedded presence of a primal ordinary theology is filtered through the vernacular language within the reflective process of autobiography. The contrasts between ordinary theology suggested by Ward and Campbell feature the contrasts between the internal and the external, between perception and proposition.

The implication of these contrasts may take Astley’s idea of contrasts between ordinary and academic theologies beyond his intended use of these terms. The reason for this lies in the distinction that Astley makes between distinctions of degree and those of kind. Astley observes that

... the differences between these two ‘ideal types’ are often best characterized by differences of (sometimes marked) degree rather than as a difference of kind. It is not true to say that all ordinary theology is always thoroughly spiritual or personal; nor that every example of academic theology is irredeemably impersonal or theoretical. (Astley, 2002a, p. 28)

Astley recognizes the complex nature of his proposed ordinary theology. There are risks that an ordinary theology may succumb to any number of personal internalized perceptions devoid of an external verifiable referent.

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65 Astley's comments also speak into Pentecostalism's historical suspicion that academic theology serves to stifle spirituality and an immanent experience of God.
The relationship between an ordinary and systematic theology is one which is a little bit more porous and permeable than might first be imagined. An ordinary theology is embedded and takes a temporal and logical priority over any critical evaluative theology. And yet an ordinary theology also co-exists alongside and within an academic systematized knowing: it does so through a continuum of formation/information/formation. Primal perceptions interact, accepting or rejecting, the cognitive knowledge of a systematized theology. Perceptual knowledge, not propositional knowledge, is where ordinary theology begins. Ward and Campbell argue that

ordinary theology is what we start with, a kind of primal knowing that co-exists with the more technical and systematized knowing that is learnt through processes of education. (Ward & Campbell, 2011, p. 226)

There is a risk to an ordinary theology though. A learned faith devoid of an historical referent or beginning can lead to a truncated understanding of the fullness of theology. McGrath has rightly argued that a knowledge of origins is essential to knowledge and understanding. McGrath has thus noted that

the recognition that human thought – whether sociology, theology, ethics or metaphysics- arises in a specific social context is of fundamental importance to the sociology of knowledge. (McGrath, 1990, p. 89)

It will come as no surprise that theorists of an ordinary theology believe that this kind of theology requires an ordinary language (Lees-Smith, 2013, pp. 25-26). The complex and language-specific explanation of faith and practice offered by an academic theology may elude the ordinary practitioner of the Christian faith. Ordinary language expresses, in the terminology of the speaker, the internalized and formative perception of the what, who and why of God’s personal and immanent interventions. God is experienced in the ordinary and that experience is, in turn, expressed in the language of the ordinary, the vernacular (Astley, 2002b; 2010, pp. 44-62; 2014, pp. 69-83).

Anthony Lees-Smith (Lees-Smith, 2013, pp. 23-31) has picked up on Astley’s suggestion that ordinary theology may be viewed “as a theology of the mother tongue” (Astley, 2002b, pp. 77-82). The comparison is with an academic or authoritative father tongue. Taking a decidedly patriarchal stand the father tongue is defined as the
objective “language of power and politics” and objectivity, whereas the mother tongue is defined as the subjective language of relationship, of communication and exchange.

The mother tongue looks back to the origin of ideas, the idea of ordinary theology being expressed in the primal vernacular. Ordinary theology is thus “acquired ‘at our mother's knee’, learnt through engagement with our environment and therefore inextricably bound up with autobiographical details and personal story” (Lees-Smith, 2013, p. 24). Initial and progressively acquired life experiences develop comprehensible meaning e within the context of cultural traditions and perceived expectations (Lees-Smith, 2013, p. 26). For Lees-Smith our ordinary theology may be the result of a complex interaction of cultural inheritance, contextual demands and an attempt to interpret our experiences of God: just as our native language appears to develop as the combination of innate capacity and creativity together with immersion in a particular linguistic tradition. (Lees-Smith, 2013, p. 29)

Astley (Astley, 2010, pp. 44-46) himself sets the discussion of religious language within a broad canvas. It is a frame of reference that comprises an understanding of religious language ranging from a “primary language of living faith” through to a “second order talk about God”. He identifies a spectrum of God-talk that stretches between (a) the poetic and story language of Scripture, piety and worship, with the autobiographical and anecdotal of figurative discourse of ordinary theology, at one end; and (b) the “more prosaic” academic theology, whose language is systematic and consistent, and employs carefully defined concepts at the other” (Astley, 2010, p. 45).

God-talk, then, moves across the spectrum of ordinary and academic theologies. Rather than a preferential option based on a choice of either/or between the ordinary and academic they interact at various stages between the two polarities of the spectrum. Points of interaction across the spectrum may be a consequence of the dynamics of variance of contextuality. Two caveats are essential.

The first caveat offered by Astley is the priority of an existential connection with a living and lived Christian faith expressed through the vernacular of ordinary theology. The reverse, a priority of an academic language, may forfeit theology's “spiritual and practical religious roots” (Astley, 2010, p. 46). Astley warns that
“without this link with our human faith and practice, theology becomes bad news – irrelevant (and sometimes, spiritually misleading) speculation” (Astley, p. 46).

The second caveat is the recognition of a need for an academic or doctrinal language in order to provide a necessary verity and cohesion test of an existentially expressed faith and practice. Creedal statements, for example, express an academic and linguistic precision that may lack clarity and meaning to the “unlearned” but, nevertheless remain as an essential background description of the Christian faith and practice. It is here that Vanhoozer and Strachan’s (Vanhoozer & Strachan, 2015) suggestion is relevant to the interchange of theologies. They promote a decisive role for the local pastor as the interpreter of the essentials of an academic theology in the vernacular. In such a presentation, the essentials of theological accuracy and application may be grasped and put into action by the academically untrained.

The discussion of a vernacular ordinary theology emerging from diverse primal languages addresses the multiple vernacular or mother-tongues of the research participants. The nuances of multiple language contexts can work against the exactness of translation from one primal vernacular to another. The linguistic goal is to arrive at the closest approximations of both the word itself and the meaning of that word within the vernacular context. The task may be prolonged, but it is not without its rewards in an understanding of the “other”, particularly in the context of a culturally conceived ordinary theology (Graham, Walton, & Ward, 2007, pp. 370-372).

The application of terms such as vernacular or mother-father language are not made to identify gender issues, though as Astley noted (Astley, 2002b, pp. 78-79) these may occur in the context of a genderized analogy. Vernacular and mother language stress the ordinariness of the theological language in its primal expressions (Lees-Smith, 2013, pp. 23-31) out of which a “conceptual language of doctrine and theology” is derived (Christie, 2012, p. 149). Ward and Graham conclude

Local theologians believe that God is present and active in generating insights. They possess the potential to review Christian understanding and enable us to discover and claim previously

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66 Christie and Cartledge employ such a theological caveat in their research.
recognizing or unregarded aspects of God’s embodied revelation in Christ. (Graham et al., 2007, p. 371)

For the sake of a multicultural church like Inspire being a theological haven this is no small claim. Its members come from diverse sites within a world Christianity that is increasingly no longer being subject to western oversight. Western Christianity has been challenged to consider a more expansive culturally identifiable pneumatological involvement in the post-colonial south witnessed today in the welcome development of African and Asian theologies. Amos Yong has drawn out the implications of such change:

To embrace our hybridized identities - whether yellow or “red”, or even black or white – is to not have to assimilate to the dominant culture in ways that erase our differences but to be able to maintain solidarity in differentiated ways, with others nearer and further, and to be able to navigate these multiple spectrums, colours and discourses in order to participate in and facilitate the pentecostal fellowship of the one Spirit with its many voices” (Robeck & Yong, 2014, pp. 248-249).

Ordinary theology recognizes the continuing influence of primal personal religious awareness. There is potential here to bridge ordinary perception and academic proposition (Phan, 2003, 1999). Yong follows a similar approach (Robeck & Yong, 2014, pp. 17-27). He brings together his culturally plural formations of his country of origin and his integration into the American church’s expressions of Christian faith and practice, into his academic expertise within a unified understanding of theology. The theologian now has a testimony.

Pentecostal theology is, first, a testimony and then a testimony looking for a biblical identity and, finally, a testimony whose veracity is vouchsafed by a Pentecostal theology. Harvey G. Cox tells his story of his encounter with the Pentecostal testimony:

As a theologian I had grown accustomed to studying religious movements by reading what their theologians wrote and trying to grasp their central ideas and most salient doctrines. But I soon found out that with Pentecostalism this approach does not help much. As one Pentecostal scholar puts it, in his faith ‘the experience of God has absolute primacy over dogma and doctrine’. Therefore, the only theology that can give an account of this experience, he says, is ‘a narrative theology whose central expression is the testimony.” I think he is right... (Cox, 2001, p. 71)
It is at this point that autobiography becomes essential to theography. Testimony, in the sense expressed by Cox, is a specific narrative of God’s actions on behalf of the one giving the testimony. In essence the testimony/narrative is talk about God – a theography.

Cartledge identified testimony as the critical element in understanding the theological concepts held by members of a British Pentecostal church. He employed testimony as an expression of ordinary faith and practice in order to hear the varied stories of the participants (Cartledge, 2006, 2008; Cartledge, 2010a, 2012, 2013, 2015; Cartledge & Cheetham, 2011). He suggested a direct/indirect model based on research of belief and practice as a way in which perceptions of God may be effectively measured. His reason for this model is that:

God is not the direct object of enquiry, since theology is a reflection on faith expressed in belief and practice. God cannot be researched directly because he is a transcendent reality. God is the direct object of faith, whereas the beliefs and practices of religious people are the direct object of theology and thus God as a transcendent reality is the indirect object of theology. This means that the reception of God’s self-revelation by a person can become the object of research, ‘especially in the religious experience in which he … experiences reality as religious.’ (Cartledge, 2015, p. 25)

Cartledge focused his research on “the turn to testimony as a form of legitimate theological discourse” (Cartledge, 2015, p. 29). It is a legitimate hermeneutic partner in the formulation of Pentecostal theology. Cartledge adds that:

[i]t can be argued that the concept of testimony, the telling of one’s personal story of God's activity, is central to the ordinary expression of faith. This is because Pentecostalism is rooted in oral culture, rather than literary culture, and oral culture is shaped by narrativity. (Cartledge, 2010b, p. 17)

Cartledge further considered the pragmatic function of testimony or personal narrative.

The kind of rationality employed within Pentecostalism is more likely to be narrative in shape, a story about what happened and its consequences, rather than a set of abstract propositions. (Cartledge, 2010b, p.17)

An academic or cognitive theology of God by its very nature is prone to the limitations of human rationality in the face of divine transcendence, a danger clearly expressed by Cartledge. Ordinary theology, the

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67 The Pentecostal Movement reflects a priority for a pragmatic immediacy expressed in a hermeneutic of testimony (Richie, 2011, pp. 129-161).
personal and experiential expressions of a belief in practice provides what is lacking. Cartledge allows for a valid approach to research of God as both transcendent objectivity and personified subjectivity. Academic theology answers to the objective and ordinary theology answers to the subjective. A forfeiture of either the objective or the subjective will result in a truncated divine transcendence or an anchorless divine immanence.


An embedded theology may present itself as either covert or overt. Covert embedded theology integrates with the individual’s life context. It is simply assumed and taken for granted. Indeed, an embedded theology in this situation is identified as the norm or the expected. An overt embedded theology, on the other, is that embedded theology that reacts to an altered life context. There is now an absence of normalcy, the presence of the unexpected.

The covert or overt features of an embedded ordinary theology are expressed in the diverse contexts of origin found in churches such as Inspire. Normalcy or its absence can influence perceptions of having found a haven of belonging or of not belonging.

The immigrant, for example, may be more comfortable expressing formal or informal worship in the vernacular or mother tongue, an overt embedded theology. Research participants, members of culturally and ethnically diverse Connect groups demonstrated varying degrees of preference for culturally embedded

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68 Recognising rational limitations should not result in an abandonment of a rational investigation of the divine mystery. Alister E. McGrath, for example, made a significant contribution to a rational theology in his three volume work on a scientific theology (McGrath, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c).
expressions of faith and practice. Attendance at church conducted in English indicate a more covert embedded theology, Connect group meetings are conducted in their language of origin, a more overt embedded ordinary theology. Ordinary theology was expressed in, what was for the participants, their very ordinary practices of faith. Astley does not specifically apply the term embedded to his ordinary theology. Nevertheless, he recognises the continued impact of the origins of such. According to Astley

...the engine that drives our current attitudes, virtues and even cognitions is powered by the memories, images and emotional aftertastes of their learning origination that still lie deep within us.
(Astley, 2002a, p. 23)

My use of the term embedded theology as a characteristic of ordinary theology comes from Astley’s last phrase in the above quotation – “their learning origination that still lie deep within us.”

And yet, change challenges or even threatens an embedded theology. Embedded culturally-formed theological experiences encounter alternative expressions of faith and practice. Fidelity to an embedded belief and practice may be confronted by alternative beliefs and practices. Acceptance of alternatives may imply the diminution of a personal embedded faith and practice.

I am a case study: my theography testifies as to how my personal embedded faith identity went through a series of challenges and change. Could it be that the culturally diverse adherents at Inspire Church are faced with similar challenges to their embedded faith and practice? The question is not simply an academic one. Embedded faith and practice are inextricably linked to personal identity. Forfeiture of the former may negatively impact on the latter. Such a scenario features in multicultural churches such as Inspire. My research formed through personal reflection of embedded theology is indeed designed to understand the process of challenge and change encountered by diverse embedded theologies. It is at this point that embedded theology requires a level of reflection and direction.

While an ordinary theology is recognised as a contributor to an understanding of Christian faith and practice, the analysis of such understandings requires a cognitive or common theological referent. Without a

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69 Indeed, the challenge may be as much political as it is theological, touching on embedded national identity and loyalty.
common theological referent there is nothing against which an ordinary theology may be interpreted or analysed. As a consequence, my survey of the research participants ordinary theology would have lacked a measure of theological verifiability and validity. The research outcome may be descriptive but it would lack analytical integrity. Both academic and ordinary - or better still cognitive and conceptual theologies - need to respond to core systematic claims. Cartledge's research of ordinary theology, for example, was measured against the beliefs and practices of the Assemblies of God of Great Britain. (Cartledge, 2010b). Christie’s research into an ordinary Christology (Christie, 2007, 2012, 2013) and soteriology (Christie & Astley, 2009) was processed through comparisons with orthodox and creedal confessions.

This way of testing an ordinary theology recognizes and respects the validity of an ordinary theology. Its value in theological understanding is affirmed. This engagement with a systematic theology is a way of bringing both perception and proposition together. Astley recognises that

[t]his dialogue – or to use more informal language, this conversation – is between the ‘interpolations’, the implicit or explicit questions and answers of Christian faith, on the one hand, and those of our human experience and life on the other. (Astley, 2002b, p. 3)

This dialogical approach ensures a fuller, even more consistent and cohesive articulation of Christian truth and practice as the lived and the learned come together, a position supported by Christie (Christie, 2013, pp. 41-42) and Astley (Astley, 2002a, pp. 154-162).

Allowing the ordinary people of God to be a criterion of the church’s teaching is rooted in the conviction that ordinary believers can, at least sometimes, be a source of theological wisdom and a medium for divine revelation. (Christie, 2013, p. 42)

The dialogue between academic and ordinary theology reflects the conversation utilized in the research project. A theology that is effectual in reflecting and regulating Christian belief and practice derives from the dialogue between a propositional cognitive theology and a primal conceptual theology. The resultant theology reaches to the core elements of perception and understanding of the human and the divine encounter: lived faith as a first order theology and the learned faith as a second order theology coalesce in a transformative theology for those who have migrated and evidently prefer a haven of belief and practice.
We now turn our attention to the ways in which research into an ordinary theology is carried out. Our focus will be on the research carried out by Mark Cartledge in an Assemblies of God church located in Birmingham and Ann Christie’s research in a number of rural Angelical churches.

Research in ordinary theology is best expressed within the diverse environments of the research participants (Bevans, 2002, p. 18). Contextual and ordinary theologies are necessary partners in the quest to hear the narratives of individual and community experience of divine transcendent and immanence. Astley recognises the partnership as “a proposition of inclusion, not direction... used to express the sense that theology needs to be done from inside a particular framework of interest and concern” (Astley, 2002b, p. 1).

The question is how to uncover the ordinary within the elemental complexities of a primal, vernacular, autobiographical and embedded theology. Cartledge and Christie each found a way.

Cartledge’s research was carried out with members of the Hockley Pentecostal Church in Birmingham. Cartledge’s research was intended to arrive at the “grassroots level of theological discourse”. Cartledge’s research was intended to arrive at the “grassroots level of theological discourse”.  

Research participants reflected a pragmatic Pentecostal approach to theological understanding. This is not to say that they are theologically unaware. Indeed, as Cartledge noted, a level of Pentecostal theological reflection is generally encouraged in Pentecostal churches (Cartledge, 2013, p. 16). Such personal and group reflection may occur in Bible study groups, Connect Groups, conferences. Variations may occur in type, but the intention remains the same: that is to understand the Christian faith and its implications in Christian practice. The result is what Cartledge calls an “ordinary expertise” (Cartledge, 2010b, p. 16).

There are limitations in such research if there is not a third-party referent that acts as an instrument of evaluation and critical analysis. Research that neglects the referent runs the risk of limiting itself to description. Devoid of an instrument of critical analysis the research may fail to provide satisfactory conclusions. Armstrong thus cautions the empirical researcher:

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70 The church was renamed Life Community Church in 2009. www.lifec.co.uk, Accessed 15 December 2017
71 Cartledge’s grassroots approach is mirrored in Simon Chan’s work on Asian Pentecostal theology in which he engaged in a dialogue between various expressions of primal Pentecostal theology and the broader context of Christian theology (Chan, 2014).
What ordinary believers say about their faith is of value and potentially important for the wider faith community only if such talk about God is the result of some critical reflection, and not simply idle thoughts or unreflective opinion. (Armstrong, 2013, p. 65)

Cartledge avoided this risk. The British Assemblies of God Statement of Faith acted as his third-party referent in conjunction with accepted broader Christian statements. Research was carried out through a three-part analysis. First, the ordinary theological narrative was heard. Second, that narrative was subjected to a critical analysis based on the denomination’s Statement of Faith. Third, the outcomes of that analysis were subjected to a critical comparison with accepted theological statements of the broader Christian community. The three-part analysis concluded with what Cartledge termed a rescriptive analysis. The three analytical elements came together in a fresh approach or articulation within the specific topics. A “rescripting of ordinary theology” thus occurred (Cartledge, 2010b, pp. 16-18). Cartledge described his use of rescription as follows:

Rescription in this practical-theological orientation aims to be careful in its representation, sensitive towards the denominational tradition, sympathetic towards Pentecostal spirituality, yet also critical in its analysis and constructive in its proposals. (Cartledge, 2010b, p. 18)

Cartledge analysed participant responses as to how they relate to the British Assemblies of God Statement of Faith and the relationship between the denomination’s theology expressed in the Statement of Faith and the ordinary theology experienced in faith and practice (Cartledge, 2013, p. 109). Cartledge concluded that the denomination’s doctrine was “embedded in the conversion-initiation process” (Cartledge, 2013, p. 112) with a continued affirmation throughout church life.

Although a majority of the participants approved of the Statement of Faith, a number of participants, however, disagreed with the core Pentecostal doctrine of glossolalia as the essential biblical evidence for Spirit baptism. Alternative symbols for receiving Spirit baptism such as trembling under the power of God were suggested. Cartledge concluded that diverse Pentecostal practices within the broader Pentecostal church result in multiple interpretative contexts for the experience of the Holy Spirit (Cartledge, 2013, p. 114).

Ann Christie, senior lecturer at York St John’s University followed a similar pattern (Christie, 2007, 2012). Her interest was in uncovering what ordinary Christians thought about who Jesus is and what he did. Her
approach was very much in line with Astley’s definition of ordinary theology. Research was carried out with forty-five participants in four rural Anglican churches. She utilized the creedal statements of Nicaea and Chalcedon as “the doctrinal norms against which ordinary Christology must be tested” (Christie, 2007, p. 182). A Christological rule of speech that recognises that “Jesus is the one person who is properly spoken of both as God and as a human being” (Christie, 2007, p. 182) was extracted from the creedal statements. To speak of Jesus, then, in the context of the creeds is to speak of Jesus as both God and man. Christie analysed the ways in which the participants either conformed with or contrasted with the creedal affirmations of the humanity and deity of Christ (Christie, 2007, p. 182).

