RELATIONAL LIFE THROUGH AN AFRICAN LENS:

A THEOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF UBUNTU IN

A WESTERN CONTEMPORARY CHURCH CONTEXT

DEBORAH JOY DUCILLE

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Abstract

This research explores the origins and usage of the term *ubuntu* in sub-Saharan Africa and the applied *ubuntu* theology developed by Desmond Tutu in order to consider what, if anything, a theologically applied concept of *ubuntu* might offer to a Western contemporary church context as it seeks to grow in its relational life.

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the research, offering the primary thesis statement, definitions, scope and an outline of chapter content.

Chapter 2 provides some background to *ubuntu* through an exploration of its historical, contextual and linguistic development, its system of values and practice, and its subsequent understanding of personhood. This acts as a base from which the *ubuntu* theology of Desmond Tutu is overviewed in the context of post-apartheid South Africa.

Chapter 3 outlines the ontology, methodology and methods chosen to explore the interface between the paradigmatic frameworks that govern the social sciences and theology. This includes a reflection on the nature of epistemology in the discipline of practical theology in which this research is located, and upon the characteristics of group interviews as the selected method of gathering qualitative data about *ubuntu* and the experience of relational life, both in urban Britain and in sub-Saharan Africa.

Chapter 4 takes a thematic analytical approach to the qualitative data generated from two group interviews and extrapolates four correlative themes to bring into discussion with previous my exploration of *ubuntu*, in order to illuminate any transferrable aspects that might offer transformative resonance in relational life as experienced in a Western contemporary church context such as urban Britain.

Chapter 5 forms a theological critique of Tutu's *ubuntu* theology using the core concepts of the *imago Dei*, the nature of the Holy Trinity and ecclesiological praxis as dialogue partners to examine fundamental tenets of his position. In order to do so, the metaphor of *perichoresis* and the doctrine of participation have been employed to illuminate what may be meant by personhood, relatedness and *koinonia* of the Spirit in the context of Scripture and Christian tradition.

Chapter 6 brings the themes of this research to a conclusion by evaluating any concept of an applied *ubuntu* theology and what, fundamentally, may bring transformative praxis into being in contemporary local church contexts such as that of urban Britain. It concludes with a vision for a vibrant and intentional *koinonia* through the shared community, agency and love of Father, Son and Spirit, and the Body of Christ. This vision affirms the challenge of interdependent life that Tutu has offered, but is essentially founded upon a reframed understanding of personhood, experienced through the radical and life-giving hospitality of the triune God.

Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed…………

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of inquiry

It has been my intention through this research to engage in what I perceive to be a very real issue; that of the overall predicament of the Western contemporary church with regard to its relational life, fellowship and experience of community.[1] As a practising member of the church within the orthodox Protestant tradition in urban Britain, my experience over the last 30 years has been that an authentic relational life as a community of believers is often sadly lacking. By lacking authenticity, I mean that life lived as the Body of Christ is not usually experienced as something both transcendent, which reflects its origin (springing from relational life in and through God), and vibrantly rooted in a particular context. Instead, it is often experienced as an impoverished, half-hearted reflection of the society around it, fragmented through indecisiveness in establishing an identity and a vision for life together, and subsumed by the prevailing Western individualistic worldview. Any sense of fulfilled personhood derived from relationship within the context of community is confined to an aspiration for the life to come.

Setting the context: significance of the study

In an increasingly secular society, where technology is humanity's most intimate ally, where selfhood is individually constructed and autonomous knowledge is

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[1] Throughout my research, I have generally used the term 'Western' to denote a generic sense of First World countries in global terms, but more specifically as a cultural construct that is found in many First World countries, that carries a historic and philosophical emphasis that is Eurocentric, founded in Christendom and is a product of modernity/postmodernity in the post-Enlightenment era.

all,[2] it is unsurprising to observe that the Western church is struggling to maintain a different narrative and calling to an interdependent life, focused upon relationship with God and 'other' as persons in community. Inevitably, I am heavily reliant upon my own context through which I am able to reflect on this problem with most understanding, and within urban Britain I have experienced local churches and denominations respond in a variety of ways to this challenge. I believe that it is possible, even probable, that the state of community in urban, British, Protestant churches has comparable traits to other Western church contexts.

My aim was, initially, to explore whether there could be a theologically appropriate and more meaningful expression of Christian community than those I had experienced or observed. I was seeking an alternative way of expressing *koinonia*, or fellowship, that neither ignored nor merged itself into its social context, was founded upon principles gathered by the church throughout its history from the Bible and Christian tradition, and that might also draw from contemporary global church experience where such interdependent, community-based life is not an alien concept.

My motivation for doing so stems from my own context and church situation: I live in Birmingham, a super-diverse city,[3] and the inner-city parish church of which I am part is not unusual, situated as it is within a range of communities, the majority of whom are Muslim, mostly of South Asian origin.

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[2] Craig Gay, *The Way of the (Modern) World: or, Why It's Tempting to Live as if God Doesn't Exist* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 15.

[3] Birmingham has been recognised in recent NHS research as Britain's most diverse city, and the first city in Britain to be an 'ethnic majority'. See Jenny Phillimore, 'Approaches to Health Provision in the Age of Super-diversity: Accessing the NHS in Britain's most Diverse City', *Critical Social Policy*, 31 (2011), 5–29. For abstract, see <http://csp.sagepub.com/content/31/1/5.abstract> [accessed 23 October 2014].

These majority communities understand well the common life as the *ummah* dispersed around the world,[4] and the daily experience of interconnectedness, with all its advantages and challenges. Whilst beneficial engagement and dialogue has emerged between faith leaders in the city, it seems to me that the church, both in local contexts and as the Body of Christ across contexts, has struggled to establish what its own sense of identity, belonging and life as a community looks like. To not only survive but to flourish as a multicultural minority in such a multicultural context as Birmingham, I believe it is crucial that the church in urban Britain rediscovers its own heritage of relational life that is founded in the *koinonia* of the Spirit, and to live this out. This will allow the local churches at one level to speak a common language with its neighbours, which springs from an informed understanding of identity as a people clearly belonging to a particular community. It is also a solid foundation from which to express the love of God that informs Christian praxis, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.[5]

Location of research within theological studies

To draw upon global church experience in this arena of study, I turned to the life and work of the church of the global South and its theologians, who form the majority leadership and membership of the church today, and in particular to the life and work of the sub-Saharan African church. This was in order that I might

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[4] *Ummah*: the collective sense of identity or belonging of Muslim people globally, as expressed in any locality.

[5] Throughout my research, I have elected to use the term 'praxis' to denote the practice of faith that is shaped and undergirded by Christian values, tradition and theological reflection in action. In this context, I do not intend it to carry any politicised meaning, but do acknowledge the importance of the term in liberation theology to live lives that work out faith in one's own agency.

consider how relational life could be lived differently in the Western church, by seeking out discourse with those who do not affiliate themselves with or elect to live under the dominance of a Western worldview. Here might lie an answer to the Western church's predicament, exploring the reasoning, experience and traditions of theologians and philosophers whose worldview remains essentially relational at its heart. As a typical and prevalent construct of communitarian life in sub-Saharan Africa, I have analysed the concept of *ubuntu*, both as a worldview and as an applied theology, as developed by Desmond Tutu.

A question of direction arose from these first research decisions. Did I wish to focus upon the missiological aspect of the local church? If so, how might a renewed sense of identity, community and belonging play out in the church's mission and ministry to wider society? Or did I wish to remain within an ecclesiological framework, examining how the *koinonia* of the Spirit informs and shapes the life of the Body of Christ in its communal worship and praxis? Whilst I believe the missiological impact of retrieving an authentic relational life as the church would be highly significant, my interest has remained focused on ecclesiological implications. This has been in part shaped and informed by the emerging theological critique in my research that concentrated upon the perichoretic nature of the Trinity, and the subsequent, invitatory aspect of participation that is embedded in an ecclesiological framework. Although this clearly informs missiology, it is not the emphasis of my research.

The focus upon ecclesiology as the shaping theoretical perspective locates this research within the discipline of practical theology. Practical theology is an inter-disciplinary, reflective and reflexive discipline that 'enables those engaged in ministry and mission to think theologically about what they do

and to draw belief and action closer together'.[6] It has dialectic and emergent qualities that draw upon what would be considered sociological and theological concepts. This reflects well the central tenets of my research, based upon a theological exploration of *ubuntu* and the experience of *koinonia* amongst the Body of Christ in the particular context of the contemporary church. Any developed ecclesiology must therefore correspond well with concepts of identity, personhood and community, as I have understood them, as 'revealed knowledge' from biblical exposition and from trinitarian theology as developed through Christian tradition, and from a sociologically based, interpretive understanding of *ubuntu.*

Embarking upon this research into *ubuntu* and *ubuntu* theology presented a divergence of underlying principles almost immediately. *Ubuntu* as a worldview has some spiritual elements to it, the most basic being the cognisance of a primary relationship with a Creator God alongside relationship with all living things and ancestors, and is essentially a moral set of attributes or values that would fit within a definition of religion in sociological terms. This contributes to an understanding of *ubuntu* as a human quality, worldview or philosophy that describes how social structures and appropriate attitudes towards others are formed in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa; as such, it is a sociological phenomenon. Tutu's *ubuntu* theology, however, is founded upon both orthodox Christian and traditional African social constructs, which do not always coincide in conceptual or real terms. Tutu develops his theology around *imago Dei* as espoused in Genesis 1 and the doctrine of the Trinity as a

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[6] Helen Cameron and Catherine Duce, *Researching Practice in Ministry and Mission: A Companion* (London: SCM Press, 2013), p. xi.

community, combining biblical notions of personhood and relatedness with those found in *ubuntu.*

This dynamic tension in the nature of *ubuntu* as an applied theology illustrates well the tension present in practical theology as a discipline, where context and themes arising from the world inform revealed knowledge, theological reflection and praxis within the church. As befits any research within the arena of practical theology, therefore, I have sought to hold the two paradigms of interpretivism and revelation, which inform how knowledge is understood to be received in the social sciences and in theology respectively, in dialectic tension. To this way of thinking, revelation, God's activity as disclosed in the world, is subject to a form of 'mutual critical correlation' with an interpretivist paradigm,[7] but takes precedence as my primary frame of reference, and is best understood to be demonstrated through Christian Scripture, tradition, reason and experience, which I have endeavoured to reflect in my research.

The nature of holding two paradigmatic frameworks in tension has been a crucial one, as my question concerning relational life and personhood is essentially epistemological. How do we know what we know about relatedness? From where do we gain our knowledge, understanding and frame of reference with regard to relational life in the church?

Thesis statement

In the light of these issues and decisions, the premise I initially developed was that, although there have been good foundations both in theory and in practice

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[7] John Swinton and Hilary Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2011), pp. 74–76.

in the contemporary Western church of living as a counter-cultural community, Christian relational life has become fragmented, and that a theologically applied concept of *ubuntu* could transform the development of a more authentic and relevant understanding of *koinonia*.

As my research progressed, however, and I engaged in a more stringent theological critique of *ubuntu* theology through an investigation of *imago Dei* and the doctrine of trinitarian personhood, I recognised that a more nuanced conclusion might be reached in contrast to that which I anticipated. My concluding argument is now shaped around the conviction that, whilst *ubuntu* theology offers much to challenge and enrich aspects of an understanding of relational life in the Western church, a more convincing and significant foundation is offered to the church, regardless of cultural context, in the form of a renewed and participative experience of God as 'open' Trinity, or triune *koinonia.* This has been part of the church's traditional thought from the beginning and should, I contend, formulate the basis for a rediscovered and enhanced understanding of relational life that might transform any contemporary experience of *koinonia.* It is my belief that little has been written thus far that draws these disparate themes of *ubuntu*, trinitarian theology and ecclesiology together in order to explore how an applied *ubuntu* theology might be transferred across contexts, or critiqued effectively through and within a theological framework.

Scope and limitations

It has been important to define the scope and constraints of my exploration. As research located within the discipline of practical theology, I have sought to be aware, for example, of sociological concepts of identity, personhood and

community, but have not explored them in any detail, rather using them in review to orient and direct my work back towards the same concepts, as found within Scripture and Christian tradition.

In researching *ubuntu*, I have attempted to read a variety of texts that represent Christian theologians and philosophers (some from a Christian perspective) writing on the subject, but due to the vast number of articles that have emerged on the subject in the last ten years, I have necessarily had to be selective. By contrast, very few of the same writers have engaged critically with Desmond Tutu's applied *ubuntu* theology, and consequently my own reflection and critique relies heavily upon one source in this regard.

In my theological critique, I have highlighted the limitations of what I have been able to reflect upon in terms of the exposition of Genesis 1 and *imago Dei* as related to my research. For example, I have not engaged with the inter-relatedness of all creation but only that of God with humanity. It has similarly been beyond the scope of this research to explore the great breadth and depth of many aspects of trinitarian theology, or its historical basis or development in any detail. Where I have reflected upon Eastern Orthodoxy in relation to any revelation of the Trinity, it has been in order to enrich the dialogue by involving a long-established and leading partner in the conversation. In doing so, however, it has not been my intention to bring Eastern Orthodoxy into the wider context of my research, and I have attempted to remain focused upon *ubuntu* as the locus of exploration in relational life.

Definitions

Where specific definitions have seemed appropriate, I have endeavoured to offer them in context, related to my use of particular words or phrases. I note

that I have used somewhat interchangeably the words 'Britain' and 'UK', which I acknowledge carry different meanings, but for the purpose of my research can be accepted as being equivalent terms. When making references to Scripture, I have understood that to mean Christian Scripture, that is, both the Tanaka and the New Testament. On occasion, I have referred to specific aspects of Scripture, for example, the Hebrew Scriptures, but this is indicated in my discussion.

One choice of definition merits further explanation here. I have found it difficult to establish with any real conviction whether *ubuntu* should be viewed as a communitarian model of society or as a collectivist one, neither term being used in my research with any politicised meaning. My understanding of communitarianism is of a social construct that places primary value upon the community; this is seen as prior to the formation of the individual, but does recognise particularity as an acceptable aspect of individual persons, and therefore acknowledges difference as something to be held in tension within the wider relational life of a social group. In radical form, communitarianism may demonstrate limited tolerance of deviance or breakdown in consensus, as the life and good of the community must take priority. My perception of collectivism is similar to this but of a much more stringent, decidedly prescriptive code of conduct in social life that anticipates less individuality being demonstrated by members of the group, but imposes high expectations of responsibility upon them. This is in order that the community at all costs be maintained and allowed to flourish, at personal cost on many occasions. My review of the literature pertaining to *ubuntu* and subsequent fieldwork failed to illuminate the difference further, the two terms sometimes being used interchangeably and without particular emphasis to distinguish characteristics. Through my literature review,

fieldwork and theological critique, I have concluded that *ubuntu* is most appropriately considered as a communitarian system. This can often be experienced in radical form either as a whole or elementally, and depends upon context (for example, life in traditional rural societies). This definition has important implications as part of my theological critique of *ubuntu* and an applied *ubuntu* theology.

It is interesting to note that the primary concepts explored in this research — *ubuntu*, *koinonia*, personhood and community — are all problematic in being satisfactorily defined,[8] and these enigmatic qualities have subsequently become a significant aspect of my research.

Outline of research

Chapter 2 opens with a detailed exploration of *ubuntu*, its historical development and inherent values and practices, which forms the foundation for an overview of Desmond Tutu's *ubuntu* theology, placed in the context of post-apartheid South Africa.

As already stated, Tutu's applied theological construct raises epistemological and paradigmatic issues, therefore Chapter 3 on research methods discusses at some length the nature of epistemology in practical theology and the type of fieldwork that has emerged as a result. Qualitative interviews were an obvious choice of research method in my fieldwork, as this supported my desire to work reflexively to gain highly interpretive data, but from a contextual theological position. My decision to interview the selected participants in groups rather than individually seemed a fitting method, reflecting

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[8] Many social scientists no longer use the term 'community', for example, so distorted and notional has it become. See Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1985), pp. 7–8.

the communitarian character of our discussion around *ubuntu.* As part of this chapter, I have also explored issues in designing and implementing qualitative interviews, analysis choices and ethical considerations.

In Chapter 4's thematic analysis of the group interviews, I develop four emergent, correlative themes and attempt to draw conclusions from my findings that I believe demonstrate resonance rather than specific generalisations to be made concerning the transferrable nature of *ubuntu* into a context such as urban Britain.

In order to succeed in any argument for a theologically applied concept of *ubuntu* to prove transformative in a Western contemporary church context, it has been important to bring *ubuntu* into a rigorous theological analysis, using the dual conversation partners of Scripture and Christian tradition. In Chapter 5, the *imago Dei* of Genesis 1 is explored for interpreted meaning and any implications it carries for an understanding of identity and personhood. This is developed further by reflecting upon the Holy Trinity as the source of this relation and personhood, using the metaphor of *perichoresis.* In terms of human persons and their experience of fellowship with the triune God, I outline the concept of the Trinity as 'open' and use the somewhat contentious doctrine of participation to elucidate what the *koinonia* of the Spirit may mean in ecclesiological terms. Wider themes of hospitality and agency are used to explicate this.