Christie selected a semi-structured methodology (Christie, 2012, p. 21). Each interview began with an opening question. The response then guided the remainder of the interview. Christie meticulously recorded and transcribed each interview. Her intention was to hear and preserve the vernacular speech of primal theology. The responses were then subjected to critical reflection based on theologies surrounding the person and work of Christ.

Christie identified three types of Christologies: the sceptical, ontological and the functional. The six sceptics expressed doubt about the divinity of Jesus. However, doubts as to his divinity did not preclude the participants from identifying themselves as Christians (Christie, 2007, p. 190). It did, indicate also unbelief in miracles.

Those Christie identified as ontological held to the “orthodox doctrine that Jesus is God” (Christie, 2007, p. 187). For them the confession that “Jesus is God” is “synonymous with being a Christian” (Christie, 2007, p. 187). Christie pointedly observed that if such an expectation was indeed obligatory two thirds of the research participants could not be classified as Christians. The responses from the ontological group contrasted with those of the functional group in that...

... they have an image of Jesus as the pre-existent eternal Son present with God at creation. Jesus is thought of as Son of God, not merely from his resurrection, or baptism or virginal conception, but from eternity. (Christie, 2007, p. 188)
Christie expressed surprise that the majority of the participants (30 of the 45) indicated a functional rather than an ontological Christology. Here Jesus is deemed to be an earthly man who acted (functioned) on behalf of God. A pragmatic approach took precedence over a propositional one. Christie noted a hesitancy, even implied refusal, to consider the ontological reality of the two natures of Christ (Christie, 2007, p. 185). The functional group’s recognition of the Trinitarian naming of God does not imply, according to Christie, a doctrine of the Trinity. Rather, “what this group has is a story, which has a Trinitarian structure” (Christie, 2007, p. 182).

Christie observed that her research participants “do not abstract from the story of God’s action to God’s being. This is what academic theologians do. Ordinary theologians are content with story and tend not to engage in speculative thinking” (Christie, 2007, p. 183).

Christie concluded that there was more than a hint of Arianism amongst the responses. The interviewees were, at least, “effectively Arian” (Christie, 2012, p. 57). Christie explained that the contrasts between the ontological and the functional may best be explained in terms of the spectrum between an academic and an ordinary theology.

Academic theology ... is always pressing towards conceptual clarification and ontological explication. Ordinary Christology, by contrast, is not concerned with metaphysical conceptualization and speculation; it is content with the story and is untroubled by these metaphysical issues. (Christie, 2012, p. 151)

Christie’s research of ways in which Jesus was identified utilized the historical Christological creeds as theological referents. When it came to her research into the significance given to what Jesus did there was no one specific creedal statement available such as is available for the question of who Jesus is (Christie & Astley, 2009, p. 180). Instead, she used the theory of substitutionary atonement in order to interpret what Jesus had accomplished through the cross (Christie & Astley, 2009, p. 181). Once again, three types of responses were identified.

The exemplarists identified Jesus’ death as something that illustrates but does not achieve something special for humanity (Christie & Astley, 2009, p. 181). Devoid of an objective meaning, an exemplarist soteriology
identifies with a subjective impact. Respondents recognized the exemplary love of God in the cross but not in a salvific sense (Christie & Astley, 2009, p. 183).

The traditionalists, on the other hand, identified with the traditional understanding of the cross but are unable to express why they do so (Christie & Astley, 2009, p. 184). Belief was expressed as it were, through a given theological formula. Here is the language of the learned, not the vernacular or primal. Without explaining why it does so, for the traditionalist what is essential is that Christianity works for them (Christie & Astley, 2009, p. 185).

Unlike the other two groups the evangelicals responded with belief in a substitutionary atonement (Christie & Astley, 2009, p. 187). Christie explained that “the evangelicals have *explicitly* learned substitutionary atonement theology during their socialisation into evangelical Christianity” (Christie & Astley, 2009, p. 188). This is not to say that the evangelicals have engaged in a greater level of theological reflection than the other two groups. The idea of a personal relationship was also a significant addition to the evangelical response as “evangelical piety depends on knowing Jesus personally, directly, and intimately in one’s heart rather than one’s head” (Christie & Astley, 2009, p. 189).

Christie concluded that urgent work must be done to better interpret the meaning of the cross for those who are puzzled or offended by the idea of substitutionary atonement (Christie & Astley, 2009, p. 193). In much the same way she called for a re-telling of Christology in a contemporary idiom, “the church needs to tell new stories of how Jesus saves – stories that address the religious needs of our contemporary world and that are credible and believable for modern minds” (Christie & Astley, 2009, pp. 193-194).

The research into an ordinary theology carried out by Cartledge and Christie recognized the essential interplay between ordinary and academic theology. While Nicholas M. Healy placed a limitation on the role of ordinary theology in the official formulations of church theology (Healy, 2013, p. 20), Cartledge and Christie opted for a dialogical approach. Their research projects were significant not only for an academic audience but also, and perhaps more so, for the academically untrained to understand their ordinary theology and, where necessary, to correct or enhance that understanding. Within the dialogical framework the resulting theology is
one that expresses a lived and learned process of seeking to understand the ineffable mystery of God in immanent relationship with his creation. Christie speaks to all those whose desire is to faithfully and effectively communicate the truth of God:

> how can we help people grow in their faith if we do not understand something about what they believe and why they hold the belief they do? (Christie, 2013, p. 39)

Ordinary theology is a valid and invaluable assist in qualitative research. The scope of that significance continues through the application of a quantitative element to the articulation of the research findings contributing to the understanding of Christian faith and practice. The contributions of the ordinary theology of the ordinary Christian provides practitioners of practical and scholastic theologies with an understanding of Christian theology within the praxis of the common (ordinary) life. Christie is correct to conclude that ordinary theology raises “issues of considerable significance for those involved in the Church’s educational ministry as well as those engaged in apologetics and evangelism” (Christie, 2013, p. 39). Astley further affirms that in ordinary theology

> There is an uncontroversial, pragmatic justification for its study in that the church needs to know the beliefs, and patterns of processes of believing of those who receive its communicative and pastoral ministries. The wider significance of ordinary theology, however, and the theological justification for its study is that ordinary theology in some sense “works” for those who own it. It fits their life experience and gives meaning to, and expresses the meaning they find within their own lives. (Astley & Francis, 2013, p. 2)

Martyn Percy takes Astley’s ecclesial position a step further. He asserts that what is an essential element of ordinary theology within the Pentecostal sense - that is, power and empowerment in the local church. Charismatic giftings - and God encounters based on grace and orally testified- give credence to, and empowerment for, the ordinary stories of Pentecostal experiences of God. In this way the testimonies of ordinary theology are recognised participants in the formation of a Pentecostal theology. Thus, (Percy, 2013, pp. 55-63).

Furthermore, an ordinary theology links the church community’s participation with the ongoing ministry of the Holy Spirit (Armstrong, 2013, p. 67). In view of this benefit the research project employed a semi-structured interview process in which participants were encouraged to freely discuss their perceptions of God
within their specific Connect Group. As well, a qualitative-quantitative questionnaire based on the attributes of God was provided to each participant. Thus, the stories of the ordinary theologians are heard and heeded.

The theological haven that is emerging is sufficiently spacious to make room for these differing ordinary theologies. It allows those who find their haven here the possibility of maintaining an identity in faith through a vernacular language or a “mother tongue”. The haven itself is constructed within the distinctive believing emphases of a Pentecostal tradition – but it is a global Pentecostalism that is seeking itself to come to terms with cultural differences. It can as such accommodate multiple ordinary stories, testimonies – and indeed theographies.
Chapter Five

Participating in ordinary theology

The origins of this thesis lie in personal experience. This enquiry into the ways in which the attributes of God may be privileged by country of origin has taken place within a particular theological haven. The words of worship and discipleship that are to be found in this haven are used to describe the language of personal experience and testimony. It is an environment in which ordinary theology is practised. That simple description masks a possible difficulty. The problem is me.

From the perspective of a theological reflection there is a particular point of tension to be negotiated. Judith Thompson (Thompson, Pattison, & Thompson, 2008) refers to the role of the one who is reflecting. Often the individual concerned with reflecting on ordinary experience is a member of the Christian community whose experience is being reflected upon. It is not enough simply to make a distinction between the formally trained and those who are not and then rely on a distinction to be made between a critical theology and primal, vernacular and embedded understandings of faith. This tension to be negotiated is actually a double movement. It must delve into my personal experience of how I found a theological haven in an understanding of the fatherhood of God and attributes of relationality. It must also explore the encounter between attributes where sense of the immediacy of God differed – and where the attributes of God were alternatively weighted.

That type of observation effectively establishes a link between an ordinary theology and another relative newcomer to the field of theology, the autobiographical turn or theography. That word, theography, is beginning to be used in order to express the course of an individual’s life perceived in the light of belief in and the apprehension of God. Theography is not the same as autobiography which is driven more by its desire to relate the story of the self. Here the focus is on the relationship of the self to God and, indeed, may even be regarded as a subjective expression of providence.
The story I am about to tell is my personal testimony. It is a case study on how country of origin can inform perceptions of God and what it is then like to encounter a different cultural experience of the same. The purpose of this case study is to present a theographic narrative based on the assumption that other migrants might have experienced something similar. In terms of Thompson’s concern over the role of a participant observer I differ from those who filled in the questionnaires. I have received a formal theological education whereas they fit in with Astley’s and Christie’s understandings of those who have not. There is a need to clarify further what is the purpose and intent of a theography. Theography focuses not on the religious object but on the religious subject. The intent is to understand:

the process by which religious subjects reflexively negotiate between affective and discursive framings of the transcendent, and then work upon the self to reflect that framing through practice…(Sutherland, 2017, p. 326)

Theography as such is a reflective praxis that intersects with cognitive theology in the hope of a transformative outcome. Sutherland observes that “religious ways of being are not formed out of homogenous affect and discourse but out of a plurality (Sutherland, 2017, p. 333). The reflective praxis of theography is not static but a continuing narrative.

Theography is thus not simply the descriptive retelling of personal events. Rather, there is a story, a testimony or witness, to the experienced meanings attached to personal events and experiences. Personal witness is not a reiteration of events whose meanings are defined within rational boundaries. Rather, the witness given within its own integral context to its theography, interprets and gives meaning to the witness.

Rebecca Chopp describes this kind of process as a poetic testimony (Chopp, 2001, pp. 56-70). Borrowing from judicial procedures, Chopp defines poetic testimony as the meaning given to the event or experience. The essential interpretative function of testimony provides meaning to the reality. Without the interpretative witness the experience/event has no meaning. Poetic testimony, then, is a reflective witness.
Chopp is concerned with the portrayal of reality when its meaning is defined solely by reason. In such a scenario reason stands as both judge and jury over testimony. Coherence and consistency is identified not from within the narrative but from outside the narrative with reason “deciding which of the jarring witnesses will be included and which will be excluded into silence, into powerlessness, as irrational” (Chopp, 2001, p. 60). For Chopp, on the other hand, reality is not given to the testimony but is expressed from within the testimony. The judicial analogy of testimony is reversed.

Theories are now placed on trial and poetic testimony is called upon to be both judge and juror. Reason is required to hear and heed the multiple voices of poetic testimony as it is these voices that give expression and meaning to theory and, thus, to reality. History is meaningless unless events are given meaning through poetic testimony. As Chopp pointedly states

[t]estimonies describe the real in ways that require people to see these events that reason and theory do not count, do not authorize, do not signify. (Chopp, 2001, p. 64)

Heather Walton poignantly identifies how otherwise ‘unspeakable’ elements can make up a poetic testimony. As she states

[w]hile recognizing that some experiences are neglected or denied in dominant discourses, the poetics of testimony is concerned with those aspects of human life that cannot be addressed at all within our usual registers and are currently ‘unspeakable’. Experiences of trauma and abuse, ecstasy or pain, fall into this category and witnessing to their significance requires extraordinary means. Imaginative forms must be created that bear the unbearable in speech. (Walton, 2014, p. 180)

For Chopp poetic testimony is “fundamentally concerned with human and earthly survival and transformation, and thus renders a moral claim on human existence” (Chopp, 2001, p. 57). The ideas of
transformation and morality give poetic testimony a theological context that relates significantly to this research project. For Chopp the theological element relates directly to what she terms “emancipatory transformation”.

This theme of “emancipatory transformation” is at times overshadowed by transient events in personal and national narratives. And yet, the idea of transformation is anticipated in the reflective testimonies of a longed for but elusive emancipation. The post conversion reflection highlights the idea of transformation through unexpected divine grace.

This transformation is linked to transcendence. Poetic testimony must engage with a transcendent reality. Transformation is indeed the result of the presence of transcendence. If devoid of that presence the very act/process of transformation remains unfulfilled.

Poetic testimony is both a private and public discourse. A private testimony indicates possession and identity. The testimony belongs to someone. The testimony identifies who that someone is. As a private narrative “a testimony requires being heard in its own voice, style, and content” (Chopp, 2001, p. 65) that is, in its ordinary vernacular. Redaction, correction or coerced compliance to a given theory are anathema to poetic testimony. The intensity of the personal testimony may be reflected in what to others may be a “strange voice” (Chopp, 2001, p. 61; Walton, 2014, p. 180), but the valid voice of the witness is heard.

The term “testimony” also identifies the public nature of the story. Private testimony is only testimony when it has entered the public domain as witness. An internalised testimony is contrary to the definition of the term. One does not testify to oneself. Testimony is not soliloquy.

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72 Walton (Walton, 2014, p. 179) creatively utilizes Ricoeur’s metaphorical construct in the poetic process of understanding self and others: “Metaphoric construction is what enables human beings to engage in transformative action in the world as they create new conjunctions which allow them to apprehend existence in fresh ways.”

73 Hope and Eriksen demonstrate a practical way in which that voice may be heard (Hope & Eriksen, 2009).
Testimony is a first-person narrative. In this sense, a choice is made to give “witness” to the narrative to ensure that the personal story gives its own meaning to the developing personal theology. Jung Young Lee expresses the essence of autobiographical theology:

Theology is certainly autobiographical, because I alone can tell my faith story. However, it is not an autobiography. Telling my story is not itself theology but a basis for theology, indeed the primary context for doing my theology. This is why we cannot do theology for another. If theology is contextual, it must certainly be at root autobiographical. (Lee, 1995, p. 7)

Despite the risks, poetic testimony is public as “one testifies in and to the public space about what one has seen, what one has experienced, what one knows to have really happened” (Chopp, 2001, p. 62). There is a moral dilemma here. Poetic testimony “is from someone to someone about something” (Chopp, 2001, p. 63). In the giving and receiving of testimony a moral decision is required. Witness is not simply the retelling of an event, or series of events as an impersonal observer. Ultimate meaning is discovered only through personal participation. The meaning given alludes to a moral significance that demands a moral decision on the part of the witness and the hearer.

In the case of my theography on occasions I made choices on what was to be private and what was to be public. My theography as poetic testimony, then, reflects personal and vocational dilemmas in which moral challenges were met and decisions made and re-made. In the instances of personal trauma, I made choices - first, to remain silent. In this way, what occurred was contrary to my “testimony” to a series of ostensibly routine medical examinations. In the second instance, I identified the incident for what it was. I made a third choice which was to include these two incidents in my theography. This option was not without challenge. Reflection on sexual abuse and making public that reflection involved myself once again with these events. However, it is out of their theographic context that an ordinary theology of divine intervention and providence is formed.

Alluded to by Hodgson in his intensely personal epilogue (Hodgson, 1994, pp. 332-337). Walton concisely states; “It is not easy to speak of God in public” (Walton, 2014, p. 181)
I was born in 1947. My mother was Australian. My father was born in Barcelona, Spain. In that year, the Australian population was 89.82% English and Irish. The Australian culture was defined in terms of its Anglo-Celtic identity: “In the Australia of 1947 it was normal to be a member of the Church of England, of British background, to eat meat pies, and to fear the Yellow Peril” (Bouma 1995). In Bouma’s terms our Catholic family was part of a religious minority. Based much on ethnic origins, the children of post-World War II Australia experienced a religious divide between Catholics and Protestants.

This Australia was on the verge of dramatic change, however. The stringent requirements of the Immigration Restrictions Act (1901) were relaxed and the post-war population growth through mass migration began. Arthur Calwell, Australia’s first Minister of Immigration, defended mass immigration as a matter of national security: “If Australians have learned one lesson from the Pacific War, it is surely that we cannot continue to hold our island continent for ourselves and our dependants, unless we greatly increase our numbers.” Calwell’s rallying cry, “populate or perish”, became the mantra for an unprecedented cultural and ethnic transformation of the Australian population.

Demographic issues were not the concerns of a child in rural New South Wales. The developing multi-ethnicity of the Australian community was confined to a curiosity at the nearby Bonegilla Migrant Reception and Training Centre. I could not, however, escape the ethnic challenge within my extended family distinguished by an often uneasy relationship between its Australian and Spanish members. Initially I had little desire for inter-cultural awareness and multi-ethnic identity. Like Don Aitkin’s (Aitkin, 2005) reflections of his personal journey

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75 In 1947, less than 10% of the Australian population was born overseas. [http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/2f762f95845417aece25706c00834efa/5f4cb6b7c223dce4ca2570ee00751357|OpenDocument]. Accessed 14th August 2016

76 No statistics were found for second generation Australians in 1947. A child of Australian and Spanish parents was, then, outside the statistically significant. [http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/2f762f95845417aece25706c00834efa/10072ec3f4f7b4ca2570ec00787c40|OpenDocument]

77 Census information available through the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicates that the prominence of the Church of England in 1947 may not be as significant as Bouma suggests. The percentages stated by the ABS are: Anglican 39% of the Australian population, Catholic 20.9% and other Christians 28.1%. However, the statistics enforce the reality of an overwhelmingly Protestant population (67.1%) in contrast to the Catholic population (20.9%). [http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/2f762f95845417aece25706c00834efa/10072ec3f4f7b4ca2570ec00787c40|OpenDocument]


79 [http://www.newgeography.com/content/002858-populate-or-perish|Accessed 27th January 2018]

of self-discovery and identity, I would only much later come to appreciate the significance of my own multi-cultural story.

My primal theological identity resulted from a mixed Christian formation. My Protestant mother agreed, prior to marriage, that all children resulting from the marriage would be raised Catholics. She was faithful to her promise. I was educated in Catholic schools and participated in the Catholic stages of spiritual growth marked by the sacraments of baptism, penance, Holy Communion and confirmation. Within a largely Protestant Australia (them), I identified as Catholic (us).

Earliest recollections of school life in Albury, NSW, included watching the mainly Protestant students attending the state school across the road from the Catholic school I attended. They would sing with gusto as they passed by our school; “Catholics, Catholics, sitting on a log, eating maggots out of a frog.” We could not allow such sentiment to go unchallenged. With equal gusto, and very little theology, our response was given; “Catholics, Catholics, ring the bell, while the Protestants march to hell”.

As a Catholic, the church was a defined community, a haven. After all, in my naïve theology, encouraged by what I was taught in school, only Catholics went to heaven. What better sense of security could there be in a post-World War II Australia in the emerging years of the Cold War.

I learned my faith at school. Religion was not discussed in a home where the tenuous nature of my parents’ marriage was moving to its inevitable collapse by the time I reached my early teens. I did not question the existence of God. That God loved me was taken for granted as was His consistent alertness to even the slightest misdemeanour (venial sin). Fear of sin’s ultimate consequences was embedded into my faltering practice of faith. And yet, my Catholic faith was a haven of belonging and belief. The Australian Catholicism of the time would brook no alternative.