In Chapter 6, the conclusion, I attempt to summarise my key argument and evaluate what, if anything, a theological concept of *ubuntu* can offer to the church in a contemporary Western context such as my own, that is, urban Britain. A renewed vision for interdependence, accountability and worship in the active, hospitable *koinonia* of the Spirit is proposed. In the spirit of the 'open'

Trinity, this is an invitation and not a prescription: any and all are welcome to reflect upon these findings and to continue the dialogue, but none are obliged.

Chapter 2

An Exploration of *Ubuntu*

An African is never regarded as a loose entity to be dealt with strictly individually. His being is based or coupled with that of others. Next to or behind or in front of him there is always someone through whom he is seen or with whom he is associated.[1]

Introduction

The above statement illustrates what is widely accepted as a core tenet of traditional African life: apolitical collectivism or radical communitarianism. Within such a concept, or in attempting to articulate something more about it, one will inevitably come across the term *ubuntu*, a way of describing the essence of social structures and appropriate attitudes to others in Southern Africa. The origins, contextual development and usage of the word *ubuntu* are often amorphous, nebulous and vague: most sub-Saharan Africans would know the word or its equivalent, but cannot easily define it.[2] For many, this is its strength and offers them a sense of identity — for others, it remains a source of frustration. There are proponents of *ubuntu* aplenty, but also critical voices. What sort of concept can evoke such a strong emotional response? Surely a concept that deals with the most intimate of questions for human beings: what does it mean to be a person, and how do we relate to our world and others around us? It is my intention in this chapter to explore the historical usage and evolution of the term *ubuntu,* to identify examples of its practice, and then to give an outline of Desmond Tutu's development of an *ubuntu* theology. This will lead into a more thorough investigation of its theological foundations and

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[1] Nisbert Taisekwa Taringa, 'Possibilities and Limitations for Inter-cultural Dialogue from the Perspective of Ubuntu Philosophy', *Swedish Missiological Themes,* 95 (2007), 185–96, (p. 190), quoting Paris (1995), p. 101.

[2] Mluleki Mnyaka, 'The African Concept of Ubuntu/Botho and its Socio-moral Significance', *Black Theology*, 3 (2005), 215–37 (p. 216).

possible transferrable qualities, in dialogue with analysis of qualitative interviews exploring an understanding and practice of *ubuntu* with participants originating from sub-Saharan Africa.

Historical overview

Before examining the various possible meanings of *ubuntu,* it seems appropriate to give a historical overview of its usage. Gade observes that even *ubuntu*'s historical timeline is unclear: most contemporary writers on the subject refer immediately to the Xhosa (South African) proverb in which *ubuntu* is most often quoted and explicated — '*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*', translated roughly as 'A person is a person through other persons' — and yet the use of this proverb to aid in defining *ubuntu* is only recorded from 1993–95 onwards.[3] It should also be noted that there must be a widely differing experience of the use of the word *ubuntu* in written form, historically, to that of its cultural use, primarily in aural/oral societies, but Gade (nor any other writer on the subject to my knowledge) makes little or no reference to its spoken heritage or historicity, this not being a primary focus. According to Gade, the word *ubuntu* first appeared in texts dating from 1846, and up until *c.* 1950 it was used in discourses written almost entirely by white Europeans which focused upon linguistic and semantic work. In these oldest descriptions, *ubuntu* is generally translated as 'human nature', 'humanity' or 'humaneness'; other, less commonly used translations at that time include 'generosity', greatness of soul', 'liberality' and 'manliness'.[4] In other words, pre-1950 writings refer to *ubuntu* almost exclusively as a positive human quality, a virtue attainable in its practice by

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[3] Christian B. N. Gade, 'The Historical Development of the Written Discourses on Ubuntu', *South African Journal of Philosophy,* 30 (2011), 303–29 (p. 303).
[4] Ibid., p. 307.

members of African traditional society but not to be assumed, just as the status

of personhood is not to be assumed by all individuals in the same context (see

later notes in this chapter, and in Chapter 5). After this time, it seems that

ubuntu began to be defined much more broadly, being termed severally as

African humanism, a philosophy or worldview.[5]

The shift in meaning during this era is not coincidental, of course. Whilst

the legal ruling of apartheid was coming into force in South Africa in 1948, many

African countries were emerging from colonial rule into a new dawn of

independence. Alongside this huge political and economic shift, African leaders

such as Nyerere, Kaunda and Nkrumah, were seeking to reassert, recreate and

redefine the very essence of life within their countries through what became

known as Africanisation: a modern political movement, but one founded on

traditional African humanist values and social infrastructures.[6] Gade identifies

this drive in seeking new, home-grown social prosperity as 'a narrative of

return': a desire for something truly pre-colonial in their social transformations, a

recovery of a 'golden age' or 'African renaissance' (as called for more recently

by South Africa's former president, Thabo Mbeki)[7]. Such narratives were

promoted and used in preference to remaining within colonial models, with the

aim of forging change through a reinforcement of African identity. Gade argues

that some of the narratives around, and usage of, *ubuntu* can be similarly

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[5] Ibid., p. 303.

[6] Ibid., p. 304. The term 'traditional African humanist values' is one used by Kwasi Wiredu, 'Social Philosophy in Postcolonial Africa: Some Preliminaries Concerning Communalism and Communitarianism', *South African Journal of Philosophy* 27 (2008), 332–339 (p. 332), cited by Gade in his work. It is understood in this context not to refer to humanist Western philosophy with its atheist tendencies.

[7] Ibid., p.304. Gade notes that the expression 'narrative of return' is drawn originally from Leonhard Praeg, *Philosophy and the Quest for Autonomy: A Philosophical Investigation* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2000).

thought of as a return narrative, a desire to get back to the 'real Africa',[8] noting that such narratives are often told and used in the context of desired social transformation, where political leaders are looking to the past for a value system that can inspire the political and social change that they are looking for. They are sometimes portrayed or viewed as fraught with romanticised and unrealistic assumptions, but as Lewis contends, many an Afrocentric movement is accused of romanticism, and that *ubuntu* follows a long line of broad biblical principles that could also be deemed idealistic.[9]

The desire to be self-determining, to be free of another's ruling of one's culture and political/economic status is very understandable; however, it is interesting to note that a philosophy of *inter*dependence such as *ubuntu* should be invoked as a 'cultural cornerstone' in countries desperately working out their independence, most likely as a continuing thread of the Africanisation programme during independence as it emerged. This is highly unusual, and perhaps says much about the strength of communitarian culture across Africa.[10] Tutu certainly sees the drive for interconnectedness as a foundation of African life that brings hope of reconciliation between racial groups in South Africa, and it seems to have been a crucial aspect in the transition to independence in many African countries, under leadership that called for and upheld the interdependence of all citizens. Seeking to create a future together without reprisals is an essential element in Tutu's understanding of *ubuntu,* which will be commented upon shortly.[11]

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[8] Ibid., p. 304. Another example in a different context would be the 'Back to Basics' campaign launched by the UK's Conservative Party in 1993.

[9] Berrisford Lewis, 'Forging an Understanding of Black Humanity through Relationship: An Ubuntu Perspective', *Black Theology*, 8 (2010), 70–85 (p. 81).

[10] Leonhard Praeg, 'An Answer to the Question: What is [Ubuntu]?' *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 27 (2008), 367–85 (p. 372).

[11] Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (London: Rider Books, 1999), p. 36.

As part of his exploration into the contemporary global cultural process, Sanneh reflects on Kenyatta's accusations during this historical period, that colonialism, and in particular the missionary movement, had deliberately imposed 'a religion of individualism on the African […] that […] wrought havoc on Africa'.[12] The relationship between the notion of *ubuntu* or traditional communitarian life and the Christian faith is a contentious one: historically, it is generally accepted that Western missionary activity revolved around bringing the gospel in a particular cultural framework and in turn rejecting or minimising existing 'pagan' culture. Louw refers to this as a model of 'inculturation'.[13] Louw goes on to propose that what is sought in contemporary contexts might be deemed 'inter-culturation' rather than inculturation, which implies an equality between cultures rather than dominance by one over the other. A more appropriate description than inculturation of that which occurred historically, however, might be 'forced assimilation' as implemented by some colonial powers of the time, which displayed genuine or feigned ignorance of contextual sensibilities. The gospel as communicated through a Western lens and the missionaries who brought it were often too intertwined with the ruling powers for many to accept the tenets of this new faith for themselves for fear of rejection by, or isolation from, their kin: the perceived choice between remaining within

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[12] Lamin Sanneh, *Encountering the West — Christianity and the Global Cultural Process: The African Dimension* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1993), pp.154–160, citing Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), pp. 259–260.

[13] Daniël J. Louw, 'Noetics and the Notion of Ubuntu — Thinking within an Inter-cultural Hermeneutics and Philosophical Approach to Theory Formation in Practical Theology', *International Journal for Practical Theology,* 15 (2011), 173–92 (p. 186). It should be noted that 'inculturation' has a different meaning in models of contextual theology as posed by Stephen Bevans, reflecting upon Aylward Shorter's *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (1988). See Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), pp. 26, 92.

society or exclusion was no choice at all.[14] Sanneh often comments and reflects in his work upon the complex, emotive issues surrounding most readings of colonial history, and challenges those critics who would seek to reject Christianity out of hand because of its cultural form in delivery.[15] Bediako observes that most African commentators are now able to distinguish between the Christian message and the European messenger; rather, it is the West who continues to struggle with its part in African history.[16] It is beyond the scope of this chapter to examine this often tragic episode of church and world history in any depth, but there is a significant link between the spiritual foundations of *ubuntu,* the Christian gospel, context and a theological reading of *ubuntu* which form the core of Tutu's work explored here, and will be reflected in my overall conclusions.

Unlike Gade, other writers on *ubuntu* claim that the term is first used in written form from the 1950s onwards, and up until the 1980s it maintains its descriptive focus as a general human quality, slowly shifting towards the more philosophically based understanding as time, and political independence, progresses. Throughout, *ubuntu* retains its vague and ambivalent nature: it is unclear what many of the earlier writers mean by the term except that it is some form of human characteristic. As to its complexity and who possesses this, its proponents differ, from those who would assign it to all people potentially, to those who deem it an exclusively African quality and something that white people lack.[17] Common traits or any characterisation of *ubuntu* are also wide-

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[14] Sanneh, pp. 16–18.

[15] Ibid. pp. 16–18.

[16] Kwame Bediako, *Christianity and Africa: The Renewal of a non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), p. 235.

[17] Gade, 'Historical Development', p. 308, citing L. M. Thompson and J. Butler, *Change in Contemporary Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), p. 158. See also Christian B. N. Gade, 'What is Ubuntu? Different Interpretations

ranging and often generic in an idealised form of humanity, but typically centre upon community and kinship, belonging, hospitality and generosity towards others.[18]

Ubuntu and apartheid/post-apartheid South Africa

For many people, any discourse on *ubuntu* would be most strongly affiliated in their minds with the apartheid regime, ending the struggle, and the subsequent post-apartheid era in South Africa. Indeed, many writers did begin to incorporate ideology and philosophy in their work something which reflects upon *ubuntu* principles from the 1950's onwards, even if the term is not used specifically. Examples of writers turning to such themes include Ngubane, who explores the virtue of acting humanely, even in the extreme circumstances of apartheid. His understanding of *ubuntu* is as a philosophy of life, the practice of being humane.[19] Biko also wrote of the special contribution that Africa can make to the world in the field of human relationships, and the most prominent advocate of *ubuntu,* Tutu, went on to draw upon his own Christian faith in order to develop an *ubuntu* theology.[20]

    A pivotal moment in the employment of the term *ubuntu* came in 1993 when it took on the form of a more holistic worldview, being used as such in the epilogue of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, which urged a new beginning after such crippling division and strife:

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amongst South Africans of African Descent', *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 31 (2012), 484–503 (p. 494).

[18] Taringa, p. 190.

[19] Gade, 'Historical Development', p. 309, citing Jordan Kush Ngubane, *An African Explains Apartheid* (London: Pall Mall Press,1963), p. 76.

[20] Steve Biko, *I Write what I Like* (London: The Bowerdean Press, 1978), p. 47, contrasting what the West and Africa might leave as a legacy to the world.

> [T]here is a need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for *ubuntu* but not for victimisation.[21]

This reference to *ubuntu* was seen as significant in the work of reconciliation that went on in South Africa, being mentioned in over 20 cases that came to the new constitutional court and instrumental in the development of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, led by Tutu. An important forerunner to its usage in South African legislation came about in 1980 with the arrival of the first book to be written specifically about *ubuntu.* Samkange and Samkange wrote *Hunhuism or Ubuntuism: A Zimbabwean Indigenous Political Philosophy*, which is notable for the new direction given to *ubuntu* as a clearly political ideology or philosophy, one which the authors hoped would transform policy formulation under Black majority rule. Although Mugabe did refer to the term himself when proclaiming national Peace Days in the country, *ubuntu* was never actually used or referred to in Zimbabwean policy/law-making.[22]

Its use in South African legislation also spawned a resurgence of interest in *ubuntu* and consequently a large number of texts on the subject, the most influential being Shutte's book *Philosophy for Africa* published in 1995. Gade observes that it was through Shutte's work that *ubuntu* became so closely aligned to the proverb quoted earlier in this chapter, that is, '*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*', translated roughly as 'A person is a person through other persons' and yet interestingly Shutte rarely uses the term until the US edition of the text is released, where *ubuntu* takes centre stage as his conviction for the new South Africa. Shutte also promoted and set up the 'Ubuntu Project', seeking a

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[21] Gade, 'Historical Development', p. 311, quoting the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1993, Act 200, Epilogue after Section 251.
[22] Ibid., pp. 309–10.

way of developing critical dialogue between European and African traditions and worldviews.[23] Since then, a huge number of texts with references to *ubuntu* have emerged, with more than 12,000 in 2009 alone.[24] In South Africa the importance of *ubuntu* cannot be underestimated, both for its real and imagined potential use in reframing what it means to be African in the post-apartheid era, although this is contentious to its critics who would deem *ubuntu* as a term over-used, exploited and now meaningless.[25] Louw notes that it has achieved a unique position in crossing social strata, being used both by the wealthy and well-educated elite and by grass-roots, traditional social groups alike.[26]

With such large numbers of articles and texts in circulation on the subject, it is difficult to be explicit in drawing conclusions about each writer's understanding of or position on the meaning of *ubuntu*; it is apparent, however, that all its proponents take its meaning to suit their own agenda, and the fluidity of the term allows them to do so. Praeg reflects that this is one of the problems in defining *ubuntu* at all: '[*U*]*buntu* is poised between the familiar (translatable) and the unfamiliar (untranslatable). [...] Its very meaning is generated by the conflicting demands that it can and has to be understood yet remain partially un-understood or untranslatable'.[27] It is a term specific to Southern Africa, and yet there is a translatability to it that both reflects an African reality of interconnectedness that is familiar across a range of social groupings. It is, by its very nature, according to Praeg, heterogeneous and contextual, local and

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[23] Ibid., p. 314.

[24] Ibid., p. 319.

[25] Antije Krog, ' "This Thing Called Reconciliation," Forgiveness as Part of an Interconnectedness-Towards-Wholeness', *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 27 (2008), 353–66 (pp. 354–55).

[26] Louw, pp. 184–85.

[27] Praeg, p. 369.

global.[28] Gathogo argues that *ubuntu* is both a descriptive and a prescriptive term describing what we are as humans ('being-with-others'), and also what that should look like in action.[29] It is possible to see overarching patterns of usage and how these have developed over time, and Gade in particular has identified the movement and expansion of *ubuntu,* from a personal quality to a philosophy to a political ideology to a worldview, with varying agendas and historical contexts driving each emphasis. It can be argued that there is much overlap in all these terms, but is also worth noting that it is unusual for a personal quality to be adopted, and indeed subsumed, by a prevailing conceptual framework. This may have come about because *ubuntu* did become tied into a specific political philosophy as highlighted earlier, and was often used as a vehicle in which to promote an agenda. For example, Mbeki supported Shutte's 'Ubuntu Project' (later called the 'Common Good Project') after the South African elections in 1999, when Mbeki was looking for solutions to what he termed 'our moral vacuum'.[30]

Linguistic development and translation

The linguistic equivalent of *ubuntu*, as far as can be said, seems to exist in a range of African countries or groups. Metz and Gaie identify *ubuntu* or *botho* (Botswana, Tswana) as a good starting point for understanding sub-Saharan morality. It is not just a descriptive phrase of humanity wherever it is found, but more of a metaphysical quality concerning interdependence between all living and non-living things, and a distinctive orientation or understanding as to the

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[28] Ibid., pp. 369–70.

[29] Julius Mutugi Gathogo, 'African Philosophy as Expressed in the Concepts of Hospitality and Ubuntu', *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 130 (2008), 39–53 (p. 46).