That embedded Catholic identity and personal self-awareness was challenged by a series of personal traumas. The first of these occurred when I was nine years of age. Concerned with my physical development, my
mother took me to see our family doctor. He suggested that I was showing signs of an early puberty. He scheduled weekly visits over the next few months to monitor my physical development. He conducted a physical examination during each visit, including what he told me was a medical procedure but is now recognised as a form of sexual abuse. While doing this procedure he questioned me. Did I do this? How often? I replied in the positive. Through that encounter what was solitary was becoming something shared; I was active but now I was made passive.

I recall the apprehension I experienced during the examinations. Was I enjoying all this? If anybody else knew what was happening, what would they think of me? Was the doctor enjoying what he was doing? Or, was he simply repeating a medical examination? Who was I, a boy of nine, to question the motives and actions of such an authoritative figure? My unease and uncertainty with what he did and why he did it and my apparent willingness to let it happen remained with me long after the medical sessions concluded.

I was unprepared for the moral dilemma I faced. To tell my parents what was happening might implicate me as well. If they were concerned with my behaviour before, what would they think of me now? The shame that may come out was unthinkable. The doctor may have been right after all. What if it was nothing more than a medical procedure? Should I remain silent and hope that time would erase the memory? Like many in similar situations I chose silence. My testimony went unspoken, unheard and unheeded.

The inevitable breakdown of our family during the same period resulted in the loss of a father figure, even though a marred one, at a critical time. Allegiance to the Catholicism of a now absent father was maintained through attendance at Catholic schools and occasional participation in the sacramental spirituality of the church. Although I now rejected my multi-ethnic identity I clung to my Catholic identity. A continued Catholic identity was essential in the context of personal uncertainty and confused multi-ethnic identity. At least there was a sense of continuum within an embedded, though shaky, Catholic theography.

My mother remarried a number of years later. Our step-father provided a revitalised father figure. Through his influence we were to learn and appreciate a secure family environment in which mutual respect and moral order were paramount. The formation of my perceptions of what the term “father” really means began
Even though the trauma I went through remained hidden but remembered by myself, I was now privileged with a developing safe and stable family haven.

The second trauma occurred at the age of fourteen. I was inappropriately touched by a member of a religious teaching order. He accompanied me and other students on a bus excursion sponsored by members of an historical society. At first, I thought, or hoped, that it was purely accidental. However, his actions became bolder. Whenever an adult approached he ceased; only to continue after they left. This practice went on for some hours.

What had started out as an ordinary class excursion was now a time of betrayal, shame and guilt. It was betrayal by a religious power figure. It was guilt because I had not resisted. It was shame because my class colleagues sitting alongside of me were aware of what he was doing but remained silent.

The moral dilemma of Chopp's poetic testimony re-occurred. This time, however, I was not able to carry the moral implications on my own. I made the choice. The following day I told my parents. My Catholic school education was abruptly terminated.

In a case of sad irony the two incidents of trauma came together. I was taken to the family doctor for counselling. His conclusions were ambiguous. He had discussed the incident with the school principal prior to our meeting. As a result, the perpetrator was transferred to a correspondence school. Reminding me of my similar responses four years previous, however, he concluded, that I had passively concurred with what had happened. I was not to worry, though, he assured me. Other boys had similar experiences. He shared details of his own similar experiences when he was about my age.

This was no resolution for me. Shame and guilt were embedded even deeper. A fragile consciousness of God's immanence remained. Yet, this was mixed with a sense of God's judgement, not his grace. The guilt of my repeated passivity may have been naive on my part but it was nonetheless very real.
Betrayed by religious and community authority figures I yet sought for a haven of belonging and identity by other means ways. I found my shelter, my haven in books. The literary testimonies of others provided a vicarious landscape through which to explore my place in the real world.

Yevgeny Yevtushenko’s poem, ‘The city of Yes and the city of No’, provided one such literary landscape. Here was a graphic reflection of the seemingly endless, even futile, search for meaning and self-worth. The convoluted yet repetitive journeys between the two cities of extremes mirrored my own ambiguous search for self-identity and ultimate meaning. The poet found no solace, no haven, in either a city of nebulous joy or a city of sterile pursuits. Better to remain in neither, he concluded. And yet, as attractive as the poetic ideal seemed, the idea of an unending journey between two extremes was counter to the personal and religious struggles I encountered.

I sought answers to the questions of “why”, and particularly, “why me”. Possibilities of coincidence, accident, personal fault or an incognito divine purpose shared fluctuating prominence. Unaware of its literary fame, I read Thornton Wilder’s Bridge of San Luis Rey (1927). Wilder’s haunting suggestion of covert divine design and providence preserved a sense of the possibility of God’s reality in my own journey.

By the time I reached twenty-one my family had become regular attendees at the Assembly of God Church in Albury. I accompanied them occasionally. My resistance to a vigorously proffered conversion was, initially, intense and defensive. Despite the fragile nature of my Catholicity, conversion was tantamount to abandonment of religious identity and faith community. Conversion was, as yet, a step too far.

\[\text{\footnotesize 80 Walton (Walton, 2014, p. 177) reminds us that “we should not despise the passion with which human beings desperately plunge into the chaos of life to seize whatever is needed to create meaning”. There is something here of discreet providence in my plunging into literature rather than more dubious moral alternatives.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 81 “Better let me be tossed around-- To the end of my days, between the city of Yes and the city of No! Let my nerves be strained like wires between the city of No And the city of Yes!” (Yevtushenko, 1966). J.D. Salinger’s Holden Caulfield also became a much-read literary companion.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 82 Yardley, Jonathan (2009). Second reading: Jonathan Yardley on Thornton Wilder’s 'Bridge of San Luis Rey.} \]


\[\text{\footnotesize 83 One might consider such an experience as a struggle of the soul. Whatever the label given to that experience, it was personally real and emotionally intense. I was loathe to abandon what was a haven of identity, tenuous though it was.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 84 Catholicism and Protestantism, especially Pentecostalism, were perceived as contrasts in Australia in the late 1960’s.}\]
The simple even primal faith of the congregation expressed a redemptive immediacy that was, nevertheless, attractive. Perhaps, here the poetic journey might discover its ultimate destination. Persistence on the part of the pastor coupled with my recognition of a personal need of God coalesced in a definitive salvation experience. At that point, I made a decisive break with the religious identity to which I had stubbornly clung.85

A revitalized faith and practice took on a new personal priority. Salvation introduced a personal encounter with the immanent Triune God. I rediscovered the father figure, forfeited through family breakdown and betrayal by medical and religious authority figures. A marred personal identity was redefined. Encouraged by the relationally focused congregation a newly formed perception of God as Father was now embedded as the significant theme of my personal perception of God. The corollary of a new understanding of God as Father was a new self-awareness and self-worth as a child of God. Personal discovery and transformation would continue.

The Pentecostal community replaced the faith community that I had abandoned. I finally found the haven of belonging that eluded the poet. I increasingly served within the community. Indistinctly at first, but inexorably clearer, I felt a call to a ministry vocation.86

Encouraged by the church leadership I received the Pentecostal experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The resultant dimension of spirituality focused on a relationship with the immanent God. The idea and the experience of God the Father coalesced in a post-conversion testimony forming a new understanding of self within the context of the immanence of transcendent love and grace. In the past I had not thought of God through attributes of the Father. The idea of a theological haven – if indeed there was one - consisted of a Catholic identity and sacramentality. The Pentecostal experience was more immediate, personal and relational. The Fatherhood of God was not simply the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as per Paul’s epistle. Nor was the Father simply the Abba to whom Jesus prayed the Lord’s Prayer nor the Father to whom He committed His Spirit while dying on the cross. God the Father was now in a relationship with me through a baptism in the Spirit and

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85 I would only realize much later that my conversion to Christ did not necessitate a total rejection of the dormant Christian faith that was expressed through my somewhat difficult Catholic journey.

86 The term ‘felt’ is not used here to indicate a sense of indecisiveness. On the contrary, it is used to best describe the innate conviction that a vocation to Christian ministry was the direction God had chosen for me. Yevtushenko’s never-ending return journeys, for me, was re-directed toward a single destination.
through the Name of the Triune God. This Father had attributes. They were not merely ones of transcendent otherness, unrelenting judgement, indifference or wrath. They were attributes of empathy, love, forgiveness, grace, understanding and patience. I now found myself within a theological haven of belief and relationality. Fatherhood now attracted a moral quality of being.

Two years after my conversion I married my pastor’s daughter and we prepared for Christian ministry at the Assemblies of God Commonwealth Bible College, Brisbane. My theography now becomes a shared one; at times intentionally singular and other times plural. Ordination as a minister of the Assemblies of God in Australia in 1973 accompanied a personal resolve to explore the Christian faith and practice from a deeper theological perspective.

At this point my reflective theography intersects with the theological discourse anticipated in the beginning of this chapter. It is this intersection that gives meaning to my faith and practice. Inclusion of the biblical references is intended to comply with a Pentecostal narrative that relies on biblical mediation to provide the external authoritative referent for the narrative or testimony.

My testimony so far developed a theme of covert divine providence.87 The story is, in itself, unremarkable within the context of the post-World War II Australian society, sadly even within its darker moments. Following Chopp’s definition of witness, my story is not intended to draw attention to a series of events, but to draw meaning out of those events by locating them in the context of the experience of God in my personal history.

The significance of the events witnessed in my poetic testimony, such as those of personal trauma and salvation, following Chopp (Chopp, 2001), is not the events in themselves that make up the autobiography. Rather, the significance is in the meaning given to such events; the reality is given to the history by the narrator’s interpretive reflection of the events, a theography. Here the poetic draws reality to the surface, to be confronted, interpreted and embedded. The theographic story, though unrecognized or even rejected, unfolds within the shadow of God’s unobtrusive interventions.

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87 The God narrative moves from covert to overt providence, all the while processing transformational interventions in a personal narrative.
My pre-conversion testimony of ethnic uncertainty, and personal trauma formed a tenuous perception of an absentee God. The post-conversion testimony re-evaluated my idea of divine absenteeism to a narrative of God’s immanence. Between the narratives is the crucial event of a new beginning (John 3:1-21). The validity of my turn to a salvation theography was tested through interaction with the Pentecostal witness to redemptive immediacy and the Spirit’s immanency.

It is now time to draw upon a Pentecostal hermeneutic. The biblical testimony affirms the immediacy of personal salvation (2 Corinthians 5:17). Forgiveness and consequent peace with God are at the heart of the salvation that comes by faith in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:5, 7; 2:13; 5:1). The salvation motif is decisive in my personal testimony. The transformative intervention of God’s mercy and grace confronted shame, humiliation and guilt. Reconciliation with God and adoption as a child of God (John 1:12; Romans 8:15; Galatians 3:26) coalesce in a new identity and relationship.

This is not to say that trauma is forgotten or memories somehow eradicated. Consciousness of personal history validates the reality of the past, present and future. The past remains in the memory but is now interpreted from the side of mercy and grace and not that of shame and guilt. There is a link here between God’s prescient providence acting in the past with the future in view and my re-interpreting past history within the scope of future hope (Psalm 139).

A Pentecostal spirituality is reflected in personal relationship with the immanent Triune God (Romans 8:1-27). The new-found perspective of God as Father resounds with the biblical narrative of the Holy Spirit’s ministry to the individual (Romans 8:15-16). It is the Spirit of God who makes God known in the present reality of the imminent eschaton.

An empowered spirituality is an essential, but not necessarily obligatory requirement for Pentecostal ministry (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-8; 4:31; 6:10; 7:55; 10:19, 44-47; 19:1-6; Romans 1:11; 5:5; 8:1-16; 12:1-14:50). The declaration and demonstration of salvation through the crucified Christ in the enabling power of the Holy Spirit is at the very heart of the call to Pentecostal ministry (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). The personal testimony
resonates with the idea that a calling to ministry is based on God's grace and mercy and for his glory and not personal attributes or attainment (1Timothy 1:12-17).

It is fitting that I return to my theography. The context here is my testimony of God’s immanence within the formation of Christian ministry. My perception of God’s immanent presence as a daily reality developed throughout my initial period of pastoral ministry. My wife and I faced the sometimes-daunting challenges of pastoring small churches while at the same time providing for our family. These were years of ministry development and spiritual formation. I was at home in Christian ministry. My resolution to minister the immanence of the transcendent Trinity within a Pentecostal dynamic sometimes faulted but was consistently re-affirmed by divine grace and mercy.

The conclusion of this phase of pastoral ministry commenced with a series of unanticipated divine interventions. On the conclusion of ministry at the Assemblies of God in Launceston we returned to Albury for what we hoped would be a brief respite before re-commencing pastoral ministry somewhere else. This was not to be, however.

Soon after our return to Albury we attended the National Conference of the Assemblies of God, held that year in the city of Brisbane. I anticipated receiving an invitation for future ministry while attending the conference. This did not happen, at least, in the way I expected. The guest speaker at the conference was an American missionary evangelist with an extensive ministry in Brazil. The concluding service featured an opportunity for the conference participants to come together in a time of dedication and commitment. As he gave the invitation, the speaker mentioned his need of pastors to assist him in the development of an extension Bible college. In Brazil. Almost simultaneously my wife and I said to each other, “that’s us”.

I made initial enquiries while the missionary evangelist was still in Australia. He promised to send further details once he returned to Brazil within a month. During that month I received invitations to pastoral ministry at a number of churches and returned to Albury. We agreed not to accept any ministry invitation until we had resolved, one way or another, the potential invitation to ministry in Brazil. The promised letter arrived from Brazil and often arduous negotiations began for appointment as Assemblies of God missionaries to Brazil.
It was necessary to obtain further theological education to comply with Brazilian government regulations. I enrolled a well-known Pentecostal Bible College in Manila. We expected to stay for three years. However, we stayed one week. In that week we experienced a significant example of God’s immanent presence and grace-filled concern. There was no doubt that God was preparing us for overseas service. It all had to do with Psalm 121:1-8.

We attended church on our first Sunday in Manila. Prior to the service I prayed quietly in the church foyer and thumbed through the Psalms. Psalm 121 caught my attention. And there it was; “The Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore” (verse 8). During the service first-time visitors received an American Bible Society Scripture card. We received a card with Psalm 121. Yet I was troubled.

The first week of classes commenced on Monday. I put my agitation down to culture shock. We were out of our comfort zone. However, by the end of the week we made the difficult decision to return to Australia. I informed the College principal of our decision. Unexpectedly he agreed with our decision. He concluded our conversation with a prayer and unexpectedly Psalm 121. He suggested that the final verse indicated God’s protective presence in our leaving Manila and our return to Australia.

A week later we checked in at the Manila airport. I was surprised to see a senior Australian pastor waiting in the same queue. He questioned our being in Manila. Once we had checked in for our flight I told him our story. When I finished, he gave me unconditional support for our return. Furthermore, he gave me his phone number to give to anybody who questioned either our return to Australia or our eventual ministry in Brazil.

The final affirmation came from the director of the Assemblies of God Missions Department, I informed him of our rapid return to Australia. He replied by return mail that what we experienced in Manila would stand us in good stead in Brazil.

Our experience in Manila particularly in the context of Psalm 121 conforms to a pragmatic immediacy informed by a triadic Pentecostal hermeneutic. The haven of belief and belonging I discovered through salvation in Christ is restricted by neither time or place.
And so, in 1984, we commenced an eighteen-year period of ministry in Brazil and Portugal. During that period I discovered the richness of personal and theological formation through engagement with those whose theological statements were similar to mine yet, whose spiritual formation was dissimilar. It also initiated the process that led to a recognition and appreciation of my own multi-ethnic identity, seeing it, for the first time, interacting with another culture and ethnicity. This new stage in my reflective story uncovered the gap between my anticipation and the reality I encountered. The learning process was what at first appeared to be a dissonant dialogue between my Australian spirituality and a Brazilian spirituality.

Personal and ethnic identity moved from uneasy suspicion to personal appreciation and participation during my time in Brazil. The trigger for the change was the way in which ethnicity and Christian identity were uniquely, and to me, unexpectedly expressed in the belief and practice of the Brazilian church. For the first time, I was compelled to consider the cultural formation of my understanding of Christian faith and practice. Perhaps naively, I was not prepared for the dimension of the faith encounter. After all, I was working within the same denomination. I anticipated a uniformity of faith and practice. If theology is the same, would not the expressions of that theology also be the same? Reflecting on my anticipations at the time I now see how little I then understood of the interaction of theology and culture.

According to the 2017 Declaration of Faith, the Brazilian Assemblies of God’s theology of God conforms with a creedal Christian orthodoxy. The preface to the declaration recognises the ecumenical creeds such as the Apostles Creed, the Nicene and Nicene-Constantinopolitan as well as the Chalcedonian and Athanasian creeds. The creeds are included as an appendix to the Declaration of Faith. The declaration affirms belief in the Triune God, the Creator and Sovereign of heaven and earth. The relational attributes of God are discussed under the sub heading of the moral attributes of God (Chapter 2:2). In the first instance God is love. He is also incomparable in his holiness, his truth, faithfulness, justice, love, goodness, kindness and mercy. Johnson’s research of Pentecostalism in the prisons of Rio de Janeiro indicates the transformative reality of such attributes of God. Despite the environment of incarceration, the Pentecostal churches in the prisons are havens of belief.
and belong where “God as an all-loving, all-forgiving father is an abstract concept that was embodied through the deeply religious practices in the cellblocks” (Johnson, A. 2017, p.133).

Initially I stood apart from the cultural environment and observed the cross flow of culture, ethnicity and faith at work in the Brazilian church. It was not my intention, however, to remain an outsider, a theological voyeur. I was determined to become an accepted part of the church community to which I had been called to minister. Anything less would stultify our ministry. Christian ministry is expressed in the context of relationship with a faith community 88 identified in my thesis as a haven of belief and belonging.

Brazilian Pentecostal expressions of faith and practice impacted on my understanding of Christian faith and practice. Over time the Brazilian testimony became an extension of my testimony engaging dramatically with my ethnic and theological theories and experience. Hesitant at first, I reflected on the primal and embedded influences that had formed the ways in which I perceived God’s interventions in my life.89 The issues were theological and sociological (Davies, 2008; Gill, 2012a, 2012b, 2013; Scharen & Vigen, 2011) as well as intensely personal.

My understanding of God formed through the narrative of my theography was challenged.90 Theographies of the “other”, narrated in a new vernacular would play a part in the continuing narration of my theography. My initial suspicion of what I perceived in Brazil as an ever-present God of love yet ready to discipline even the most minor misdemeanours seemed uncomfortably familiar to me. This suspicion was to change, however. I looked at the Brazilian Pentecostal perceptions of God through the prism of a unique Brazilian theography. Gill’s observation certainly applied to me.

Theologians inevitably interact with society at large, and, however much they may seek to influence that society, they themselves are influenced by it. (Gill, 2012a, p. 15)

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88 An uncertain relationship with my primal faith community ended when I committed to a new faith community. Geographically removed from that community I recognised that I needed to identify with the Brazilian faith community.
89 Seeing the story of the “other” inevitably causes one to see afresh one’s own story.
90 Embedded theology is not static but dynamic. As such, embedded theology is open, to coin Hodgson’s phrase, to “the wind of the Spirit” (Hodgson, 1994).
The following incident illustrates the tension between my perception of the Brazilian Pentecostal narrative of a God of immediate judgement and my perception of a God of immanent encounter of grace and mercy.

On arrival in Brazil, we were informed that my hair was too long and my wife’s hair too short. We would, therefore, not be accepted into the local church. My problem was quickly resolved with a visit to the barber shop. It would take time for my wife’s hair to grow. She was obliged to request personally forgiveness from the senior pastor and promise not to cut her hair again. Unbeknownst to us at the time, we were in violation of a series of resolutions unanimously passed by delegates at the 1975 National Conference of the Assemblies of God in Brazil, one of which prohibited long hair for men and short hair for women.

It appeared to me that the Assemblies of God in Brazil projected a God as a judge ready to mete out punishment for what I considered to be seemingly insignificant misdemeanour. A relationship with God was dependent on compliance to a rigidly enforced legalistic interpretation of certain portions of the Bible.