[30] Gade, 'Historical Development', pp. 321–22.

value of being a person, becoming more fully a person through relationship.[31]

An equivalent phrase or word exists in many African languages spoken in

Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and DR Congo, amongst others;

however, Gade notes that it is unknown if peoples agree within their language

group as to what the term means, let alone if it means precisely the same as

ubuntu.[32] This would seem to be a crucial issue: are groups and individuals

even debating the same term, and how can this be verified other than by

exploring common practice? In light of this, it was fascinating that the group

interviews I conducted and analysed revealed a remarkable consistency across

language and tribal groups in offering a definition of *ubuntu* (see Chapter 4 on

thematic analysis).

How *ubuntu* is derived linguistically may be key in how it is used or

approached. Most writers on the subject would point to the word *ntu* in a range

of languages known as Nguni, previously referred to as Bantu (which includes a

range of Southern African languages, for example, Xhosa, Zulu, Ndebele), as

the linguistic root of *ubuntu*. As many as 300 linguistic groups use this or a

variation as the word for 'person', and it has two usages: firstly, in a

cosmological framework to differentiate between the human and non-human

world; and secondly, as a socio-legal term referring to the inhuman way a

human can transgress the scope of humanity, breaking the code of behaviour

towards another, for example, through witchcraft.[33] Others would see the word

muntu, meaning 'a person, the primary Creator, spirit or human being', as the

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[31] Thaddeus Metz and Joseph B. R. Gaie, 'The African Ethic of Ubuntu/Botho: Implications for Research on Morality', *Journal of Moral Education,* 39 (2010)*,* 273–90 (pp. 274–75).

[32] Gade, 'What is Ubuntu?', pp. 486–87.

[33] Taringa, pp. 188–90, quoting S. Samkange, *Hunhuism or Ubuntuism: A Zimbabwean Indigenous Political Philosophy* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1980).

root.[34] Both possible derivations are significant — not only do they differentiate humans from other creatures, but involve the crucial identification of the person as the basis of the *ubuntu* worldview, with deeply religious concepts embedded within.

Personhood in *ubuntu*

According to traditional South African societies, a human being is seen as a person when they operate out of *ubuntu*, because they recognise that they are a being created by God, that God and the ancestors are active beings too and that accordingly every person has dignity and equality.[35] Mnyaka states: 'It is in a human community that an individual is able to realise himself or herself as a person'. It is a core tenet of *ubuntu* that only through the cooperation, influence and contribution of others can we understand and fulfil who we are as persons.[36] The tenets of such a philosophy or worldview underpin many societies and are by no means exclusively African, but the high value placed upon this system of interconnectedness, of recognition of the role of the 'other' and the intensity of its expression in daily life, is notable, and is a recurrent theme amongst writers as they grapple with *ubuntu* as their subject.[37] For example, Lewis identifies the role of the 'other' as key in determining and fixing one's identity: a person's awareness of self 'rests on recognition or acknowledgement from the other', a forging of identity through relationship. This is a crucial concept in the framework of *ubuntu* and one that Lewis explores in its potential as a transferrable concept for Black humanity in other parts of the

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[34] Mnyaka, p. 217.
[35] Ibid., pp. 218–19.
[36] Ibid., p. 223.
[37] Ibid., p. 220.

world.[38] Others would seek to restore a more balanced view of the individual and the community. Eze has explored the commonly held position amongst African philosophers that the individual is created by the community, and is therefore prior to the individual. As a more moderate communitarian, Eze would argue that they are mutually formative, and that this has important implications for consensus, as well as how individuals are treated by others in the group.[39] Mbiti famously chose to re-phrase Descartes' philosophical statement of being ('I think, therefore I am') to capture African communitarianism: 'I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am'. Eze, however, prefers Dzobo's reworking of the same: 'We are, therefore I am, and since I am, therefore we are'.[40]

This understanding of an individual can inevitably be idealised and lack nuance. For example, 'the exclusion of the "other"… is a Western importation' seems both a generalised and inaccurate charge.[41] Gathogo, questions the place of *ubuntu* in African society when reflecting upon behaviour and experiences across the continent. Where, for example, was the practice of *ubuntu* in the Rwandan genocide? Gathogo's conclusion is that protection of one's own under tribal law stands over any other affiliation, and therefore exclusion of the 'other' when it occurs is simply part of being human.[42] He also reflects on women's experience of *ubuntu* and their lack of status as a full person in traditional life; women are often subservient, tied into sometimes

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[38] Lewis, pp. 77–79.

[39] Michael Onyebuchi Eze, 'What is African Communitarianism? Against Consensus as a Regulative Ideal', *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 27 (2008)*,* 386–99 (pp. 386–88).

[40] Ibid., p. 388, citing J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), pp. 108–9, and N. K. Dzobo, 'The Image of Man in Africa', *Person and Community (Ghanaian Philosophical Studies),* Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye (eds), Washington: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992, pp. 132—145.

[41] Mnyaka, p. 221–2, citing G. M. Setiloane, *African Theology: An Introduction* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1986) p. 10.

[42] Gathogo, pp. 47–48.

harmful practices such as FGM in the name of maintaining cultural traditions.[43]

The status of personhood is not always bestowed upon them, the inclusion into

society as persons often only referring to men who hold power as part of the

established hierarchy. Outsiders or even certain community members in the

ubuntu worldview are not necessarily persons either: 'There goes a person

walking with a white man' would seem to indicate fairly exclusive parameters.[44]

Gathogo does not dismiss *ubuntu*, however, but argues for its reconstruction in

a way that will go beyond both individualism and collectivism to form a sense of

community that includes all.[45]

Ubuntu in practice

Wrestling with conflicting worldviews is a common theme in an attempt to

express the communitarian roots of *ubuntu*. Personal autonomy and freedom

are often seen as specifically individualistic and as Western constructs, but

within the *ubuntu* framework, 'one's autonomy is understood and practised in

relation to the community'.[46] The needs, best interests and security of the

community are seen as paramount, and each person is expected to play their

part in maintaining this balance of communal life by their actions and behaviour.

Ubuntu can therefore be lost, and a person no longer viewed even as a person,

if they act selfishly or in a way perceived as harmful to the group, because they

have forgotten the personhood of the 'other'. In this way, then, even the

definition of a person is not static, and can change according to actions and

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[43] Ibid., pp. 49–50.
[44] Taringa, p. 189–90.
[45] Gathogo, p. 52.
[46] Mnyaka, p. 223.

behaviour patterns.[47] If this kind of ostracism sounds harsh, it should be remembered that at the heart of *ubuntu* for some writers is the concept of forgiveness and restoration: reintegration is offered to those who have offended against the community, and the balance of mutual concern and caring for each others' interests can be made good. That is, a person can count on and expect meaningful support of others, as well as providing it, once restored to the group.[48] This extends to the wider community too: hospitality is a crucial component of *ubuntu,* and care for the stranger is a basic obligation that falls to all in the community, something one can expect to receive in return when travelling. In this way, a wider social stability is created; hospitality is perceived as a public duty.[49]

Other prescribed actions and policies according to *ubuntu* principles include distribution of property, formulated according to esteem for communal relationships over utilitarian principles, and is primarily seen in family life.[50] For example, where people in the West would probably wish to exercise individual choice regarding marriage and having children, many parts of Africa would see this more as a responsibility in order to maintain community. This explains in part the rejection and ostracisation of homosexuals commonly in traditional African society, because of this expectation of taking marriage as a responsibility for the good of the community, and consequently perceiving such persons as 'dissenting', self-focused individuals.[51] It is of interest to note the impact that both the apartheid regime's forced removals policy and widespread urbanisation must have had on such practices as *ubuntu*. Furthermore, with

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[47] Ibid., pp. 224–25.
[48] Ibid., pp. 225–27.
[49] Ibid., p. 230.
[50] Metz and Gaie, pp. 277–79.
[51] Ibid., pp. 277–79.

regard to urbanisation, it is important to question which community specifically these writers refer to when discussing *ubuntu*, as many sub-Saharan Africans now live in urban contexts and would possibly see themselves as participating in several communities, for example work, faith, and occasionally returning to ancestors' homelands, rather than a singular community of village life alone.[52] John Mbiti classically decries the changing African context and spiritual landscape in the breakdown of traditional society through urbanisation, but does not offer (in this text) any practical solutions.[53] This was a significant theme arising within the group interviews conducted, and will be explored in more detail as part of my thematic analysis.

One of the more unsettling aspects of *ubuntu* as a communitarian practice is in regard to how differences and decisions are handled. It appears to be extremely difficult to raise a dissenting voice or to behave in a way that has been judged as immoral, as this is seen as damaging to the cohesion of the group and will jeopardise the ability of that person to be seen as a person at all, losing their *ubuntu* and, therefore, potentially their place in the group.[54] Whilst some maintain that reaching consensus is a foundation of traditional African society,[55] others would argue that consensus to this degree suppresses alterity and autonomy. Eze, for example, contends that individual values are crucial in building a healthy dialogic model of community rather than an oppressive, stagnant alternative.[56]

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[52] See Wim van Binsbergen's critique, 'Ubuntu and the Gobalisation of Southern African Thought and Society', cited by Paul Hess in 'The Retrieval of the Subject: A Critical View of Ubuntu Theology', The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education, Birmingham, 24/10/2013.

[53] John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), pp. 224–25, 274.

[54] Gade, 'What is Ubuntu?', pp. 497–98.

[55] See, for example, M. B. Ramose, *African Philosophy through Ubuntu* (Harare: Mond Books, 1999), p. 140, quoted in Eze, p. 390.

[56] Gathogo, p. 50. See also Eze, p. 386.

Eze also warns of the dangers of assimilation under such social systems as *simunye* (meaning 'we are one' in Zulu), which presses for complete identification between the individual and their community, reducing the concept of the 'other' to 'another the same as I'. In contrast, he argues, *ubuntu* is founded upon dialogue and respect of the 'other', not possession of the 'other', and for this reason Eze continues to promote it as a useful tool in building truly inclusive and vibrant community.[57] Taringa and Louw would also agree that there are exclusivist elements within *ubuntu,* but that it is essentially an inclusive philosophy, tolerant of other cultural practices (particularly if they, like *ubuntu,* give precedence to communitarian life), with practitioners of *ubuntu* usually being willing to maximise who is considered kin or 'community', someone who belongs, within certain parameters.[58] Taringa does note the exclusive nature of *ubuntu/botho* as it operates tribally in some parts of Southern Africa, for example, opposing tribes in Shona areas of Zimbabwe are seen as 'less perfect' people, and their culture considered a threat or foreign. Those Shona who have chosen to operate in a Western value system are labelled as Westerners, because they have lost *ubuntu/botho.*[59]

Positioning on this inclusive or exclusive understanding of *ubuntu* has huge implications for societies like South Africa. If many hold an exclusive position, it may well mean that some South Africans are destined never to be considered persons at all, nor therefore to possess the quality of *ubuntu*, and to remain 'disconnected' from the majority. Taking an exclusive position strengthens group identity and may help the (previously) oppressed to survive;

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[57] Eze, pp. 396–97.
[58] Taringa, pp. 191–94. See also Gathogo, pp. 47–48, and Gade, 'What is Ubuntu?', pp. 494–501.
[59] Taringa, pp. 193–94.

equally, adopting an inclusive position may hinder a group from being able to resist further threats or resumption of oppression. Gade suggests that it may be illegitimate ethically even to consider an exclusive position in *ubuntu* in post-apartheid South Africa, but the fact that such views are being aired is a good reminder of the complexities of social structures, and the challenging reality of regaining any sense of hospitality and trust after such a regime.[60]

Desmond Tutu and *ubuntu* theology

It should be noted that the following section of the chapter has been largely shaped by, and is heavily reliant upon, the semi-biographical account of Desmond Tutu as offered by Michael Battle, an African-American theologian who worked with Tutu and who has explored in some depth Tutu's *ubuntu* theology, in his book *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (1997).[61] This work is thorough and wide-ranging in its background research, particularly of Tutu's speeches, sermons and theological responses throughout the apartheid regime; however, it appears to be almost the sole resource commenting on this aspect of Tutu's work to date, and therefore inevitably interprets the man and his theology in a particular way. Subsequent texts and articles continue to comment upon *ubuntu* and a theological interpretation of it, but few have chosen to specifically critique Tutu's pioneering work in the field.

It has been the focus of this chapter until now to paint a picture of *ubuntu* with broad strokes, indicating the fluid nature of the term as a philosophy, ideology or worldview, and how people choose to interpret this in practical ways. It has been implied that there are spiritual foundations to *ubuntu* but

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[60] Gade, 'What is Ubuntu?', pp. 499–501.

[61] Michael Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1997).

these have not yet been explored, nor has *ubuntu* been investigated as a theological construct. In the following section it is my intention to give a brief overview as to why Tutu was, and is, uniquely placed to develop an *ubuntu* theology, how he has constructed this, and what it currently appears to offer to Southern Africa. This will lead later into my analysis and critique, where I take a more systematic approach in exploring the tenets of *ubuntu* theology through the lens of Scripture and Christian tradition.

It is unnecessary for the purposes of this research to give a detailed biographical account of Desmond Mpilo Tutu, but there are several crucial threads of his life story which pertain to his deep commitment to, and development of, an *ubuntu* theology. Firstly, as a Black South African growing up in Johannesburg in the 1940s and 1950s, he experienced for himself the second-rate education and life of disadvantage that was a product of the apartheid regime: his feelings about racism and interdependent life are not borne out of ideologies, but a shared history. The rationale behind apartheid was to be found rooted in biblical interpretation and in Enlightenment philosophy. The Afrikaners, themselves an oppressed group in early colonial history, saw themselves to be an elect group, election which became entwined with race as a hierarchy and constructed narrative of order and rational superiority. This in turn was seen to lead into a formulation of mature human identity and personhood, excluding those who could not be afforded to be seen as equals or even human: native South Africans.[62] Biblical justification was taken from a reading of Genesis 9. 24–27, the curse of Canaan, and from 1 Peter 2. 9, a chosen people, so that in time Afrikaners would see themselves as the superior race who would hold guardianship over separation and justice for

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[62] Battle, *Reconciliation*, pp. 13–18.

all. Battle reflects in his account of Tutu's early life upon Arendt's observation that racism may have naturally died out, had it not been for the 'scramble for Africa' and the ensuing need for cheap labour once the slave trade had been disbanded.[63]

Yet in the midst of his experience of life under apartheid rule, Tutu was drawn to the Anglican Community of the Resurrection, mentored by Trevor Huddleston, was ordained in South Africa, and as a result went on to study theology in the UK, returning to his homeland to work as an Anglican priest. This enables him to offer a critique of the individualism he experienced whilst living in the West, as well as belonging to an institution shaped so strongly by Western theology. The Anglican church was perceived as the 'white man's church', yet Tutu strongly contends that there has been much in Anglican spirituality that has helped him to tread a conciliatory middle way, offering a potentially peaceful solution for a cohabitation of the powerful and entrenched Afrikaner theology of separation alongside the explosive liberation theology of Black South Africa.[64] His role as bishop in the Anglican Communion was to bring him into a position of political leadership during the apartheid regime; as a vocal and active campaigner against the system, it fell to Tutu and other Black church leaders to step into the gap left by Black activist leaders during their imprisonment.

Lastly, as apartheid was dismantled and the threat of reprisals and bloodshed became very real, Tutu was the obvious ambassador of peace to propose, formulate and conduct the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) from 1995 as its chairman. The work and ethos of the TRC were clearly

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[63] Ibid., pp. 20–22.
[64] Ibid., p. xv.

influenced by Tutu's *ubuntu* theology, but can also be said to have consolidated his understanding of *ubuntu* and refined his theology in its practice. Tutu and the TRC had their critics. Some would say that TRC chose conciliation and truth over prosecution and justice,[65] whilst others were particularly vocal regarding the use of the term *ubuntu* in the setting up and stated purpose of the Commission, calling it 'mere wrapping' for the ANC agenda:

> Ubuntu should be recognised for what it is: an ideological concept with multiple meanings […] within the populist language of pan-Africanism. In post-apartheid South Africa, it became the Africanist wrapping used to sell a reconciliatory version of human rights talk to Black South Africans.[66]

Most critics saw *ubuntu* as a superficial and confusing ideal posed within the TRC, and even proponents such as Krog have often chosen to discount Tutu's explicitly Christian basis for his *ubuntu* theology, whilst accepting that *ubuntu* formed the essence of the TRC process. At the same time, Krog acknowledges that the term's over-use has rendered it almost unusable.[67]

Tutu's theology is contextual rather than systematic, and is deliberately popularised rather than given an academic reading. It has developed out of a theological narrative of exile and oppression, ironically in much the same way that apartheid ('separateness') was, but with very different conclusions.[68] As Tutu understands it, *ubuntu* provides a corrective hermeneutic for Western

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[65] Michael Battle, 'A Theology of Community: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu', *Interpretations*, 54 (2000), 173–82 (pp. 175–76).

[66] Krog, p. 354, quoting Richard A. Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa – Legitimizing the Post-apartheid State* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), p. 13.

[67] Ibid., pp. 354–55, 357.