My understanding of the Brazilian perception of God took an unexpected turn, however. There was something else in the church besides a rigid legalism. There was another testimony that seemed to go against the legalistic grain. I witnessed a spiritual vibrancy and vitality within the church that was expressed through a sense of immediacy and immanence of the Divine encounter. Whether in prayer meetings, monthly Communion services or Sunday services, participants responded vocally and spontaneously to the sense of the personal and powerful presence of God. The church was not merely a place of discipline. It was also a haven of belief and belonging based on a shared immediacy of the immanent God of grace. My theography was now on familiar ground.

91 My wife was spared a public confession and request for forgiveness from the congregation as she was not aware of the Brazilian requirement. I remained uncomfortable with the practice of public confession and congregational forgiveness throughout our period in Brazil. I unobtrusively did not participate in the practice.

92 Other resolutions included appropriate dress for men and women, prohibition of the use of jewellery by women and ownership of a television. Violation of the resolutions would result in disciplinary expulsion from church fellowship for a period of time set by the senior pastor followed by a public confession of guilt and petition for forgiveness from the congregation with restoration to fellowship. Paul Freston defined the function of these traditions as “using a clothing code as gatekeeper of the community” (Freston, 1995, p. 130).

93 Infractions of the code of conduct were assessed by the senior pastor who would mete out discipline. Discipline included, including exclusion from participation in the monthly Communion service (Santa Ceia) for a specific time. Restoration to fellowship was dependant on public confession with forgiveness then given by public affirmation by church members attending the Communion service.
Millard J. Erickson’s advice bears strongly on my experience.

Christians from different cultures, whether from different countries or different subcultures within a given country, need one another, and the Christian message is capable of being expressed in culturally appropriate ways in these different settings. No less urgent than contemporizing is the need for cultural contextualizing. (Erickson, 2013, p. 71)

And yet, interaction is one part of the contextualisation. The other part is the resolution of almost inevitable conflict between the contexts. How much of one context requires reformulation or even abandonment and how much of the other context requires acceptance and conformity? The process, though necessary, is not without its challenges.

The Assemblies of God of Brazil focuses intently on conformity to a code of conduct to express a right relationship with God while, at the same time, expressing a vibrant and vital spirituality. Spirituality seemed incongruous alongside what I perceived as legalistic excesses. I was puzzled. I felt the need to understand this energy, this spirituality, if I were to minister successfully within the Brazilian churches. I began a process of critical appreciation of Brazilian Pentecostal spirituality that I was to take with me on return to Australia. I discovered a Brazilian Pentecostal theography.

The Brazilian Assemblies of God had begun in the northern city of Belem. The story has all the elements of a God directed narrative or “a prophetic history “(Chesnut, 1997, pp. 26-29). Two Swedish immigrants in North America, Daniel Berg and Gunnar Vingren received a prophetic message to preach the Pentecostal message in a place called Pará. A voyage of miracles brought them to the city of Belém, capital of the state of Pará (Alvarsson, 2009, pp. 384-385; Synan, 1997, pp. 134-135). Significantly, the denomination identifies itself as a national church with minimal foreign influence.

Like the Hoovers in Chile, Vingren and Berg adopted Brazil as their own country and the Church grew as a Brazilian church from the beginning. Vingren made it clear that the work spread through Brazilians who caught the fire and spread it in other parts of the country-first to the Amazon interior and along the coast. (Anderson, 2004, p. 205)

The denomination began as a church of the poor amongst the marginalised populations of northern Brazil. Experiences of the daily interventions of the supernatural were formed within the Afro-Brazilian context.
The Pentecostal message of freedom from conflicting supernatural forces of good or evil resonated within such an environment. Conceptual understanding of the why and the how of spiritual freedom and, particularly, the ontological reality of the Triune God was largely out of reach of the mostly uneducated or at best undereducated ministry and members (Anderson, 2004). Paulo Mattos recognizes the theological neglect of the past while acknowledging a current turn to theological study.

Brazilian Pentecostals had shown a great aversion to theological education from their beginnings, so much so that until the late 1950s, formal theological training for Brazilian Pentecostal preachers was considered almost ant-biblical heresy. Even in the 1960s, when they began to establish Bible institutes for ministerial training under the influence of North American Pentecostals, their leaders still showed strong resistance to formal theological preparation. However, in the last few years, a younger generation of Brazilian Pentecostals is avidly seeking academic credentials.(Mattos, 2016, p. 243)

Industrial development in the cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in the 1950s and 1960s resulted in an internal migration from the north to these two cities (Anderson, 2007). Northern rural workers whose conditions may be classed as benign serfdom to the plantation owners now found themselves dislocated from their tight communal identity in the sprawling chaos of the shanty towns (favelas) of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. The Assemblies of God and other Pentecostal churches provided alternative havens of belonging for the dislocated internal immigrants. Shop front daughter-churches were established in the areas of urban concentration on the periphery of the newly industrialised mega cities. In doing so the denomination began a period of rapid growth.

Johnathan Alvarado (Alvarado, 2016, p. 338) suggests that the rapid growth of Pentecostalism in Latin America may be attributed to a similarity between Pentecostal and African primal spiritualities. The primal African cosmology in which “an African world-view is grounded in a pervasive sense of God-consciousness” (Nwachuku, 2014, p. 517), according to Alvarado, was a fertile soil for early twentieth century Pentecostalism in Latin America.
A primal Afro-Brazilian narrative of spirituality reflects a supernaturalistic immediacy. That the supernatural exists is not in question. Pierre Sanchis, admittedly from a syncretistic perspective, described the primal idea of the supernatural in Brazilian religion in which

[m]ankind is immersed within a universe populated with forces, spirits, personal influences, all engaged in relationship with men. There seems to be a perennial dialogue between these ‘others’ and the self, built precisely during the operation of such relationships … orixas for some the dead, saints or entities for others. Our Ladies who appear to come amongst men, angels, spirits, cosmic forces, demons – or all these at once; the Holy Ghost, after all, for pentecostals and charismatics. (Sanchis, 2007, p. 225)

What Sanchis describes is a sense of supernatural immediacy and imminence. The supernatural is very much a part of daily life.

The forced importation of up to five million Africans as slaves between 1570 and 1850 was the catalyst for the absorption of a primal African spirituality94 within an embedded Brazilian spirituality described by Anderson:

Movements like Umbanda (the largest), Candomblé and Macumba (with more African elements) have combined European (Kardecian) spiritualism with West African and Amer-indian traditional religion to create something uniquely Brazilian. It is estimated that some 60% of Brazil's population is involved in some form of spiritualism. (Anderson, 2004, p. 70)

The African element in primal Brazilian religious consciousness permeates every level of Brazilian society (Hébrard, 2013, p. 85; Klein & Luna, 2010, pp. 242-243; Silva 2007, pp. 231-232). Initially confined to the stories of slaves, freed slaves and Portuguese colonists raised by their slave “mammy” the elements of Afro-Brazilian spiritualities were not be confined to the marginalized. Hébrard notes that

[t]his was the case for the feiticeiros,95 the healers, spell-casters, conjure-men, or witches – depending on who was talking about them – whose beneficent or harmful skills were sought out at every level of a society that Catholicism had never been able to dissuade from magical beliefs. (Hébrard, 2013, p. 90)

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94 Current anthropological studies (Hébrard, 2013) demonstrate a fresh approach to the humanity and spirituality that was maintained in spite of the dehumanising efforts of the slave trade. The primal and embedded sense of personhood, ethnicity and spiritual identity were not destroyed even though slavery intended otherwise. They brought nothing of Africa with them except that which could not be physically removed – their African spirituality (Alvarado, 2016, p. 348; Nwachuku, 2014, p. 517)

95 English translation, literally a wizard.
Alvarado poetically described the continued influence of Afro-Brazilian spirituality from the colonial period to contemporary Brazil.

From the early 1500’s through the mid-1800’s, the influx of African slaves permeated Latin America with a spiritual resonance, born out of the womb of Africa through the hardships of forced labour, separation and dehumanization. Even after the chains of slavery were loosed it seems that the spirituality of the slaves that bore them remained as a part of the culture of the people of Latin America. (Alvarado, 2016, p. 337)

Gonzalez and Gonzalez consider the impact of Afro-Brazilian spiritualism on the national identity.

[t]he impact of African life and culture on the broader cultures is perhaps more visible today in Latin America than during colonial times, for today that influence is often embraced as part of national identity.(J. L. González & González, 2008, p. 37)

Brazilian Pentecostalism actively engages with a primal African spiritualism. Both express forms of spiritual immanency and immediacy. Afro-Brazilian spiritualism and Pentecostalism accept the reality of a spiritual world of supernatural immanence and intervention. But with a difference.

The multi-level cosmology of Afro-Brazilian spiritualism is inhabited by spiritual forces such as orixas (personal spiritual guides) that act, often capriciously, for good or evil, in the lives of devotees. Rituals affirm the emptying of self and possession by a spirit god. Silva explains that “these gods continue to participate in their lives as heroes or villains, responsible for the joy and woes of everyday life” (Silva 2007, p. 235).

It is worthwhile at this stage to consider what is meant by the terms Candomblé and Umbanda. To do this we turn to Yong’s study of Afro-Brazilian spiritism in which he notes that

Umbanda is a fairly recent spiritistic tradition uniquely rooted in the land of Brazil. It is most widely known by that name in Saõ Paulo and in Rio de Janeiro where the first Umbandist federation ... was organized in 1939. In other areas, Afro-Brazilian spiritism goes by other names – e.g. Macumba generally, Candomblé in the Bahia, Batuque in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Xangô in the states of Alagôas and Pernambuco, Pajelança in the Amazonian region – each with its own styles and emphases. (Yong, 2000, p. 264)

Pentecostalism defines an Afro-Brazilian cosmology within the context of submission to spiritual forces and spiritual servitude to “demonic impersonations” (Yong, 2000, p. 258). Pentecostalism opposes theological
syncretism and cultural assimilation while affirming confrontation with the supernatural entities of Afro-Brazilian religions (Yong, 2000, p. 259). Anderson notes the vigour of Pentecostal opposition to an Afro-Brazilian spiritualism in that “Pentecostals who accept the reality of the popular spirit world, are diametrically opposed to this and routinely exorcise Umbanda and other Brazilian ‘demons’ from their converts” (Anderson, 2004, p. 70).

Alvarado, however, does not see the distinction in such clear terms. While he uses the term “possession” he paints a seemingly benign picture of what that possession may mean (Alvarado, 2016, p. 342). He takes umbrage at the Brazilian Assemblies of God for not sufficiently accommodating Pentecostal spirituality with embedded Afro-Brazilian spirituality (p. 349).

Nevertheless, the Assemblies of God's forthright opposition to Afro-Brazilian spiritualism provides redemptive liberation and spiritual immanence for those who accept the redemptive message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Afro-Brazilian phenomena of spirit possession is contrasted with Spirit baptism. The reality of both experiences is not questioned. However, there is a stark contrast between a possession that results in servitude and a baptism that results in liberation.

The Pentecostal testimony, then, proceeds within a tension between the extremes of rigorous commitment to the foundational principles and practices and their abandonment in favour of contemporary adaptations. What remains constant is the idea of the Pentecostal church as a haven of redemptive freedom and spiritual immanence.

It was here that I rediscovered the church as a haven of belief and belonging. The Australian church and the Brazilian church coalesce in my theography as havens of God's redemptive immediacy in grace. The Brazilian church was now the haven I thought I had forfeited when I first arrived in Brazil. Expressions of my experiences of God's immanence and interventions took on a new vernacular: a Portuguese spoken with a

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96 The reality of the phenomena is located in the authenticity of the possession. Responses may be of a psycho-somatic nature. The spiritual dimension is evident.
decidedly Australian accent. The dynamic interchange of shared experiences of God was now my essential theography within both the Brazilian and the Australian contexts.

My return to Australia was, in a real sense, a fresh dynamic in my understanding of my theography and the theographies of others. Participation in an Australian church service was accompanied by a sense of nostalgia for the vibrant spirituality that I had left behind in Brazil. Cultural re-adaption was necessary if I was to once again feel "at home".

What, then, of my immigrant fellow worshippers? Were they now processing their own sense of spirituality through an Australian context? Or, were they now critiquing the Australian context through that of their country of origin?
Chapter Six
Numbering Ordinary Theology

The methods adopted by Christie and Cartledge furnish a model for how to engage with the core question of this research project. They both set about the task of engaging with an ordinary theology and doing so in a manner that sought to respect the experience and understandings of people largely without formal theological understanding. They relied upon surveys, questionnaires and interviews that were subsequently transcribed. They sought to amass a quantity of material / findings. In both instances they then sought to do a further evaluative step. For the sake of a more qualitative understanding an attempt was made to test the theological authenticity – or quality – of what was being expressed. Christie’s focus was on Christology and so she sought to interpret her responses in terms of the claims made by the Nicene Creed and theories of atonement (Christie, 2007, 2012, 2013; Christie & Astley, 2009). Cartledge’s test for the results of his enquiry into what Pentecostals actually believed was placed against a formal declaration of belief. That declaration was the Statement of Faith of the British Assemblies of God (Cartledge, 2010b, 2013).

Now there is a clear difference of intention lying behind the current research project and the work of Cartledge and Christie. They do not focus on numbers as to who said what for the sake of a statistical comparison of belief. Nor are they concerned with how country of origin - hence migration and ethnicity – may inform belief. This research project is different. It depends on a method of triangulation. That process brought together the quantitative and qualitative questions in the research questionnaire and set them alongside the practice of ordinary theology. It is a practice that included open discussion with the Connect Groups.

The theological focus of my research is on the attributes of God; the presenting context is one of explicit cultural diversity. This theological focus is consistent with what a critical analysis of global Pentecostal theology reveals: Pentecostal theology adheres to a relational immediacy in the experience of the Triune God. God makes
Himself known in a subjective way. While Pentecostal theology adheres to the classical understanding of the Triune God, the subjective immediacy of relationship takes precedence within its ordinary reception.

The Pentecostal vernacular is most likely to yield perceptions of God rather than the more formally recognized attributes of God. The latter includes those characteristics which have made their way into Christian self-understanding and worship through both biblical Hebrew and Greek philosophical modes. Had the questionnaire been designed more on the lines of such attributes, the enquiry could well have centred on whether we think God is holy, almighty, loving, just, merciful, jealous, immortal, omniscient, wrathful and the like. The pragmatic immediacy of Pentecostalism tends more towards a relationality and the subsequent experience of perception and how one feels. The research questionnaire thus explored individual experiences of the relational attributes of God anticipated in a standard Pentecostal experience. It assumed that the ontological reality of God’s being may be taken for granted within the expectations of an emerging normative Pentecostal theology. There was no need to proof the existence of God and overtly address Migliore’s peculiar logic of God.

For the sake of consistency of approach the data collected was analysed on a geographical basis according to the participant’s country of origin. The material was then arranged by way of geography/cartography rather than gender and or age. That was a deliberate choice: it is conceded that filters of gender and age may operate differently from the norm that was assumed. The quantitative signifiers were aligned with the qualitative descriptors to provide a coherent structure for the analysis. The responses were compared according to the benchmarked tool below. The two-part questionnaire was designed so that the response options in the qualitative section, the first part, were reflected in the quantitative section, the second part. In this way the consistency of responses in each section was measured.

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This merging of the qualitative and quantitative methods required some reflection on the religious experience of the country of birth. That this should be so is a reflection on why the research was begun in the first place. Where was the theological haven to be found in each one of those countries as well as in between them? What is surfacing in these responses to the questionnaire are the perceptions of migrant and diasporic members of a culturally diverse church in Australia. Would the responses have been the same had there been no migration and the people concerned were still living in their own original homeland?

The CSU Ethics committee recommended a generalised data gathering approach. That advice was designed to eliminate perceptions of coercion. In order to fulfil this purpose invitations to participate were made through the church newsletter accompanied by a personal commendation of the project by the senior pastor at four morning services. Twenty members thereupon completed the Expression of Interest (appendix 2). They were interviewed at the conclusion of the four services. A verbal explanation of the project including ethical and privacy assurances were given; any questions they had were answered. The voluntary nature of the research was emphasised.
Each respondent received a project pack. The pack included a detailed information sheet (appendix 6), consent form (appendix 1) and the questionnaire (appendix 7). A stamped addressed envelope was included for the return of the questionnaire and signed consent form.

Only six questionnaires were returned despite follow up letters. Requests for follow up personal interviews after church services were not answered by those who had completed the questionnaire. Such a small cohort of participants was deemed to be not sufficient to provide adequate data for the research. Was the modesty of this response due to the suspicion in which theological endeavour is often held in Pentecostal circles?

The research then turned to the culturally formed Connect Groups.

These Connect Groups provided a sampling of the countries of origin representative of the congregation. Participation in the research by individual members of the Connect Groups was voluntary. That this should be so adheres to Andrew Shenton’s advice that “the data collection sessions involve only those who are genuinely willing to take part and prepares to offer data freely” (Shenton, 2004, p. 66). It was not deemed appropriate to use a recorder in the interview sessions so as to allow the participants maximum freedom to express their perspectives of God without any perceived possibility of their responses being reported to any outside the Connect Group meeting. At each interview session permission was given for the taking of written notes of the conversations with participants identified only by the participant number. These records of the Connect Group interviews were subsequently analysed against the participants’ responses in the questionnaire.

Johnson has argued that qualitative methods aim at “developing a window into the minds of the people being studied” (Johnson, 1997, p. 285). The participant has the right to be heard and the researcher a responsibility to hear and to record that which is heard. The validity of the research rests on the extent to which the researcher accurately records viewpoints and experiences portrayed by the participant. In this task, the researcher acts as a recorder, not an interpreter.

Deborah O'Connor and Brian O'Neill demonstrate the consequence of that posture. They argue that it preserves the integrity and the pivotal importance of the participant.
...given the unique contributions that they can make, research participants are positioned as the experts on their own reality. This approach validates the experiences and understandings that participants bring while simultaneously unsettling more traditional views of the researcher as expert. (O’Connor & O’Neill, 2004, p. 20)

It is against this background that R. Burke Johnson (Johnson, 1997, p. 285) proposes a step that the researcher should take in order to safeguard the independence of the participants’ contributions. The researcher should undertake a background research of the specific contextual world of the participant. In this way, the researcher comes into the interview session with a certain level of understanding of the participant’s possible contextual experience. And so, prior to the interview process involving the Connect Groups, a literature review was carried out on the social and religious characteristics of the countries identified in each group. This background knowledge enabled some of the innuendoes and vocabulary of the participants to be better understood. Some caution needs to be exercised, however. The researcher is present to listen to the participant’s own story, not necessarily the story expected. This was bought home during the interview process. The literature review provided extensive understanding of the theological identity of the countries associated with the research. The Pentecostal pragmatic/functional theology was not attuned in some instances to the cognitive concepts or academic explanations, however. The interview dialogue often indicated a powerful personal narrative, not a doctrinally explanatory one.

This research method should now be examined through differing qualitative and quantitative lenses. Both lenses are necessary, of course. Their combination leads to what Bogard and Wertz term a “merged research identity” (Bogard & Wertz, 2006). In this way the data of qualitative research is assessed through the quantitative data and vice versa. The outcome is the final research analysis.

Social science utilizes qualitative methodology as the key to understanding the social context from the perspective of the participant. Alan Bryman (Bryman, 2008) provides a telling contrast here between a scientific and a sociological approach to a research methodology that lays a foundation for a qualitative approach to the research project. For Bryman inanimate items of scientific research such as molecules and atoms may be observed in their specific context; “they cannot attribute meaning to events and to their environment” (p.385).
Social science research is otherwise: “unlike the objects of the natural sciences, the objects of the social sciences – people – are capable of attributing meaning to their environment” (p.385). Participants in social research are not simply to be observed as items under a microscope but are to be heard in their context. For the social scientist research is not dispassionate observation but participation and conversation. Furthermore, the research participant is the key to the interpretative analysis. The qualitative element in the research provided opportunities for the participants to describe in their own voice, their very personal, and therefore, unique perceptions of God. That was, in effect, the practice adopted by Christie in her ordinary Christology.

In seeking to hear the voices of human experience in their variegated global contexts [as is the case at Inspire] Scharen and Vigen advocate on behalf of a qualitative method. They record diverse contexts of ethnographic research. In such research life experiences are heard and recognised as significant contributions to a theology that responds to the specific context.

For such an approach Scharen and Vigen discern the need of “a posture of humility and friendly curiosity” on the part of the researcher. These research virtues “are crucial character traits of a skilled and responsible ethnographer (p.17).

The task is not an easy one. Sensitivity to cultural expectations of leadership and power is essential. The researcher must not act as either a passive or an active critic of what may seem to be excessive expressions of power symbols. To do so would impede the success of the research, even to the point of nullifying the trustworthiness of the analytical outcome.

The formative nature of ethnographic research is powerfully supported by Todd Whitmore’s poetical narrative of his ethnographic research with the people of Acoliland, in which he is personally and theologically disturbed by the perceived contrast between the God of the white man and the God of the poor (Whitmore, 2011, pp. 184-206). Whitmore’s research is an example of the researcher’s intention to understand the research participants from their own perspective. The social variable of human experience of divine reality is not only recognised but utilized in a qualitative research process:
This concept opens the space for hearing the voices of others because it recognises that in order to fully understand a particular phenomenon or process, ascertaining the perspectives of those who have experienced it is essential. (O’Connor & O’Neill, 2004, p. 20)

The debate concerning the relationship between quantitative and qualitative methodologies (Bogard & Wertz, 2006, p. 371) is based, to a large extent, on the question of validity or trustworthiness of qualitative methodology. That question was addressed by Johnson (Johnson, 1997) and Shenton (Shenton, 2004). Johnson notes that “[w]hen qualitative researchers speak of research validity, they are usually referring to qualitative research that is plausible, credible, trustworthy and defensible “ (Johnson, 1997, p. 282). Shenton concurs: “ensuring credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness” (Shenton, 2004, p. 64).

For Johnson the validity of qualitative research is based on three specific areas. First, the descriptive validity in which the factual accuracy of the analysis is ensured. Second, an interpretative validity ensures that the research participants’ viewpoints, intentions and experiences are accurately understood and reported. Finally, the theoretical validity ensures that the theoretical outcome developed from the research is an accurate analysis of the data and is both defensible and credible.

The issue of objectivity of research findings, from both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, is complex. That is because “tests and questionnaires are designed by humans,[and thus] the intrusion of the researcher’s bias is inevitable” (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). Shenton advises that “steps must be taken to help ensure as far as possible that the work’s findings are the result of the experience and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher” (Shenton, 2004, p. 72).

Cartledge’s most recent work in the field of an ordinary theology is called Narratives and Numbers. It is seeking out a statistical base to determine attitudes and values. The nature of the research at Inspire likewise depended on numbers. That testimony was evoked by a series of questions. The grammar of the enquiry was designed to open up the possibility of participants to express their own perceptions rather than being told what to think or feel.

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The first section of the research questionnaire provided the quantitative data. Questions were based around levels of perceptions of God’s relationship in grace. The questions were phrased in terms of the attributes of God within an orthodox Christian perspective. This data was measured across a reverse scale. Responses indicating levels of perception of God’s personal relationship in grace were rated toward a high of 5. Responses indicating perceptions of a more distant God were rated toward a low of 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A Distant God</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>A personal God of grace</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prior to entering into the analysis of the questionnaires, consideration will be given to possible weaknesses in the research project. That is not uncommon in a research project such as this one. Shenton (Shenton, 2004), for example, favours a mixed methodology in research in order to facilitate the strengths of the quantitative and the qualitative approaches. As well, taken together, they “compensate for their individual limitations” (p. 65). A number of possible weaknesses are identified.

The first weakness identified has to do with the questionnaire itself, the primary instrument for obtaining the research data. Hutsebaut and Verhoeven (Hutsebaut, 1995) suggest two possible weaknesses associated with the type of questionnaire used in my research.

Consider a questionnaire based on the selection of a number of items associated with perceptions of God. The options appear limitless. On what basis could the selection be made? For this reason the questionnaire was limited to recognized attributes of God in his personal interventions in the life of the individual Christian. There exists the possible weakness in open-ended questions, particularly in a cross-cultural setting. What of the participants whose level of English may not be adequate to describe their perceptions of God? This was the case with the Latin American Connect Group. Two recent arrivals to Australia identified their limited English. In their
case they completed parts of the questionnaire in Spanish and other sections were explained to them by other members of the Connect Group. Their Spanish responses were later translated into English.

The length of time that participants have been in Australia can also impact on their responses to the questionnaire. The cultural impact on perceptions of God is at the heart of the research. The thesis recognises the fluidity of cultural experience, as was the case in my theography. Such fluidity inexorably results in fluidity in culturally formed perceptions of God. To remove the participants from the influence of cultural fluidity would be neither desirable or even possible.

The reason for the participants’ immigration to Australia may also impact on their questionnaire responses. If the participant emigrated for personal safety or perhaps political security, it may be that his/her record of the impact of his/her country of origin may be described in negative terms. There may be a reaction against the country of origin. Such questions related to reasons for immigration were not considered in the Connect group discussions. Instead, it was taken that participation in their country of origin Connect Group members indicated that responses would be minimally negative toward countries of origin.

Finally, the question of numbers must be addressed. A total of thirty-nine participants representing fourteen countries of origin took part in the research. In the research. Six participated as individuals and a further thirty-three participated through their Connect groups. Research participation by numbers and countries of origin is detailed in the table below. What volume of numbers within each specified country of origin would be appropriate for the task at hand?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries of origin</th>
<th>Individual participants</th>
<th>Connect Group participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook Island</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samoa</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Connect Groups are organized according to country of origin except where there are not sufficient numbers to form their own Connect Group. In such cases, as with the Latin America and Pacific Islands Groups, Connect Groups are based on geographical locations. In this way a greater number of countries of origin participated.

It is conceded that there may not be sufficient numbers to arrive at definitive conclusions. The findings can be seen as indicators, trajectories and tendencies. Nevertheless, indications are recognized that may lead to further investigation with other members of Inspire with the same country of origin. The results of this research can now be viewed initially through individual responses and then as a result of work with the particular Connect Groups.
Participant P15 was born in Australia of Filipino parents. expresses an embedded or primal ordinary theology indicated in the responses. According to the participant God is the paternal provider and carer reflecting the Filipino family context.

The expression of paternal comfort and caring are limited, however. That limitation is indicated in the consistent responses to the twin aspects of Section One: God is a comforter/companion and Section Two: God comforts me. In Section One the idea of comfort is minimised in response to the Filipino experience of family as controlling. In Section Two the participant responded with a “not sure” to the statement. The same response was provided to the statement, God rules me.
There is a similarity of approach in the responses of P15 and P37. They both recognize the primal influence of the family. P15 locates the primal family experience within the Filipino culture. P37 identifies the primal family experience within the immediacy of the family unit rather than external cultural influences.

The experience of family and father is a primal priority in identifying God through personal experience. The way in which God is perceived as father/parent is dependent on the individual’s experience of their own father according to P37. Participant P15 recognises the influence of cultural expectations of a father on how the fatherhood of God is perceived. P15’s primal influence gains support from the Filipino culture. P15’s recognition of cultural influence is supported by the participants in the Philippine Connect Group who similarly perceived God in the father/parental sense.

For P37, the experience of a loving family is one of three factors that result in a perception of a loving God. The other two factors are culture and the biblical texts on love. This response to God as forgiving/unforgiving corresponds to the response to the following perception of God as approving/disapproving.

The response is framed in negative terms. Disapproval by others results in a perception of a disapproving God. It may be questioned as to why the participant used the negative reference.

The participant’s observation is evaluated alongside the participant’s statement of personal perception of God. In regard to God as either free or restricting the participant does not identify God as restricting. God’s immanent presence and grace as helper/guide and comforter/companion are identified through personal experience.

P37 identifies the role of the Bible in understanding the ways in which God is experienced and perceived. Further evidence for perceptions of a God of immanent grace is provided in Section Two. The participant scored high for the responses except for two, namely God rules me and God punishes me. There was no response given for either. As a result, both were scored as zero. While an anomaly is recognised scoring otherwise would have resulted in a contrived numerical scoring on the part of the researcher. It was considered appropriate to recognise the anomaly rather than to remove it artificially.
The Australian Story

Australian narratives of God include a distant and disinterested deity or a personal and immanent deity. Bouma (Bouma, 2006) suggests a primal distant and disinterested deity based on Australia’s geographical isolation from its English homeland. It may be argued, however, that his conclusions in this case are now historically and culturally dated. Australia’s geographical loci post-1945 abandoned the priority once given to the British homeland. In its place is a multi-focused approach that absorbs religious and cultural diversity with emphasis on the reality of the nation’s regional identity. The primal and embedded Australian story has lost its Anglicized vernacular. In its place is an Australian vernacular of diverse cultural and religious accents.

The multi-accented vernacular narrative is typified by Participant P15. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics “43.1 per cent of people have at least one overseas-born parent”. With that being the case, diverse cultural stories are absorbed into the broader Australia narrative bringing with them unique vernacular primal and embedded testimonies. In the case of P15 the Australian narrative of the family community is delivered with a Filipino cultural accent.

Robert L. Gallagher (Gallagher, 2006), an Australian academic and Associate Professor of Intercultural Studies at Wheaton College, goes further. He rejects an imported European Christianity as foreign to the Australian cultural character. In its place, he advocates an embedded Australian concept of mateship as the foundation for a personal and immanent relationship with God. The “mythology of mateship demonstrates a theological paradigm whereby the Gospel may be presented and received by a present day Aussie society in spiritual decline” (Gallagher, 2006, p. 127).

An embedded primal mateship analogy is enticing when placed within the context of Anzac Day and associated pilgrimages to battle locations associated with the Great War that celebrate the mateship narrative during danger and adversity. Just as mates stick together in hard times and good times, so God as “mate” will

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stick with the Australian believer. It may even be that current societal concerns may act as a national catharsis constructed around the mateship myth. Perhaps, a culturally transcendent myth reflected in an ordinary theology of an immanent God, “a mate”, may be what is needed for such a catharsis to occur.

The Indian Participant

The participant recognised the multi-faith context of India as the impetus for finding truth. The primal autobiography provides the embedded elements for the participant’s perceptions of God. References to India include God as comforter amid the extreme poverty seen by the participant. Interestingly, there is no indication of the participant experiencing poverty. Rather, the participant’s record is that of an observer. The participant suggests that the violence and idolatry in India indicate that God is both caring and angry.

Significantly the primal perception is of God as father. It is not surprising, therefore, to locate a God of care, comfort and help throughout the responses. The anger of God is directed toward the violence and idolatry
in India, not the participant. The participant strongly agrees with the discipline of God while not sure of the personal punishment of God. Discipline identifies with God as Father. Punishment, on the other hand, does not.

There is a level of agreement with the responses of participants in the India Connect Group in regard to God as freeing/restricting. The common idea is that of freedom within the restrictions implied in God's purposes. The participant does not see an ambiguity here, as the response in Section Two indicates disagreement with the idea of God ruling the individual.

God’s forgiveness is freely available on the basis of repentance and confession of sin. The participant’s response to God as accepting or rejecting agrees with God’s free forgiveness – “definitely God is accepting.”

**South African Participants**

![South Africa chart]

South Africa, the participants noted, is a Christian country in which they grew up within a primal context of prayer, Bible reading and paternal love and care. God's paternal presence and protection was evident in all circumstances, even the difficult times (P11). God is always willing to comfort and care (P10). As recipients of
God’s love, the participants recognise that God’s anger is directed toward sin and his love directed to the believer.

The responses indicate a theological understanding which is consistently portrayed within the context of a personal relationship with God.

**The South African story**

The two participants are white South Africans. In their case, the primal and embedded ordinary story reflects a different context than that which is anticipated from a Black South African\(^\text{100}\) narrative. The participants do not respond from the primal perspectives of an African who endured the social rigours of apartheid. Rather, they represent those who were advantaged by the system. For this reason, their participation in the research is unique. Here is not the vernacular of the disenfranchised but the enfranchised; it is not the disadvantaged, but the advantaged.

**The Sri Lankan participant**

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\(^{100}\) A number of recent texts explore Christian faith and practice from the African narrative (J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013; Clarke, 2014; Kunhiyop, 2012).
The participant acknowledges the grace filled and merciful attributes of God, without reference to the ways in which perceptions were formed. Except for two statements, God is a father/parent and God is a comforter/companion, responses are made by repeating the relevant words of each statement.

As there was no further contact with the participant I was unable to clarify the responses was given in this section of the questionnaire.

Section Two responses are consistent with a personal experience of a gracious God who is both forgiving and approving but with one exception. A single item, “God rules me”, is scored at 1, indicating a strong agreement with the statement on the reverse scale. The response indicates a perception of God as an authoritarian figure. As there was no further contact with this participant I was unable to discuss why this response was given.

The Sri Lankan story

The history of Christianity in Sri Lanka bears a similar tradition as that of the Indian state of Kerala. Tradition has it that the apostle Thomas established Christianity on the island during the same period as his missionary work in Kerala. Archaeological findings indicate the existence of a Christian community between the sixth and seventh centuries (Somaratna, 2001b). Christianity was considered a threat by the two major religions in Sri Lanka, Hinduism and Buddhism. The constitution of 1972 and 1978 established Buddhism as the “religion of the government while tolerating other religions” (Somaratna, 2001a, p. 795). Despite growing opposition from Buddhism, Christianity has developed particularly from the late 1970s due to a large extent by the growth of Pentecostal groups. As Somaratna explains

Christianity has been accepted as a national religion despite occasional criticism of the Buddhists, who do not want their members to be converted to Christianity. So far, people of all walks of life have given their life to Christ because of personal experiences with him. (Somaratna, 2001a, p. 796)

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101 “Christian suffering is not uncommon in Sri Lanka.” (Somaratna, 2016, p. 36)
The growth of the numerous Pentecostal groups\textsuperscript{102} on the island was facilitated by an indigenisation process that saw the rapid development of national leadership (Somaratna, 2016, p. 17). According to Somaratna, the Pentecostal groups adopted existing Christian infrastructures with the addition of extending mission to the “excluded middle.” The conversion of Buddhists, representatives of the social middle included Buddhist monks of whom “many have become pastors of new congregations.” (Somaratna, 2016, p. 34)

\textsuperscript{102} Somaratna writes of the multiple Pentecostal groups including a supposed Hindu saying; We have over 330 million gods, and they are in one place of worship. On the other hand, the Christians have only one God, but you cannot worship Him together in one place.”(Somaratna, 2016, p. 18)
Connect Group Participants

Visits to culturally identified Connect Groups were initially planned in the research project. Informal visits were envisaged in which the researcher would participate as an observer of cultural expressions within each Connect Group visited. However, owing to insufficient participants from the general congregation, the decision was made to facilitate my data collection through the culturally identified Connect Groups.

The Indian Connect Group

Participants responded from the perspective of their embedded cultural and religious expectations. The analogy of family, particularly related to God as father is evident throughout the responses.

Section One responses identify the primal (P49, P51) reality of father as universal reality (P55) who is both loving (P57) and strict when necessary (P57, P58). God is immanent and always ready to help (P49, P52) when requested (P56). Indeed, God’s readiness to help those in need is reflected in Indian hospitality and willingness to help others (P57, P58).
Divine immanency is further expressed in relation to God as a compassionate comforter, guide and helper. God’s compassion is accompanied by his forgiveness (P56, P57). The Hindu concept of reward and judgement is contrasted with the Christian concept of vengeance (P58). God is not vengeful toward the believer but vengeful for the believer (P58). In this way God’s justice or condemnation, rather than being a capricious vengeful action as with the Hindu deities, is meted out for the benefit of the believer. This idea corresponds with the embedded expectations of God’s strict judgement by the same participant. The same participant suggested that God is both compassionate and vengeful with the New Testament portraying God as compassionate and merciful (P52).

God’s care assumes that he will ensure that the believer turns away from the wrong (P49, P56, P57). God’s anger, like that of a father, is directed to recognition of mistakes (P57). God’s acceptance is unconditional, just like that of a father (P49). It is not surprising to note a similar response to God as freeing. The primal caste divisions outlined in the Indian story contrast with the participant responses to God as freeing and accepting. Divine forgiveness is based on Christ’s work. A covert primal influence, however, is indicated by P58. God is unforgiving when the believer does wrong.

Similarly, God’s approval involves obedience (P49, P51). Obedience towards elders is culturally expected (P58). The comparison with the elderly may have ramifications for the participant’s personal story. The participant also comments that God’s disapproval is extended even to elders when they do wrong. On the other, God approves of truth even when it is “spoken from the mouth of a liar.” Unconditional approval is also recognised (P52, P53, P54, P55) with P57 responding that God’s approval is to encourage the believer to do better.

Comparisons with Section Two responses indicate overall agreement with those of Section One. The quantitative totals for each respondent are highest towards a God of immanent grace and mercy. Indications of conditionality to God’s forgiveness and approval in Section One are underscored in Section Two with 4 respondents scoring 1, and only one scoring 5 in respect to God’s rulership. Two low scores are also noted for God’s punishment.
**The Indian story**

The transformational immanency of divine grace expressed by the Indian Connect Group participants contrasts sharply "with the complex history of religious and philosophical ideas prevalent in the Hindu Indian subcontinent" (Yong & Anderson, 2014, p. 241). Gnanakan (Gnanakan, 2012) contrasts a Brahmic approach to Christian theological studies with a more pragmatic approach, exemplified by the research participants, that considers theology from the ordinary perspective of Indian life where God is found and experienced.

Perceptions of God within the Indian context, as is the case throughout the Asian continent, are expressed within the primal and embedded Indian/Asian religion and spirituality. Pre-Christian spiritualities continue as the primary sources of divine expressions, particularly in India. As Salvanayagam acknowledged, Western missionaries came to India with a definite mandate to preach the Gospel of Light to heathens. But some of them had startling experiences when they encountered natives who had a high sense of morality and undertook fascinating acts of religious devotion. (Selvanayagam, 2008, p. 45)

India’s multi-layered socio-religious identity (Gnanakan, 2012; Selvanayagam, 2008, pp. 44, 64) mitigates against an over-all exploration of the Indian story. Instead, the story will concentrate on the state of Kerala, birthplace of the members of the Indian Connect group except for the Fijian-born member.

Pulikottil (Pulikottil, 2009) traces the origins of Pentecostalism within a decided postcolonial historiography, an ordinary perspective from the fringe that is not captured by the mainstream. Here is a postcolonial history of the distinctive locality of the movement of the Spirit.103

Two ancient stories combine to form the Kerala story. First was the arrival of the apostle Thomas in A.D. 52. Second was the establishment of the Syrian Orthodox church in Kerala from the fourth through to the eighth centuries. As a consequence, “there was an ancient Christian community in Kerala, which shared ecclesiastical and liturgical traditions with Syrian Orthodox traditions before the arrival of the Portuguese in India in the fifteenth century” (Pulikottil, 2009, p. 72). Out of the Syrian Orthodox church came two church movements, a

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103 As Pulikottil explains; “Such an approach helps us explore the possibilities of the work of the Holy Spirit outside the West and the ways in which people in various parts of the world responded to its manifestation” (page 71).
reformed Syrian church known as the Mar Thomas Church and the Separatists. The Separatists or Holiness churches were to divide forming the Christian Brethren and the Pentecostal churches.

The fractured history of Pentecostalism in Kerala, especially in its relationship with western missionaries (75-77) underscores the primal and vernacular natures of Indian Pentecostalism. Pulikottil draws attention to the “Syriannese” (77). The subaltern theology comes into play, solidarity – particularly in the context of Dalit identity, being half members of the Christian community.

The subaltern consciousness formed the primal factor in the Indian Pentecostal as distinguished from a from western, or missionary Pentecostalism. The historical reality of pre-missionary Pentecostalism is advocated and defended in the primal passion of Syriennic resistance to the Roman Catholicisation of the Syrian Orthodox Church from the sixteenth century onwards. As a consequence, “[t]he emerging Pentecostal movement in India could hardly be rendered as the missionary history of Western Pentecostal denomination” (Bergunder, 2011, p. 171)

The subaltern or Dalit theology in which the Indian Christian theology is freed from its Brahmic captivity and now enabled to be expressed through subaltern or Dalit voice. Within an historical liberative context the vernacular/primal voice is heard.105

Dalit theologians ... are careful not to define Dalit theology only in opposition to the dominant theology; to do so would mean letting the dominant theology serve as their point of reference. Rather, they seek a theology in which Dalits themselves are the subjects of their own history. (Chan, 2014, p. 56)

The restrictive nature expressed in the India Connect Group responses may reflect an embedded influence of the Syrian – Dalit social strata.