[68] Battle, *Reconciliation*, p. 1.

theology's over-emphasis upon the individual in salvation, the foundation of his theology being the centrality of the *imago Dei* in our understanding of personhood, interrelatedness and outworking of our life before God in mutuality.[69] According to Tutu, life is all about our relationship with God and neighbour, and our identity is formed by God: our personhood is revealed through encountering the reality of the triune God within the framework of interconnectedness — relating with God and with other human beings.[70]

This, for Tutu, is why apartheid was clearly an evil force, dishonouring to God and to be fought against at all costs: for Black Africans, their sense of identity and of bearing God's image had been taken from them. Tutu reflects that one of the more insidious aspects of an oppressive regime is that the only definition of self that a person has is that which has been constructed. Such domination erodes a sense of power or voice. Tutu observes:

> [W]hen we were first evangelised often we came through the process having learned to despise things Black and African because these were usually condemned by others […] filling most of us with a self-disgust and self-hatred. This has been the most violent form of colonialism, our spiritual and mental enslavement, when we suffered from what can only be called a religious or spiritual schizophrenia.[71]

In spite of this, Tutu stood with confidence throughout the regime, often alone, not only against the iniquity of apartheid but offering an alternative view of

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[69] Ibid., pp. 4–5.

[70] Ibid., pp. 6–7.

[71] Ibid., p. 166, quoted from a chapter by Desmond Tutu, 'Black and African Theologies: Soul-Mates or Antagonists?' in *Black Theology: A Documented History 1966-1979*, ed. by G. Wilmore and J. Cone (New York: Orbis Books, 1981), p.18.

Christian Scripture and a vision of potential harmony between races through that view of Scripture and what he understood to be God's intention for all people:[72]

> Apartheid […] supported by the NGK (Dutch Reformed Church) says human beings are made for separation, alienation, division and disunity. The Bible and Christianity says human beings are made for fellowship, communion and koinonia.[73]

Tutu's insistence in seeking racial harmony rather than overthrowing Afrikaner identity, or rallying Black Africans to 'embrace Blackness' enabled the door of relational life to be kept open. His theology released everyone who wished to do so to join together by forging a relational view of their human identity. By taking this stance, it became clear that he understood abolition of apartheid was only part of the issue, and that something new was needed that could potentially bring different cultures together — *ubuntu*.[74]

Tutu was able to reflect on and critique not only the Western perception of the individual and community, but African perceptions of the same. He recognised that the West had developed a highly individualistic, analytical approach to society that promoted autonomy, individual freedom and a utilitarian approach to community. However, he also recognised that the African understanding of communitarian life, despite redressing the balance between spiritual and material realities, presented problems in terms of constraining

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[72] Ibid., pp. 25–28.
[73] Ibid., p. 30. Speech given by Desmond Tutu at Rand Afrikaans University, 1984.
[74] Ibid., pp. 33–36.

individuality, dissent and difference.[75] Tutu's response was to draw on both

philosophies, undergirded by a biblical understanding of personhood, that would

allow for more authentic community which recognised the individuality of its

members and allowed them to thrive, without denigrating either their

individuality or the community itself. Whilst personhood is largely equated with

the term 'individual' in the West, Tutu distinguishes clearly between the terms

'person' and 'individual', and adopts what he would probably view as an

exclusively Christian and scriptural understanding of personhood — that it is

something to be acquired through relational life, and means that people are

utterly dependent upon God and then neighbour in order to develop their full

personhood.[76]

Battle describes Tutu's *ubuntu* theology through the emergence of four

defining principles, or vectors as he terms them (implying content but also

specific direction which inter-relates to the other principles), as given below:

- *Ubuntu* theology builds interdependent community;

- *Ubuntu* theology recognises persons as distinctive;

- *Ubuntu* theology integrates cultures;

- *Ubuntu* theology can overthrow apartheid/separateness.[77]

It can be seen even from these simple statements that Tutu's Christian

foundations to an *ubuntu* theology do not always sit easily with other traditional

understandings of the term. For example, the celebration of difference that Tutu

calls for in a sense of interdependence contrasts with African forms of more

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[75] Ibid., pp. 36–38.
[76] Ibid., pp. 38–39.
[77] Ibid., pp. 40–48.

radical communitarianism: '[F]or Tutu, being properly related in *ubuntu* theology does not denigrate individuality'.[78] However, the call for true interdependence which requires vulnerability and a belief in the common good seems far removed from many Western experiences of community, where competitiveness or utilitarian values might flourish.[79] Tutu's primary credo revolves around how we see one another; being cognisant of each other's humanness as fellow bearers of God's image is the principal rationale for his theology. Variations on this theme recur in several speeches and sermons:

> It is the fact that each of us has been created in the image of God. This is something intrinsic. It comes as it were with the package. It means that each of us is a God-carrier, God's viceroy, and God's representative. This is why treating anybody as if they were less than this is very blasphemous. It is like spitting in the face of God.[80]

The most contentious aspect of Tutu's theology comes to light in statements such as these, for his conviction was that apartheid must be overthrown, not by reinforcing and reconstructing a sense of personhood in the oppressed, but in firstly allowing the oppressed to humanise their oppressors, to see them as fellow bearers of *imago Dei*. In this way, Tutu aspired to wither away the germination of seeds of violence on both sides of the regime, and to minimise race as one of the many discriminating factors regarding a person's value. It is to his enduring credit that aspects of this radical re-imaging of the 'other' was

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[78] Battle, 'A Theology of Community', p. 179.
[79] Battle, *Reconciliation,* pp. 40–41.
[80] Tutu, p. 11.

demonstrated with some success in the TRC hearings.[81] The foundation of reconciliation and restorative justice of the TRC was, in Tutu's mind, in the spirit of *ubuntu* and captured the characteristic of traditional African jurisprudence, where the healing of breaches and redressing of imbalances is of central concern (see earlier notes on '*Ubuntu* in practice').[82] His conviction remained that forgiveness was in the best interests of each person and for the entire country, and offered to humanise the victims as much as the perpetrators in each case.

Similarly, Tutu has reflected upon the spiritual foundations of *ubuntu* within traditional African society, and has sought to draw on a traditional African understanding of God as Creator, combining it with the orthodox doctrine of Anglicanism, depicting God as transcendent yet immanent. The Nguni/Bantu concept of God is primary, the First Cause of all *ntu* ('beings'), Creator and Sustainer, the Being who has always been, the One who originates but is also intimately involved in life.[83] It is here, however, that Tutu diverts from the traditional views of God, finding their fulfilment in the foundations of the gospel – the incarnation of Christ. His understanding of both creation and the incarnation, of Christ dwelling amongst us, are firmly rooted in *kenosis*. These acts of God are the result of his outpouring of love for us and the world, and tie us as persons all the more deeply into God's creation of us as his image-

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[81] Battle, *Reconciliation*, p. 47. See also Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* for detailed records and examples of this humanising movement towards both perpetrators and victims during the TRC hearings.

[82] Tutu, pp. 35, 51.

[83] Battle, *Reconciliation,* pp. 54–59. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969) would concur with Tutu's views thus far, that there is no evidence to suggest most African peoples to be pantheistic rather than theistic.

bearers: 'We and all creation are the creatures of love. We are made by love, we are marked by love, and we are made for love'.[84]

This represents the key turning-point where Tutu redefines the philosophical concept of *ubuntu* into a theological concept. If people truly participate in the claim of *imago Dei,* argues Tutu, then the transformation will occur where the individual recognises her or himself and others as persons, making for a more profound understanding of self and community because of the fundamental relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This is somewhat at odds with the traditional understanding of personhood, as previously discussed, where the defining and primary relational focus is the community.[85]

Proponents of *ubuntu* are fairly evenly divided concerning its spiritual foundations and its relationship to the Christian faith, as already noted. Masolo, for example, is not the only voice to criticise this theological position of Tutu's, but he is one of the more vehement in maintaining that the Christian God cannot simply equate to the African God, because the Christian God is the European God, constructed from concepts based in Greek metaphysics rather than African religious concepts.[86] He rejects any such attempts to justify a sense of 'completion' or fulfilment of traditional African faith through Christ, whereas other theologians such as Mbiti, Bediako and Sanneh sit more comfortably with this supposition, suggesting that the gospel, stripped of its Western transmission, is genuinely at home in Africa and is easily assimilated in a range of cultures.[87]

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[84] Battle, *Reconciliation,* p. 60, quoting a sermon given by Tutu in 1986.
[85] Ibid., pp. 62–64.
[86] Ibid., p. 60.
[87] See, for example, Bediako, *Christianity and Africa,* pp. 118–20.