All major (and most of the mainline) denominations in Kerala have Syrian leadership. This Syrian domination goes back quite early. At the beginning of the 1920’s the majority of Pentecostals in Kerala were rather from ‘low caste’ or ‘untouchable’ background people who would call themselves Dalits today. (Bergunder, 2011, p. 171)

104 “While Pentecostalism in the West was born on the wrong side of the cultural track, it belonged to the really poor in India”(Mathew, 2016, p. 57).
105 As Bergunder put it, the Indian Pentecostal narrative relates to the unique social constructs of Indian society. The vernacular context is Indian, not Western.(Bergunder, 2011, p. 171)
The Fijian Participant

![Bar chart showing responses to statements about God's attributes.]

The participant acknowledges the grace filled and merciful attributes of God, without reference to the ways in which perceptions were formed. With the exception of two statements, God is a father/parent and God is a comforter/companion, responses are made by repeating the relevant words of each statement.

Section Two responses are predominantly toward a personal experience of a gracious God who is both forgiving and approving. A single item, “God rules me”, is scored at 1. This is consistent with the quantitative reverse scoring chart that measures a score of 1 for strongly agreeing with a perception of a judgmental God, indicating a strong agreement with the statement.

The Pacific Islands Connect Group

Discussions with the participants initially demonstrated their concern with the theological direction in which the discussion was heading. This is not a criticism of a failure to understand God. Rather, it reflects a pragmatic approach to God’s purpose and presence that finds expression in oral discourse of the ways in which God is experienced.
The questionnaire was completed on my return visit. The idea of how country of origin influences an individual's perception of God was further discussed on completion of the questionnaire. What does it mean to be a Samoan Christian, a Cook Islander Christian?

Samoan members of the group proposed that the Samoan culture did not influence the way that Samoan Christians perceived God. Rather, they saw the denominational distinctive as providing the interpretative dynamic. The majority of Samoans are Christians, making up 98% of the population\textsuperscript{106}. What distinguishes them from each other is their strong denominational identity. It is not so much a matter of being a Samoan Christian, but being a Baptist, Methodist or Assemblies of God Samoan.

I asked if there was a significant feature of Samoan religious consciousness that may have facilitated the Christianisation of Samoa. What is it in the Samoan culture that gave such access to Christianity? There was general agreement by all participants that Samoan Christianity was a unique case. However, while admitting the question was an interesting one, there was no response as to possible causes or background influences.

**Cook Islander responses**

P27’s responses indicated God as One who is to be obeyed, indicated in responses to God as father/parent, God as caring rather than angry, God as accepting rather than rejecting as well as implied in the conditional perception of God is accepting rather than rejecting as “always approving of the good things we do.” Personal experience rather than culture or ethnicity may be the motivating factor in the negative response to forgiveness; “I never knew forgiveness.”

All responses were either Strongly Agree or Agree in Section Two except for “Not Sure” for God rules me and God punishes me.

New Zealander responses

P28 provided partial responses to both sections of the questionnaire. This may have simply been a result of passing over the responses, especially in Section Two. Positive responses include God as father and love, a helper and guide, companion, compassionate, loving and caring, accepting, restricting in the sense of stopping sinning. No responses were given for either God as forgiving/unforgiving or God as approving/disapproving.
The participant responded in agreement to all descriptors, including “God punishes me” but did not respond to “God rules me”. This may have been an oversight rather than deliberate omission.

**Samoan responses**

The Samoan respondents indicated positives in relation to God as father/parent and God as helper/guide. Different responses were noted that would seem to indicate responses based on personal experience rather than common “country of birth” responses. P24’s remarks indicate a strong personal involvement in the implications of the statements. She indicated negative responses to God as comforter/companion, God as vengeful/compassionate, God as accepting/rejecting and strongly negative on God as forgiving/unforgiving and God as approving/disapproving. The other two respondents gave positive responses to God as comforter/companion, God as caring rather than angry and accepting rather than rejecting. P25 and P29 differed in their responses to God as vengeful/compassionate, God as freeing/restricting and God as approving/disapproving. P25 tended to be negative regarding the possibility of God’s vengeance when a person does wrong as well as “disapproving on all things that is wrong.” P25 favours unconditional forgiveness and approval.
Significantly, all three respondents answered either strongly agree or agree to the list of descriptors in Section Two, with the exception of P25 who responded not sure to “God strengthens me” and “God is unconditionally open to me”. These responses by P25 are consistent with the responses by this participant in the first section responses.

It is noted that the three participants scored agree or strongly agree to the final statement “God punishes me”. This response is significantly contrary to the responses of the other countries of origin. The responses, though unexpected, are in agreement with the responses of P24 and to a lesser extent P25 in Section One.

**Colombian Response**

P26 is included in this Connect Group as he was raised in New Zealand. His comments regarding influence of country of origin are relevant to the research; “The answers that I have given are of my experience over the past two years. Even though I was raised [Roman] Catholic, I was never shown to have a connection with God or to see Him in any form described in the above questions.”

A comparison with the Colombian respondents from the Spanish Connect Group demonstrates a clear agreement between them (P26, P38, P39, P45). The comparisons are detailed in the discussion of the Spanish Connect Group.

**The Pacific Islands stories**

Primal understandings of spirituality and transcendence in the Pacific Islands began well before the colonial and missionary periods (Dyrness, 2008; Forman, 2005). Ethnic and cultural patterns indicate, it has been suggested, the presence of God prior to the arrival of Western missionaries and culture. Dyrness and Kärkkäinen identified three periods

... the confrontational, emphasizing contrasts, transformational in which the pre-Christian presence of God is seen as preparatory to the coming of Christianity and substantial similarity which focuses on the similarity of concepts such as the idea of Supreme Being, spiritual reality and ethical ideals of love, respect and integrity. (Dyrness, 2008, p. 624)
Charles W. Forman traces a common thread of pre-colonial and pre-Christian perceptions of God’s actions within the respective cultures of the Pacific Islands. The Melanesian sense of community and inter-dependence, in contrast to Western individualism, is derived from primal experiences of the pre-Christian creator God who was to be later identified with the Christian Creator God.

Discussions indicated the unique setting of Christianity in Samoa. Culture was not considered a significant factor in the Samoan perceptions of God. Rather, such perceptions are denominationally based. This factor gives rise to a further consideration of the underlying question in my research; the influence of country of origin on perceptions of God. If we take the Samoan response, we may conclude that country of origin, in the cultural and ethnic sense, does not influence perceptions of God. Furthermore, the ordinary theology of the Samoan Christian is based on denominational fidelity.

Samoa’s unique place in a global Christian culture was emphasised afresh as recently as June 2017. In that month, the Samoan parliament voted overwhelmingly to declare Samoa a Christian state. Henceforth, Article 1 reads: “Samoa is a Christian nation founded on God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”. There seems to be little room for theological manoeuvre here. And yet, within the framework of a Christian theology, denominational distinctives, and even contrasts, may mitigate against a national theological consensus. Further consideration of the nation’s social imaginary may provide an interpretive grid for the study of ordinary theology in Samoa.

**The Latin American Connect Group**

This group has diverse representations from Latin American countries as well as one Australian. Its meetings are held in Spanish. The group was the most formal of those visited. The Bible study, a detailed consideration of how to live a life in community, was presented by a member of the group with minimal discussion apart from each member reading a part of the study notes.

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I was given time to introduce the research project. In a similar way to the Philippine Connect Group, attachment to Inspire Church was considered as a matter of loyalty and faithfulness rather than a specific accommodation to cultural diversity. As one participant commented; “in church worship what counts is not language or cultures but the Spirit of worship.”

Language was discussed within the context of worship. Another member of the group commented that Spanish is more expressive than English, especially in spiritual things. He commented further that he expected to speak English in church but that he appreciated the opportunity to speak Spanish in the Connect group. However, he agreed with other members of the group that worship transcends language.

The questionnaire was presented at this meeting along with the consent form. The questionnaire was in English, an unexpected difficulty that was overcome by other members of the group translating for those who could not read English. Others opted to respond in Spanish. This was noted in the research records.

There is a positive consistency by the eight respondents regarding God as father/parent, helper/guide and comforter/companion. They also indicated positive perceptions of God as compassionate, caring, accepting, freeing and, forgiving. However, the responses of the three Colombian participants indicated God as both approving and disapproving. Perhaps they reflect the Ecuadorian participant’s comment that God “approves good things and disapproves the wrong doing” and the Peruvian participant’s comment that “God approves good things and disapproves the bad.”

All respondents indicated “strongly agree” with the descriptors except the final one, “God punishes me”, which they all marked as disagree “strongly.”
Participants P41 and P42 provide contrasting approaches to the influence of their country of origin on their perceptions of their God experiences. While P41 recognised the influences, P42 did not. For P42, an understanding of God only began after their recent arrival in Australia. Consequently, the participant did not respond to any further statements in section one. Participant 41, however, recognized the influences of their country of origin. Responding in Spanish, the participant’s responses indicated an immanency of a caring, accepting and compassionate God who is ever present to free and forgive.

Participant P42 responded to the Section Two statements agreeing with Participant P41 in each aspect with a minor difference of degree in the final statement, “God punishes me”.

**Chilean responses**

![Bar chart showing responses from Participant 41 and Participant 42 for God experiences in Chile.](chart.png)
The four participants responded with similar perceptions of God. In the case of P26, a Colombian by birth but who considered New Zealand as the country of his religious and cultural formation, responses were based on the relatively brief two-year period since conversion from a Catholic expression of Christianity to a Pentecostal one. And yet, Participant P26 responses were very much aligned with the other participants. Participant P39 recognised the primal influence on perceptions of God in the first response of the first section. The other participants responded to an immanent God of grace and compassion through the use of the words of the statements without additional comments.

The participants are in agreement with the perception of an immanent God of grace and compassion as expressed through the responses in the first section. Participant 26 stands out numerically as slightly towards a more judgemental perception of God than the other participants.
Participant 40 recognises a God of immanent grace and compassion who disciplines but does not punish. Responses in the first section are in the words of the questionnaire statements without additional comments by the participant. In keeping with the Latin American Connect Group responses in the second section, Participant P40 responded positively confirming the responses in the first section with the exception of the rulership of God.
El Salvadorian responses

Responses to Section One were confined to the terminology of the questionnaire statements without additional comment. There may have been a language difficulty here as with other participants of the Latin American Connect Group who responded in the same way. The responses indicate a God of immanent grace, care and compassion.

Section Two responses conform with section one responses with the exception of responses to “God rules me” and “God punished me”. In both cases the responses are in the affirmative, indicating a leaning towards a judgmental or punitive perception of God.
The Peruvian participants provided detailed comments directed to the influence of their Peruvian religious and cultural formation. Participant 8 (P8) indicated a perception of God as compassionate and caring while at the same time, controlling in both sections of the questionnaire. There is a marked emphasis on the obligation to obey God. God is to be both respected and obeyed. The comparison with the required respect and obedience of a biological father points to a primal and patriarchal perception of God.

In this way, the participant linked personal perceptions of God with the formative experience of childhood coupled with the Peruvian social and religious cultures. God is compassionate, for example. But in the Peruvian religious culture, God can be perceived as vengeful.

The participant's perception of a God of compassionate grace is qualified by a number of caveats. While God is viewed as always present, the personal perception of that presence is diminished as God is never considered as a partner/companion. In his immanence, there is also transcendence. It may be inferred from the
participant's remarks that the idea of respect and obedience previously mentioned may influence the response to God as comforter/companion. Companionship and obedience may seem incongruous.

Obedience is further alluded to in regard to individual freedom. Freedom is a reality but only within the context of God’s laws. While not stated as such, obedience is implied. The participant's response to “God rules me” in Section Two agrees with the sense of obedience and implied restrictions expressed throughout Section One. The analogy of an emphatic paternalism recurs throughout both sections.

Furthermore, while God is experienced as caring, he may also, at times, be angry. And yet, the participant also recognizes that within the caveats of personal obedience, in which God may be either approving or disapproving depending on the circumstance, God is consistently forgiving.

The participant's exceptive clauses to God's gracious immanence in Section One are considerably modified in Section 2. There are nine instances of strong agreement. The participant's response to “God punishes me” highlights the perception of God as disciplinarian. The participant strongly agrees with divine discipline while also agreeing with the perception that God punishes the participant. Participant P43 clearly recognizes the decisive influence of personal experience on the formation of perceptions of God beginning at conversion in Peru.

Like P8, the participant (P43) recognizes certain limitations on the perception of a God of immanent grace. God is caring yet may become angry at disobedience through wrong behaviour. Similarly, God approves the good, but disapproves the bad. The participant affirms God's consistent. The participant learned God's compassion from the earliest age as well as the continued help of God within the family. There is a significant contrast between the participant's unequivocal agreement to the idea of unlimited human freedom in Section One and the idea of God's rulership in Section Two.

The Latin American story

The participant discussions as well as questionnaire responses reflect a level of similarity, though not conformity across the continent. The seventeenth century implantation of Christianity in Latin America by the
Catholic Church with its political yet uneasy alignment with the civil authorities privileged the Roman Catholic Church. The development of Pentecostalism provided the marginalized of indigenous and Afro-Latino origin havens of security and communal identity.

The sense of community was affirmed during the open discussions held with the members of the Latin American Connect Group. Church attendance and commitment were expressed as vital components Pentecostal spirituality resonating with their Latin American narratives.

Chile is a case in point (Anderson, 2004, pp. 239-240; Bonino, 1995, pp. 64-65). The church community acts as a location of worship as well as a social community in which personal identity is discovered or recovered and affirmed. The liberative element of Chilean Pentecostalism contrasts with the socio/political context in which the believer only experienced “misery, unemployment, illness and alcoholism” (Bonino, 1995, p. 65). In its place, the Chilean believer enters a new community, one in which the believer experiences “the certainty of the nearness and living presence of a forgiving and accepting God”.108

The Chilean narrative is repeated across Latin America. Ruth Padilla DeBorst draws on her diverse experiences across Latin America to conclude

A deeply theological affirmation that there is no sociopolitical, economic, ecological or religious context in which God’s gracious presence in Word and Spirit, does not take on flesh and walk among God’s people for the sake of God’s good purposes. A song of hope, bursting forth in our language, with the rhythms of our heart and the music of our people. (DeBorst, 2012, p. 87)

The Pentecostal communities of El Salvador are also identified as communities of personal identity and social engagement. The social upheaval of the 1970s and 1980s evidenced a period of internal migration that resulted in the rapid growth of cities, especially the capital, Salvador. The resulting large urban communities became centres for the marginalized. Rural identity was forfeited while a new urban identity was forged through identity with the church community of like-minded displaced former rural workers. For the Pentecostal believers of El Salvador, the Pentecostal

108 Though now somewhat dated, Christian Lalive d'Epinay's study (d'Epinay, 1969) provides detailed analysis of the foundational period of the Chilean Pentecostal movement with specific attention to the Pentecostal community as a “haven of the masses.”
church building (Templo) exists not only as a sacred place within which los hermanos gather weekly to encounter the divine and worship together. It also functions as an important relational domain, where members experiment with, devise and practice a model of social life together ... (Huff, 2016, p. 161)

The liberative spirituality expressed in the Pentecostal community takes precedence over a codification of faith and practice. The personal narrative is identified through participation with the community narrative. Ministry within the community does not pre-suppose academic achievement or personal ability. Rather, expressions of ministry are perceived as evidences of individual giftings for the benefit of the church community.

The immanence of a forgiving God who protects and provides is exemplified across the Latin American Connect group participants. The ordinary narratives reflect the Latin American narrative.

Political and social convulsions across the continent during the 1960s and 1980s resulted in a formative period of social uncertainty, alienation and oppression. Colombia is a case in point (Cuartas, 2016, pp. 139-141). The uncertainties of mere survival during this period saw the rise of liberation theologies, the uniquely Latin American contribution to global theology. Within the same time frame, Latin American Pentecostalism presented a liberative and transformative message.

Peruvian Pentecostalism was also forged in the context of revolution and violence. Like their Chilean counterparts, the Peruvian Pentecostal formation developed in a context in which “life seemed worthless, and there was no security, even in the most sheltered cities – the terrors of hell and the fear of death were the motivations that triggered conversion” (Campos, 2016, p. 231).

The common element of political upheaval and social marginalization characterised the formative narrative of Latin American Pentecostalism. When considering the vernacular, or mother-tongue of ordinary Pentecostal theology, in Latin America Klass Bom suggests an ecclesial turn: what she has in mind is an engagement with Roman Catholic theology understanding (Bom, 2016, p. 185). He asserts that the vernacular language of Latin American theology is delivered with a Roman Catholic accent. He is certainly correct when he states that Roman Catholic theology “dominates Latin culture” (p.185). However, it must be conceded that Protestant and particularly Pentecostal theology in Latin America has developed from the perspective of the
marginalised and isolated populations for whom Roman Catholic theology is identified with ecclesial and political hierarchies. In this case, the emphasis is on what is dissimilar and not on what is similar\textsuperscript{109}.

**The Philippine Connect Group**

![Bar Chart: The Philippines](chart.png)

This group allowed the most time to the research project with a lively discussion before and after the completion of the questionnaire. The discussion of the influence of country of origin on possible diverse perceptions of God focused on the shared interest of all cultures within Inspire “on Jesus” which is reflected in the free approach of the worship style of the church. The older generation expressed shock with the informality of dress and worship in the local church in contrast to the formal approaches with which they were familiar in

\textsuperscript{109} In spite of such difficulties Bom concludes that “the shared charismatic and Pentecostal experiences present a particular understanding of God. From this perspective, the relations between God and the human being is based on divine love that makes possible a continuous and intimate dialogue.”
the Philippines. There is a strong cultural pull to have to go to church. A definite loyalty was expressed for Inspire Church perhaps emanating from this cultural necessity to belong to a church.

The discussion that followed the questionnaire was lively. The majority expressed appreciation for the opportunity to think through some of the perceptions that they had of God. The conversation focused on personal experience of God’s care and compassion. Three members of the Connect group indicated their experiences of God. A husband and wife related their difficulties associated with a diagnosis of cancer. A woman related her difficulties with her husband’s long-term unemployment. In each case, the continued support of the group reflected the familial characteristic of the Philippine culture consistent with the responses in the questionnaire.

Six members of the group responded. P6 had completed the questionnaire as one of the initial responses to the invitation to participate. It will be noted that her responses were often different to the rest of the group.

The perception of God as father was consistent with the seven responses. Three recognised that their parents were influential in understanding God as father. P6 added that they were taught to obey their elders and parents. This was also reflected in their obeying God. The seven participants also affirmed God as helper/guide and God as comforter/companion. P32 and P34 indicated the strong family influence on their culture, especially in understanding God as a comforter. P34 also indicated the place of church attendance in the Philippine community.

When it came to God as either vengeful or compassionate, one participant (P6) indicated a conditional aspect: God will punish any wrongdoing but will also show compassion when the person repents. P32 remains consistent in recognising the influence of parents in understanding God’s compassion. The five other participants perceived God as compassionate.

On the description of God as caring or angry, P6 again highlighted the dual character of God; “God cares for us but is also angry when we do the wrong thing.” The other participants were consistent in their positive responses of God as caring. A contrast is again evident between P6 and the members of the Connect group in regard to God accepting or rejecting. Whereas P6 sees God as only accepting those within the Church, the other
group members see God as accepting “no matter what we have done” (P32) or as accepting “sinners” (P34). All respondents are consistently positive in referring to God as freeing, forgiving, and approving.

The variations in this section relate to the descriptors “God rules me” which P6 disagrees with while the others indicate either agree (one) or strongly agree (five) as well as “God punishes me” which P6 indicates uncertainty while the other participants either disagree (four) or strongly disagree (two). The responses indicate an overall consistency with those given in section one.

The Filipino story

It has been suggested, though with some reservation, that the primal Christian story of the Philippines parallels somewhat that of Latin America (Kim, 2005; Harper, 2002; Suico, 2005, p.195; Martin, 2011, p. 25-26). The combination of civil authority vested in the hands of an autocratic colonial authority and religious authority of Iberian Catholicism (Harper, 2002, p. 157) provides the Philippines an ordinary primal status more in line with that of Latin America than that of other Asian nations (Kim, 2005, p. 235; Suico, 2005). Latin American influence lasted some three hundred and fifty years up until 1899. The development of primal Spanish religious and political identities would be undeniable within that timeframe. Yet, there also remains a pre-Spanish primal religious narrative that continues to impact Filipino ordinary stories.

Elijah Jong Fil Kim identifies a primal spirituality in the Philippines sourced in the traditional or local religiosity and spirituality from the lower level of the religious systems (De Yong, 2005, p. 238). Kim further identifies of primal spirituality in Filipino Pentecostalism; “Pentecostal spirituality has been deeply related to folk/popular religions in Asia, i.e., to animistic beliefs and practices in ‘supernatural ‘arenas (De Yong, 2005, p. 238).”

The supernaturalistic primal religion evident in the Philippines and the rest of Asia as well as Latin America facilitated the popular acceptance and growth of Pentecostalism in these regions. Primal

\[110\] Wonsuk Ma also recognises the influence of ‘primal spirituality’ within the broader context of Pentecostalism and Asian Pentecostalism more specifically (Akrong, 2011, p. 56).
supernaturalism found a home in Pentecostalism’s acceptance of an immanent God of personal and powerful intervention. The questionnaire responses very much identified with such a perception of God’s relationship.

G.W. Harper’s research on Filipino and Latin American expressions of Pentecostalism further identified a common social factor in the emphasis on the family unit in which

Both Latin American and Philippine cultures continue to lay great stress on the family unit taking the extended family as the basic building block of society. (Harper, 2002, p. 155-156)

Filipino participants commented on the core primal influence of the family in their understanding of the nature of God. The social interaction of the extended family was evidenced in the group prayers for the three members of the Connect who requested prayer.

**Analysis and conclusions**

![Responses by country of origin](chart.png)
Thirty-nine responses were received, with six individual responses and thirty-three responses in the Connect groups representing thirteen countries of origin. A further fifteen completed the Expression of Interest but did not continue with the project. One under age participant was not accepted.

The discussion of perceptions of God was something new to each participant. This may have caused a significant number to withdraw from the project once they had received the questionnaire. Unfortunately, attempts to follow up these participants were not successful. It was found that open discussions at the Connect Groups relieved initial hesitation and timidity.

This was particularly evident with the Pacific Islander group. Initial apprehension was very much evident when I introduced the research project. However, discussions that followed the questionnaire were exuberant with each participant sharing their answers. The weight of evidence was on the side of personal testimony to God as father, a God who cares, forgives and freely accepts without reservation.

A readiness to give oral testimony of God’s immanent interventions featured in each Connect group. This common factor is an aspect of the Pentecostal emphasis on personal testimony to God’s interventions in the individual’s life; an essential factor in a Pentecostal hermeneutic.

The pre- and post-questionnaire discussions were invaluable. The basic question of what it means to be a (country of origin) Christian provided access for open discussion. The discussions were later matched with the questionnaire results with a common response across the groups; God’s fatherly care, tempered by discipline and unconditional or conditional accepting.

There is agreement here with a Pentecostal theology of redemptive immediacy and divine immanence. The redemptive relationship provides the believer with the assurance of God’s personal presence and his intervening power in their daily situations.

Evidence suggests that differences across countries of origin may not be as significant as first thought. Could it be that the similarities are necessary responses to the experience of the God who transcends cultural and ethnic differences? Here sociology meets theology. The review of Pentecostal theology as a pragmatic immediacy in Chapter Three was carried out in the context of classic global Pentecostalism. Uniformity in regard
to the essential being of God is a theological given. In this case, then, we may anticipate that the interventions of the Triune God reflect a uniformity with his being. God’s being and his actions are not culturally determined though they may be perceived from a cultural context. Is this not why the Connect group participants find a haven of cultural and spiritual identity within their Connect groups which is then extended to their haven of belief and belonging at Inspire church?

Are there significant differences that are not being asked in the questionnaire? To answer this question, I now turn to my observations at the Connect Group meetings.

It is here that we encounter the connection between the ordinary theology of the participants and a pragmatic Pentecostal theology. My discussions with the Connect groups was not focused around a theology of pragmatic immediacy. To have done so may have implied a sense of coercion on my part. Instead, the discussions focused on testimony to a personal relationship with God in the context of divine attributes. Participant responses subtly witnessed to levels of agreement with the pragmatic immediacy of a Pentecostal theology.

Such a theology affirms a redemptive immediacy. Participants witnessed to various instances of God’s immediate intervention. Examples included salvation and miracles of healing or solution to immediate needs, whether financial, physical, emotional or spiritual. It was expected that God would intervene in all situations.

It is noteworthy in this regard that each Connect group spent time in intercessory prayer. This of itself is surely not unusual for a Christian gathering. There was, however an intense expectation of God’s intervention in every situation of prayer.

The expectation of God’s intervention was encouraged through personal testimony of what God had done in the lives of the Connect group members, either that week or significant past events. A member of the Filipino Connect Group, for example, testified of a recent physical healing while another member testified of the provision of employment. Such types of personal witness were not uncommon across the Connect Groups.

Spiritual immanence is closely aligned with pragmatic immediacy. By this is meant the personal and immanent presence of the transcendent God. My participation in the worship at the Connect Groups indicated
the sense of God very much being there with the Connect Group members. Prayers were spoken in a conversational manner, not to invoke God's presence but to acknowledge his presence.

The distinctive Pentecostal dimension was evidenced in glossolalia. It was something of a delight for me to attend such occasions when worship was offered to God in English, in the languages of the Connect Groups, and the language of the Spirit.

I concluded that the ordinary theology expressed in the Connect Groups did not vary significantly from the broad expressions of a pragmatic Pentecostal theology.

The data received from the questionnaire, discussions and personal observation at Inspire Church indicates a broad consensus of perceptions of the ways in which God is experienced. The pragmatic approach of Pentecostal Christianity aligns with the experientially based responses of the research participants.
Chapter Seven
On Being Inspired

Over the last several decades Inspire Church has been transformed. What began as a congregation of 70 with rented facilities above a shoe shop is now a mega-church of 6,000 members with campuses in four locations throughout New South Wales. The church's growth very much reflects the multicultural growth of Liverpool and Sydney's western suburbs.

In order to map the faith and witness of Inspire this research project has brought together a number of interweaving themes. The first of these themes was the autobiographical. Personal experience provided the initial driving force behind the project. The researcher's personal journey, an ordinary story, was the stimulus which led to the investigation into what was happening within the diverse cultures and ethnicities at Inspire. This autobiography turned into a theography that reflected a personal journey with God – and not just some cultural experience. The sense of God's purpose, covert as it first seemed, became clearer through a personal experience of redemptive immediacy. Consequently, the researcher discovered havens of belief and belonging in a Pentecostal congregation.

The cultural turn in the theography came about through the researcher's encounter with cultural distinctives and identity as the “other” in an Assemblies of God church in Brazil. This seemingly faraway country played a pivotal role as an interactive catalyst for understanding and participating in the development of ethnic - and cultural - formed identity. The anticipated cultural and unexpected theological interactions provided a cross-cultural understanding to the personal theography. Through an extended period of service with the Brazilian church, the researcher's “otherness” became less and less obvious. Theological and cultural assimilation bridged the cultural and theological divides. Just as the researcher had discovered a haven of belief and belonging in a small congregation in Albury, NSW, so now he found a similar haven in a large congregation in the city of Campinas, Brazil.
The question of being the “other” was repeated in the researcher’s eventual return to Australia. The church back home was not the one that the researcher had left behind. Now he had become the “other” alongside of the “others” at Inspire. Initial observation indicated a sense of community cohesiveness at Inspire. Would this extend to a theological cohesiveness? Had the ethnic and cultural “others” also found havens of belief and belonging at Inspire?

The Inspire story begs a comparison with Mosaic. Marti’s research of Mosaic’s unique approach to its multicultural community through havens of theology and inclusion can be extended to Inspire Church. This analogy of havens was clearly evident in the Connect Group discussions on their particular relationships with the Inspire Church as a whole. These intentional conversations with each Connect Group exemplified a strong sense of corporate identity and belonging associated with Inspire church. It was their church home/haven.

Now that sense of being a haven could have been influenced by any one of a number of factors – many of them social or cultural. It is into this mix of factors that the possibility of being a theological haven was situated. The responses submitted reflected a common understanding of God’s relational attributes. The participant responses indicated a theological cohesiveness, but not necessarily conformity. The research project is as such a theography of perceptions of God and how these are formed. The theological theme, then, is a consistent presence throughout.

The project is, of course, a form of faith seeking understanding. In this instance it is expressed through an inquiry into perceptions of God across cultures. It is thus addressing an aspect of the peculiar logic of God. It is not seeking to build a comprehensive doctrine of God. The intention was more selective. The project has been carried out against a Pentecostal commitment to a Trinitarian understanding of God. In terms of the more specific dimension to this research project the emphasis has been on the relational nature of God - hence a focus on the attributes of God as they might be experienced within a Pentecostal community.

The emerging discipline of ordinary theology is the second thread that is woven into the project. Comparative analysis was made with the ordinary research carried by Christie and Cartledge. Ordinary theology, the vernacular autobiography of an experience of God, is not an add-on to the theological enterprise. Instead, it is
proposed that, ordinary theology expresses the personal encounter with God that takes place within the theological dynamic of God’s immediacy and immanence. Such a theology partners with an academic theology to form a lived theology of God. The congregant, the ordinary theologian, is not simply the passive recipient of the theology of the congregation but is recognised as having a significant contribution to the articulation of that theology.

The research results demonstrated a consistency of perceptions of God’s relational attributes across ethnic and cultural diversity within Inspire. That brings to mind Marti’s conclusions regarding Mosaic as a theological haven. The evident consistency of understanding in the Connect Groups indicates a similar habitus at Inspire.

It might seem somewhat incongruous to use the term theological haven for a Pentecostal congregation in which theology is very much a pragmatic exercise. In line with the pragmatic approach I discussed the term “haven of belief” with the senior pastor. He concluded that Marti’s term “theological haven” does not align with his understanding of Inspire’s theological pragmatism. The focus of the preaching at Inspire is on a lived-out belief rather than a more conceptual theological approach. The term “haven of belief” was considered as a substitute for “haven of theology”. The senior pastor indicated that this term would be more acceptable within the diverse Inspire church community than that of a theological haven.

As a haven of belief Inspire takes a Pentecostal approach to the communication of theology to its adherents. A theology of Christian faith and practice is delivered through preaching that is formed through a tridactic Pentecostal hermeneutic in which Scripture, Spirit and community witness together to revealed truth. The essential authority of Scripture is paramount. In this way, Pentecostal churches, such as Inspire, share the classic evangelical perspective of the central function of preaching in the local church.

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111 Inspire does not include a theological statement on its website. However, there are five core values that indicate expressions of a lived belief, a faith in practice. [https://www.inspirechurch.com/our-vision](https://www.inspirechurch.com/our-vision). Accessed 29 September 2018.

112 Inspire’s website affirms the church’s regard for the authority of Scripture: “There are some things we are unapologetic about. Teaching from the entire Bible is one of them. We believe the Word of God is divinely inspired, infallible, and is the final authority”. [https://www.inspirechurch.com/im-new](https://www.inspirechurch.com/im-new). Accessed 29 September 2018.
It is necessary here to align the ordinary theology expressed by the research participants with a more academic approach. The discussion will provide a consistent and cohesive approach to the theological foundations of the congregation. It is here that two of the interweaving themes in the research project intersect: those two themes have to do with how an ordinary theology of God’s relational attributes engage with a cognitive theology of God’s essence. It will be argued that the participants’ approaches to God’s attributes are consistent with the integrity of divine essence and being.

The research participants’ understanding of the ontological essence of God was not tested. That God is - that is, the existence of God and that we can use human language to talk about God - is a theological given for myself and the research participants. It was not necessary for my research to discuss first if God exists. The research tested God in his economic relationships – that is how God salvifically engages with us. The emphasis fell upon a perceptual and experiential knowledge of God mediated through an implicit understanding of providence. The focus was on a set of relational attributes. The common denominator here is the experience of the attributes of God. The ontological divine reality responds in the free grace of his attributes without favour or caprice. As God is, so he acts. As God acts, he makes himself known. It is assumed that the divine essence, relational attributes and revelation are consistent and non-contradictory (Malachi 3:6). This confessional claim does not imply an imprisonment of God’s free action within a closed essentiality or actuality. Steven J. Duby asks the question, “can it be that God therefore changes in relation to creatures? (Duby, 2017, p. 161). Duby answers his own question:

While it certainly must be said that God dwells with his creatures in the world and its history (e.g. Ps.68:16; Acts 17:27-8; Rev.21:1-4) and operates diversely in keeping with their physical and spiritual conditions, it still need not be said that God changes his eternally chosen relation toward the creature. For, if God’s eternal, wise counsel and plan already encompasses all the decisions of creatures and actions of God, without need of revision, then his eternally settled, multifaceted relation to creatures does not change. On the other hand, if we are prone to think that the self-sufficient God of Holy Scripture must not truly involve himself in the economy, we do well to recall the rich variety of his exercise of his essential perfection and the immediacy with which he acts pro nobis. The development of redemptive history is not ‘handed over’ to history itself; God initiates, God acts and God fulfils his good purposes. On the other hand, if we are prone to think that he must undergo motion and fulfil some inactive potency in himself in order to accomplish his works, we do well to remember that what God does comes about simply by his directing his triune prevenient actuality toward the world.(Duby, 2017, p. 161)
We are moving here within the context of Christie’s research in ordinary theology. Her findings of a functional Christology and suspicions of covert Arianism may not be so much of an affront to God’s ontological essence. Rather, here is evidence of an ordinary, vernacular and embedded recognition of God’s relational function and action. The participant, as an ordinary theologian, is not aware of the creedal statements of divine ontology. It is at this point that the ordinary and the academic intersect.

It is helpful now to consider the work of Terry L. Cross (Cross, 2009) concerning finite humanity’s experience of the infinite deity from the standpoint of a Pentecostal theology of experience. The reality of the God experience gives immediacy to the personal understanding of God which is then validated through theological reflection. A Pentecostal theology of experience places the foremost emphasis on the fact that we have experienced the God of the universe, indeed the very God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, of Jesus, Lydia and Paul. We confess a radical openness to the invasion and intervention of God’s Spirit in our daily lives. (Cross, 2009, p. 5)

An immediate and unmediated encounter with God expressed in the participants personal narratives inform and are, in turn, informed by theological reflection. A dialogue between an ordinary theology and an academic theology is not peripheral to the sense of Inspire as a haven of belief. Rather, the believer’s understanding and response to God’s immanent presence is evaluated and acknowledged through engagement with an academic, cognitive theology. In such a dialogue, an ordinary theology and an academic express a unified purpose as “faith seeking understanding.”

The historical Pentecostal hesitancy to engage in dialogue with academic theology resulted in suspicion from outside the movement and inconsistency, excess, even error from within. For this reason Cross rightly advocates on behalf of a dialogue between experience and theological reflection.

Clearly our experiences with God should shape our doctrinal understanding of this God – if the experiences are truly encounters with the Living God and if we allow those experiences to inform our theological reflection. (Cross, 2009, p. 7)
Cross’s statement, however, is only one part of the dialogue. If a Pentecostal theology of experience is to be taken seriously within the scope of cognitive theology, it must also submit itself to the rigorous application of Cross’s concern for a doctrinal understanding of God to be shaped by experience. In other words, doctrinal understanding must play a part in shaping understanding of experience. In this way theological reflection and experience inform each other.

The statement- “if the experiences are truly encounters with the Living God” - clarifies the necessity to verify God encounters by rightly identifying the God of the encounter. The validity test, then, is essential. But how is validity played out in the ordinary stories of God experiences? Two theological assumptions are essential from a Pentecostal perspective.

First, the Spirit of God is the transcendent Source, and verifier, of the immanent experience of God. The Spirit’s attestation to the validity of the immanent encounter with God may serve as a catalyst for theological reflection within its broader contexts. Cross argues that

seething under the surface of many historical doctrinal concerns are hints of the potential for experience to act as a catalyst, driving these doctrinal concerns deeper and wider. (Cross, 2009, p. 10)

Second, Pentecostal theological reflection on the experience of God within a broader theological framework will enhance what is the genuine and expose what may be the superficial or suspicious in the ordinary testimony of the God encounter: such is a positive outcome for a Pentecostal theology of divine immediacy.

The Pentecostal experience of God’s immediacy, expressed in the research participant responses, responds to the question of whether or not the finite being is “capable of bearing the Infinite God”(Cross, 2009, p. 11). The response is a vital one for an ordinary theology’s experiential hermeneutic. What happens when the human spirit encounters the Spirit of God? We look first to the research participants ordinary stories of an immanent God.

Participants acknowledged the immediacy of God’s presence, empowering and protective. They also acknowledged a disciplinary God. At no time in the research process did a participant express a spiritual
superiority or exclusiveness because of their perceived encounters with God. Theirs are narratives of divine transcendence within the context of their diverse finite ordinariness. The apostle Paul's analogy of clay pots (2 Corinthians 4:7) is appropriate here.

Paul had previously described the surpassing glory of God. And now he has the temerity to link this same glory to clay pots. His intention is to stress that the “genuine power may be acknowledged as God’s and not ours” (Cross, 2009, p. 12). Here are the inexhaustible riches of God’s grace experienced in the immediacy and immanence of transcendent glory in the most ordinary of human vessels.

Furthermore, within the participant narratives God intervened in grace, acting powerfully in and for them. Neither the open discussion periods nor the questionnaire responses indicated merit, control or influence that initiated their God encounters. What was evident was the clear testimony to the reality of God’s personal interventions in their diverse personal histories. Such ordinary responses require an answer to the question: to what extent, if any, may finite humanity experience the immanent presence of Infinite Deity?

Caution is essential when assessing the possibility, identity and meaning of an encounter with the transcendent yet immanent God. Scripture records personal experiences of the transcendent God. Seek God and he will be found (Deuteronomy 4:29). The distressed, the outcast, the exiled and the repentant will find a God of mercy and grace (Deuteronomy 4:31). At such times the action, the giving, comes from God to humanity without the absorption of the divine into the human or the human into the divine. And yet, the encounter with God is a genuine meeting together of the infinite God with finite humanity. At all times, in moments of the conscious immediacy of God, and those moments that are unconsciously divine encounters known only by their consequences, the believer is the receiver by grace of the transcendent God in immanent relationship. Grace is the essential element. Once again Cross asserts that

[w]e do not possess a capacity for holding God within our humanity, however, we are given such a capacity by the grace of God. Through the Infinite Gracious One we experience infinite love and even the presence of the Infinite One. (Cross, 2009, p. 18)
To suggest otherwise is contrary to Scripture and analogous to an enthronement of clay pots. Within the bounds of unlimited redemptive grace, the believer experiences the immediacy of the transcendent/immanent Triune God. In a very real yet incomprehensible way, God is experienced within each research participant’s everyday life. The experience of God acknowledged by the participants was a relational encounter with God’s attributes that in turn pointed to, but did not clarify, the mystery of God.

It is at this point that discussion turns to the relationship between the essence of God, his mystery and his attributes in the relational encounters recorded by the participants. The search for an understanding of God focuses on the essential characteristics of divine personality: essence and attributes. Theological discussion either distinguishes essence from attributes or merges attributes within the divine essence. The debate concerns how God’s transcendent essence may be revealed to and known by finite humanity. For the purpose of this research, God’s transcendent essence is revealed, though partially, through his immanent actions of his presence: his attributes.

The ordinary theology of the participants looks at God through the lenses of divine functionality when identifying the God who is encountered in gracious immediacy. Relational descriptors highlight the responses both in the initial group discussions as well as in the written responses. God is experienced through his attributes rather than initially, through his divine essence or through doctrinal statement. At the same time, we recognise, along with Kärkkäinen, the dynamic interchange between essence and attributes.

When considering the attributes of God are we in the context of God as he is (essence) or God as he is to us (or better - as he has revealed himself to us? The current diverse moves away from a settled traditional listing of the attributes of God has resulted in approaches to the attributes of God that speak directly to the human heart in its situational context – liberation, dynamic categories, also as 'locally driven characterisations of God'. Kärkkäinen recognises that within the diversity of attitudes in the attribute-essence debate

[cultural differences among Christian traditions also have much to bear on the topic. Theologians from various contexts of the African continent, for example, have developed creative, locally driven characterizations of God.(Kärkkäinen, 2014, p. 285)
The research takes on a relational rather than a logical/rational priority in its approach to the divine attributes. Awareness of the divine essence is confessed but little understood or explained in the research discussions. The participants’ experience of the divine attributes identified within the essence/attributes dynamic of the biblical narrative.

Reading the attributes of God from the narrative of God in the canon and the economy of salvation in the world tell us that they are 'short hand descriptions of the God whose immanent essence is set forth in the story of Israel and Jesus' and a way of 'confession'. (Kärkkäinen, 2014, pp. 286-287)

Discussions of the attributes of God within ordinary theology testify to the immanency of God that is comprehensively identified with the reality of God’s transcendent essence (Pannenberg, 1998, p. 359). As Kärkkäinen explained

the attributes tell us of God in relation to the world. At the same time, rooted in the undivided, common essence of God, the notion of the infinity of God (while it does not allow us to ultimately define the essence of God) helps us to link the attributes in a way that categorical substance ontology does not. (Kärkkäinen, 2014, pp. 288-289)

Immanence and transcendence, like essence and attributes, are not contradictory but speak together of divine reality in the transcendence of the immanent God and immanence of the transcendent God. Both are held in perceptual tension but inextricably speak with one voice of the same reality. The potential tension and ambiguity do not deny the partial nature of the experience of divine reality, however. The transcendent God is not revealed in the totality of his ontological being. Yet, in the ordinary narratives of God encounters there is a subtle implication, perhaps even eschatological anticipation, of meeting with the “unity of the essence” (Pannenberg, 1998, p. 357). The apostle Paul alluded to such an ineffable possibility or even actuality (1Corinthians 13:12).

The participants recognised the presence of transcendent deity expressed through his relational attributes of grace and mercy. Connect Group testimonies, while not using academic theological terminology, nonetheless certified the very real presence of God himself throughout diverse narratives. The actions of God were acknowledged by participants as acts of his revelation. God is known by what he does. As Pannenberg
states “God finds manifestation in the working of his power, and we know the distinctiveness of his essence, and differentiate it from others” (Pannenberg, 1998, p. 359).

The unambiguous identity of divine attributes and divine essence is at the heart of the research project analysis. Consistency of responses within diverse cultural and ethnic formation supports Pannenberg’s argument that divine transcendence is itself relational. The ordinary theologians of the Connect Groups were unaware of the attributes/essence dynamic of their responses. The collation of the individual responses, however, speaks to both an ordinary theology of God encounters and an academic theology of divine essence.

Thiselton’s cautionary comments are justified regarding the place of experience in the formation of theology when he states: “Experience offers a hermeneutical bridge, but if it is abstracted from Scripture, tradition and reason, it is notoriously capable of unstable or diverse interpretation” (Thiselton, 2007, p. 453). Indeed,

Experience, then, offers a reliable hermeneutic starting point only if it regarded as a provisional way into the subject, in effect more strictly to yield pre-understanding or preliminary understanding rather than understanding itself.... It remains subject to the ‘control of engagement with the biblical narrative. (Thiselton, 2007, p. 453)

The viability of Inspire as a haven of belief requires that Thiselton’s caution be taken into account. A haven of belief, to be a haven, refuge, sanctuary requires a high degree of theological diligence. A theology of pragmatic immediacy is not a capricious experientialism. Rather, it functions best within the context of “the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people” (Jude 1:1). It is here that we find the haven of belief.

The idea of a Pentecostal church as a haven of belief extends itself to the broader aspect of a more academic theology. Pentecostal theology has made commendable progress in recent years in the field of academic theology. The relatively recent arrival of an academic Pentecostal theology may require time to filter through to the broader constituencies of local churches. In the meantime, Pentecostal church leaders will be required to recognise that an academic Pentecostal theology is not a threat to the pragmatic immediacy of classic
Pentecostalism. Instead, an academically defined and defended Pentecostal theology will contribute to the continued strength and witness of global Pentecostalism.

In the same way, academic Pentecostal theology is to be done in conversation with ordinary Pentecostal theology - the third member in a triadic Pentecostal hermeneutic. Pentecostal theology was formed within the context of a commonality of experience within a diversity of contexts. Consider, for example, the research participants. Their reflections on God's immanence and redemptive immediacy coincide with academic expressions of divine transcendence and immanence. An ordinary Pentecostal theology brings its academic partner into the realm of a praxis of the Christian faith.

Inspire Church is a haven of belief. It is also a haven of belonging. Here we address the sociological theme that interweaves with the theological throughout the research project. This task is very necessary as it would seem as if the levels of difference between and among members/participants is more a function of sociology than theology.

The Inspire congregation is a microcosm of the demographics of the western suburbs of Sydney. The are 79 countries of origin represented amongst the adherents. Yet, within that diversity there exists a cohesion of community identity. This social cohesion is not in spite of the ethnic diversity but alongside of that diversity. There is again a marked similarity with Marti’s research at Mosaic. Marti used the term “ethnic transcendence” to describe the community identity at Mosaic. That is, the members of Mosaic see themselves as members of the Mosaic community and not as members of ethnic communities who attend Mosaic. The same may be said for the Inspire community. The broad ethnic diversity, though obvious and appreciated, functions as a second order identity. First order identity is that which comes from the common redemptive relationship within the body of Christ, the community of the Spirit.

In such a scenario the individual in community ministers, not on the basis of achievement or ethnic identity but on the common denominator of the giftings of the Spirit. Paul describes such a community gifting: “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1Corinthians 12:7). The Pentecostal expression of belonging is given further expression through the distinctive Pentecostal spirituality
associated with the baptism of the Spirit and consequent speaking in tongues. It is here that the ethnic transcendence alluded to takes precedence over ethnic diversity. Glossolalia may infer a crossing over of the primal language of a culturally formed theology. What occurs is a coming together in the church community in which the Spirit ministers communally (1Corinthians 12:4-14). Within that community of the Spirit a haven of belonging is established.

Inspire Church’s identity as a haven of belonging extends beyond the multicultural society of the western suburbs. Inspires’ mission is to be an inclusive haven in which “people of all races and genders” are valued. As an example, Connect Groups are based on culture as well as Bible and discipleship, hobbies, crafts and lifestyle, arts and education technology, sport, fitness and healthy living and growth and self-development.

Inspire Church’s role as a haven of belonging is particularly significant within the context of the multicultural church community in which cultural and ethnic heterogeneity replace western homogeny. Should trends continue, the majority membership within the Australian Christian Churches will be of one those born outside Australia as is currently the case at Inspire Church. Two opportunities open up for the Australian church in this regard.

Firstly, church members born overseas may significantly contribute to maintaining the essentials of Pentecostal faith and practice within the local congregation. Connect Group discussions represented thirteen countries of origin. The immediacy of God’s interventions in diverse life experiences was a consistent theme in all the discussions. The community of Inspire Church, as a haven of belonging, interacts with 79 countries of origin. The church promotes the active participation of all adherents to fulfil its vision for community engagement.

Secondly, local church and denominational leadership recognition of the contribution of those born outside Australia extends to those in leadership. Such a concept though it may be challenging in the cultural sense is not outside Pentecostal expectations of ministry leadership. Recognition is based on ministry giftings and not academic achievement. Ministry leadership of those born outside of Australia requires recognition on
the same basis. The result of such a heterogeneous leadership within Inspire Church and the denomination may be evident within both multicultural and diasporic churches.

The development of diasporic Pentecostal churches is addressed at this point. The research findings of consistency of perceptions of God across cultural and ethnic divides identify the opportunity to enhance the sense of community between nationally led churches and ethnically led churches. Appreciation of ethnic distinctives in faith and practice are to be maintained as well as the contribution that the distinctives may make to churches across the spectrum of national and diasporic. The dialogue is one carried on between equal contributors.

The research project was carried out with Australia’s multicultural society as the background. Christian ministry is nothing less than the church’s participation in the Missio Dei, God’s redemptive purpose for humanity. The focus of ministry, therefore, is on the redemptive mission within and especially outside the Christian community in society in general. In the Australian context, then, that society is a multicultural one.

How does Inspire Church aspire to be a haven of belonging to its multicultural society? As a microcosm of the broader society the multicultural church community provides the ideal context for the appreciation of ethnic diversity while, at the same time, identifying with the ethnic “other” within the context of the human need.

The opportunity is there for the multicultural church member to reflect the same context of diversity and unity within their social contexts. The idea here is that of ethnic heterogeneity alongside that of a homogenous humanity; a diversity in unity. The consistency of perceptions of God across diverse ethnic experiences clearly indicates that God is the same within all contexts of human life and need (Ephesians 4:6). Here is the opportunity for ordinary theology to interact in a redemptive sense as a prelude to a further interaction within a cognitive theology. Thus, a formative ordinary theology and the informative theology come together in a transformational theology.

It is evident that this emphasis is on immediacy and being a haven privileges the phenomenology of Inspire Church being a movement. The experiential nature of the relational attributes of God does not lead into profound debates on the ontology of the church. It is highly likely that a high proportion of this particular haven
of belief and belonging are not likely to indulge in talk of models of the church. The same observation can be made of any potential discourse with the church as being one, holy, catholic and apostolic. The embedded and vernacular understanding of faith is more that of an extended fellowship of the Spirit and a movement which bestows identity and belonging.

That this should be so underlines the importance and place of an eschatological immediacy within the Pentecostal experience. The interconnections happen with the unfolding present time. The ethnic transcendence identified at Mosaic - and now at Inspire Church - is inclined to play down the ethnic and cultural experiences of the past. It is still present in the way in which Connect Groups are organised, but they are organised in such a way that participants are able to negotiate their way in a continuing present. The prospect of a particular church being a sign and witness of the Kingdom of God embracing many cultures becomes eschatologically realised.
Reference List


Appendix 1  Consent Form

Research project: An exploration of the influences of country of origin on the perceptions of God in a multicultural congregation.

Investigator: Paul Francis Porta

Participant’s Name:__________________________________________________

1. I consent to participate in this research project.
2. Details of the research have been explained to me and I have been provided with an information sheet.
3. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and received satisfactory answers and explanations.
4. I understand that my signed consent form will be retained by the investigator and a copy may be provided to me on request.
5. My freedom to withdraw from the research at any time has been explained to me.
6. I understand that my privacy and confidentiality will be protected throughout the project. Neither my name nor any other identifying information will be used or published without my written permission.
7. I understand that if I have any complaints or concerns about this research I may contact:

   Executive Officer
   Human Research Ethics Committee
   Office of Academic Governance
   Charles Sturt University
   Panorama Avenue
   Bathurst NSW 2795
   Phone: (02) 6338 4628

Participant’s signature: ______________________________
Appendix 2  Research Project Expression of Interest

Project Title: An exploration of the influence of country of origin on perceptions of God in a multicultural congregation.

Investigator: Paul Francis Porta

Supervisor: Tom Frame

University: The Faculty of Arts
          Canberra Campus – St. Mark’s National Theological Centre
          Charles Sturt University

Thank you for your willingness to participate in the research project which forms part of my Doctor of Ministry studies at Charles Sturt University. Participants will be selected so as to provide a representative group based on age, gender and country of origin. Each selected participant will receive an invitation to participate, consent letter and an Information Sheet that will detail what each participant will be asked to do as well as the ethical protection of participant’s privacy and confidentiality. Participation in the research project is strictly voluntary.

Please complete the following details:

Name:__________________________________________________________
Address:_____________________________________________________
Age:_________________________________________________________
Gender:_______________________________________________________
Country of Origin:____________________________________________

Thanking You
Paul Porta
Appendix 3  Follow up Letter

Dear

I trust you have received the envelope with the details regarding the research project. If you have concerns regarding either the project itself or the questionnaire please contact me on my mobile 0423936322 or on my email pfporta@optusnet.com.au.

I would sincerely appreciate it if you could sign the consent form and complete the questionnaire and post to me in the envelope provided. Remember, there are no right and wrong answers. The questions are designed to allow you to express your understanding of the ways in which God relates to you. If you decide not to proceed with the project please return the consent form unsigned along with the questionnaire.

Thanks for joining with me in the research project.

Sincerely in Christian Service

Paul Porta
Appendix 4  Connect Group Consent Form

Research project: An exploration of the influences of country of origin on the perceptions of God in a multicultural congregation.

Investigator: Paul Francis Porta

CONNECT GROUP CONSENT FORM

Participant: ____________________________________________

1. I consent to participate in this home Group meeting as a part of the research project.
2. Details of the research have been explained to me and I have been provided with an information sheet.
3. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and received satisfactory answers and explanations.
4. I understand that my signed consent form will be retained by the investigator and a copy may be provided to me on request.
5. My freedom to withdraw from the research at any time during this meeting has been explained to me.
6. I understand that my privacy and confidentiality will be protected throughout the project. Neither my name nor any other identifying information will be used or published without my written permission.
7. I understand that if I have any complaints or concerns about this research I may contact:

   Executive Officer
   Human Research Ethics Committee
   Office of Academic Governance
   Charles Sturt University
   Panorama Avenue
   Bathurst NSW 2795
   Phone: (02) 6338 4628

Participant’s signature: ________________________________
Appendix 5 Connect Group Discussion Guide

Research project: An exploration of the influences of countries of origin on the perceptions of God in a multicultural congregation.

Connect Group Discussion Guide

The discussion will be largely unstructured to allow attendees freedom of expression and response.

The discussion starters are directed to the specific country of origin of each home group:

a. What elements of the culture of your country of origin influence your understanding of God? Are there components of your former or present national or ethnic identity that have shaped your appreciation of how God relates to the world? Are you conscious of the ways in which your culture or ethnic identity and that of others in the congregation have affected religious belief?

b. How would you compare the perspectives of God that are influenced by your culture with those of the following cultural groups:

i. Examples of a range of cultures groups will be provided to prompt comparisons and contrasts
Appendix 6 Connect Group Information Sheet

Project Title: An exploration of the influences of country of origin on perceptions of God in a multicultural congregation.

Investigator: Paul Francis Porta
Supervisor: Tom Frame
University: The Faculty of Arts

Canberra Campus – St. Mark’s National Theological Centre
Charles Sturt University

Dear Participant

This Information Sheet accompanies your invitation to participate in the Connect Group meeting as part of the research project. It provides information regarding the purpose of the project and what you will be asked to do in relation to my research. Important information is also given regarding your rights to privacy and ethical protection in strict conformity with the standards required by the Ethics Committee of Charles Sturt University.

Please read this information sheet before signing the ‘Consent to Participate’ form. If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to ask the researcher by email pfporta@optusnet.com.au or by telephone at 0423936322.
About the Researcher:

Paul Porta is an ordained minister of the Australian Christian Churches. After pastoral ministry in New South Wales and Tasmania he received missionary appointment in 1984 to work with the Brazilian Advanced School of Theology in Brazil and Portugal, concluding his overseas appointment in 2005. He is currently Academic Dean of Tabor College, Sydney and academic consultant for the Brazilian Advanced School of Theology, Campinas, Brazil. The research project is part of his Doctor of Ministry studies at Charles Sturt University.

1. What is the research project about?

The research project is the major component of my professional research doctoral (Doctor of Ministry) course of studies at Charles Sturt University.

The project will explore how countries of origin influence the ways in which God is perceived and experienced in a local church. This is important because culture and ethnicity influence us in many ways. For example, language, dress and interpersonal relations are influenced by culture and ethnicity and this has consequences for local church communities. But such communities seldom consider the ways in which culture and ethnicity influence how we think about and relate to God. How does our country of origin shape worship, effect belief and guide conduct? This project explores these questions and proposes some answers.

2. Why my church?

Inspire Church reflects the specific multicultural identity of Liverpool and the general composition of the Western suburbs of Sydney. One half of the church’s members were born in Australia and the other half overseas. The spread of countries covers most parts of the world. This unique ‘unity in diversity’ makes
Inspire Church an invaluable source of material for understanding believing, behaving and belonging in an Australian multicultural Church.

3. What will I be expected to do?

You will be asked to participate in a group discussion during the Connect Group meeting. The discussion will compare how people from different countries of origin perceive God in his actions and attributes and how this understanding might relate to culturally influenced perceptions of God. You will be asked how you experience God from the perspective of your culture and ethnicity and compare this with those from other countries of origin.

It is important that you understand what you will not be asked to do.

First, you will not be asked to make any value judgments on the ways in which other cultures perceive God.

Secondly, you will not be asked to share any personal information or to speak about matters that you do not wish to discuss.

4. How will my privacy be protected?

At no time will your name or other personal information be given to anyone outside the research project. All research data will be maintained and it’s confidentially safeguarded by the researcher. No other person will be given access to this information. Indeed, the requirements Charles Sturt University’s Ethics Committee make protecting your privacy a priority throughout the research project. Any publication or presentation of the results of the project will not divulge the name or identity of any participant.

5. What if I change my mind and don’t want to continue with the project?
Your participation is strictly voluntary. You can withdraw from the discussion at any time without question or need of explanation. If you do withdraw from the discussion it may not be possible to remove all personal data contributed due to focus group participation. However, your anonymity will be maintained at all times.

6. Are there any risks involved?

There are no physical risks involved in the project. In the very unlikely event that you might want to discuss any anxieties caused by participating in the discussion for whatever reason, Inspire Church’s professional counseling will be available without charge. Referral to an independent counseling service will be available should you deem this necessary.

7. What will happen to all the data after the project is finished?

The data will be collated and analysed by the researcher and submitted to Charles Sturt University as the fulfillment of the requirements of a Doctor of Ministry. Various parts of the project may also be used in presentations, journals or in book form.

8. How will the research project help my church?

The research project will help Inspire Church leadership and the congregation to be aware of the diverse cultural influences and factors that bear upon its common life.

**NOTE:** Charles Sturt University’s Human Research Ethics Committee has approved this project. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you may contact the Committee through the Executive Officer:

The Executive Officer  
Human Research Ethics Committee  
Office of Academic Governance  
Charles Sturt University  
Panorama Avenue  
Bathurst NSW 2795  
Tel: (02) 6338 4628  
Fax: (02) 6338 4194

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix 7  Participant Questionnaire

Research Project: An exploration of the influence of country of origin on the perceptions of God in a multicultural congregation.

Dear Participant

Please respond to the following questions and return to the project researcher in the envelope provided.

Name:____________________________________________________

Age:_______________________________________________________

Country of origin:__________________________________________

Section One

In what ways does your country of origin influence your perception of the following descriptions of God and their validity as descriptions of how God might act towards human beings?

1. God is a father/parent

_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

2. God is a helper/guide

_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

3. God is a comforter/companion

_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
4. God is vengeful/compassionate

5. God is caring/angry

6. God is accepting/rejecting

7. God is freeing/restricting

8. God is forgiving/unforgiving

9. God is approving/disapproving
**Section Two**
Indicate your level of agreement or disagreement to each of the following statements with an **X** in the appropriate box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Disagree Strongly</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. God comforts me</td>
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<td>2. God gives me security</td>
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<td>3. God disciplines me</td>
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<td>4. God guides me</td>
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<td>5. God strengthens me</td>
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<td>6. God protects me</td>
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<td>7. God encourages me</td>
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<td>8. God is unconditionally open to me</td>
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<td>9. God rules me</td>
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<td>10. God is personally with me</td>
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<td>11. Godpunishes me</td>
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</table>