Tutu's Christology goes on to focus upon the particularity of Jesus' own cultural background, reflecting that Christ's Jewishness was rather ignored or overlooked by Western Enlightenment scholars, but for Tutu this acts as a sign of affirmation of every culture. In Christ, people are offered a pattern of other-focus rather than self-focus, to live co-operatively rather than competitively; a humble, proper-relatedness rooted in reconciliation and forgiveness that Tutu believes human beings have been designed for.[88] This leads naturally into Tutu's ecclesiology, which is shaped around Anglican spirituality. For Tutu, the church's main role is to live a life of worship, out of which springs service and suffering as a community in identification with the poor, expressed through prayer as a social, relational enterprise. This, he believes, can intentionally hold together Black, African, and liberation theologies with Anglican theologies, and leaves space for the former to develop their critical voice.[89]

Inevitably, there are those across this spectrum who challenge both Tutu's ecclesiology and his *ubuntu* theology. Battle comments that some Black theologians, for example, Mosala and Cone, would find his position too conciliatory and would argue for a more antagonistic stance in rejecting any imposition of white Christianity or theology, but Tutu, whilst accepting many of Cone's observations, refuses to dismiss the Anglican tradition and continues to seek the faithfulness of all God's peoples in their practice of the presence of God as the church in a naturally oppressive world. Tutu, therefore, maintains a

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[88] Battle, *Reconciliation,* pp*.* 69–80. In this chapter, Battle also makes reference to teaching by Tutu from Leviticus 19, drawing parallels between the Israelites in their covenant with God, and the imagery of a holy/unholy people, living out the practice of holiness in their relationships.

[89] Ibid., pp. 112–38.

position of liberation through cooperation, while Cone would call for liberation through survival.[90]

The significant point of variance seems to lie once more within the central tenet of Tutu's theology, the *imago Dei*, which in turn leads Tutu into a trinitarian perspective of inter-relatedness: 'the very nature of God related in three persons becomes the Christian paradigm of *ubuntu'*.[91] As people are created for interdependence, Tutu argues, then this is also an integral aspect of the *imago Dei*, reflecting the interdependence and complementarity of the three persons of the Godhead as understood through Christian tradition. In his sermons, Tutu often comments on the enjoyment of difference through God's own creativity in imparting such particular attributes to us as people, urging everyone to relish seeing 'God's wonderfully distinctive creation in the other', just as the Persons of the Son and the Spirit are defined by and distinctive from the Father. The three Persons of the Trinity are, for Tutu, defined in their personhood by and through the other, a divine fellowship of love that the church can witness to in the world by its own articulation of the same fellowship, through *ubuntu*.[92] At the heart of this theological model is human identity, forged out of an image of a loving trinitarian God, made for relationship, and made to express forgiveness within those relationships as a result.[93]

Conclusion

As can be deduced from this brief exploration of Tutu's *ubuntu* theology, some champions of the concepts he has developed for life together in the new South

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[90] Ibid., pp. 155–67.
[91] Ibid., p. 164.
[92] Ibid., pp. 44–48.
[93] Battle, 'A Theology of Community', p. 174.

Africa might argue that they not only could be universal, but should be so. Many of the principles are undoubtedly idealistic and subject to a variety of problems in practice, but many visionary and good principles in life could easily be accused of the same. That they are especially pertinent in his homeland is without question, but what of their transferrable qualities? Is there any value or potential in applying such concepts in another context, such as the Western contemporary church? Do the biblical principles and Christian traditions that Tutu espouses as the foundations of his *ubuntu* theology accurately reflect the theology described here, and does an *ubuntu* theology in turn accurately reflect relational life as sought through *koinonia,* the living community of the church around the world? It is my intention to explore these questions through a critique of *ubuntu* theology, investigating further the basis of *imago Dei* as revealed in Genesis 1, and characteristics of the Trinity as they pertain to personhood, relatedness and 'open' community, through the doctrine of participation.

Preceding this, I will seek to establish the epistemological and methodological basis of this research and the foundations for the resulting fieldwork I have conducted. This will be important, as it serves to link my fundamental questions concerning identity, personhood and relatedness into an interdisciplinary framework, which in turn will allow me to analyse actual examples of life and praxis of communitarian society as reflected upon by individuals from across a range of sub-Saharan countries and contexts. I will suggest that, at its heart, my research is founded upon an epistemological question: How do people know what they know about *ubuntu*, and how, if at all, can this knowledge be transferred across contexts into a Western contemporary church setting? This, I believe, is both a sociological and a theological question,

spanning as it does themes of personhood and relational life, which can be explored within both an interpretivist and a revelation paradigm. I will demonstrate that it is significant to hold the two paradigms in tension, in order to seek correlative knowledge; that is, that the social sciences can and should inform theological research that is contextual and therefore subject to interpretation. Nevertheless, how and to what extent can social sciences inform practical theology, and how indeed does the paradigm of revelation as God's activity in the world shape any interpretation of *ubuntu*? This, and an outline of the formulation of subsequent fieldwork methods, is the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter 3

Epistemology, Methodology and Methods: Exploring the Interface between Two Paradigms and Resulting Fieldwork[1]

Introduction

Even at the earliest stages of my research process, it became apparent that any exploration of relational life, identity, personhood and community would be shaped by at least two factors. Firstly, it would clearly be of a multi-disciplinary nature, touching as it does upon a wide range of aspects of what it means to be human — a person who connects and relates to the 'other'. Secondly, it would also be a highly subjective area, one firmly placed at the qualitative end of the research spectrum, where my role as researcher is bound to be reflected within my findings as well as how I locate the work within the related research corpus.

It is my intention, therefore, to outline my research aims, to reflect upon the academic disciplines that impact most directly upon this research, that is, practical theology and sociology, and their possible paradigmatic and ontological foundations that lead to a convergence or, perhaps, divergence of theories that shape my methodology and resulting methods chosen in fieldwork.[2] I will also reflect upon my own position in the research as it impacts upon my chosen methodology and interpretation of relevant theoretical concepts. I will then explore the reasons for my choice of research method, and its potential design and implementation. I will include an overview of ethical

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[1] The following chapter includes material from essays written as part of my Research Methods coursework, May 2014.

[2] Practical theology is an inter-disciplinary, reflective, and reflexive discipline that 'enables those engaged in ministry and mission to think theologically about what they do and to draw belief and action closer together'. Helen Cameron and Catherine Duce, *Researching Practice in Ministry and Mission: A Companion* (London: SCM Press, 2013), p. xi.

issues that arise from this research process, and will conclude by reflecting critically upon my role as researcher within the specific context.

The epistemological and ontological foundations that my research rests upon are complex, as formulating a theologically applied concept of *ubuntu* primarily straddles two academic disciplines: sociology and theology. Other disciplines could also be brought to bear upon this subject, for example, psychology and social anthropology, but are beyond the scope of this chapter to explore in any detail.

Aspects of this research task could be said to sit comfortably within the field of social sciences. A study of the origins of *ubuntu* and its practice in social groupings may well take place within the disciplines of social anthropology or sociology, for example. If that was the full extent of this research, it would be valid to speak confidently about working within a purely interpretivist paradigm. This paradigm would hold that all knowledge is deemed to be socially/culturally constructed and historically conditioned, and that reality, because it is endlessly created and changed by people, can only be discovered through interpretive forms of study. What is constructed by our interactions and the meaning it has for individuals is highly complex, fluid and inter-subjective; therefore, what is studied cannot be distinguished as particular facts or values, truth or reality, in empirical, universal terms. This stands in contrast to the positivist paradigm where objective, logical forms of knowledge must be established in order to deduce or elicit patterns from observed behaviour, for example, in natural sciences.

This is not to say that the natural sciences and the social sciences are incompatible. Research in both of these fields is based upon empirical evidence, and most natural and social scientists would agree that their position

is a phenomenological one, that is, raw reality is unobservable, and evidence is always filtered through our perceptions of it.[3] But despite growing convergence between these fields in the advent of post-positivism, the foundation of their epistemologies remains at odds in that, whilst neither camp would now argue for absolutes, positivists continue to work on a deductive basis, whilst the foundation of interpretivist work is inductive.

This constructionist position, Crotty argues, is the epistemological foundation for most social research, which in turn informs the theoretical perspectives that shape our methodology.[4] Constructionism is founded on the supposition that meaning is constructed and contributed to by both subject and object — the world may be real and present before people engage with it, but Crotty would maintain that 'it only becomes a world of meaning when meaning-making beings make sense of it'.[5]

Theoretical perspectives and concepts

In order to establish meaning, then, theoretical tools that elaborate on and reflect this position must be used, for example, hermeneutics and symbolic interactionism, within the wider scope of social theory. Harrington describes social theory as a relatively new study, using scientific ways of thinking about societies, our interaction as social beings, how behaviour within social structures changes and develops, and how it might be explained.[6] Within this theoretical perspective, hermeneutics (the interpretation of text, and in this case, 'text' in the socio-cultural sense) and symbolic interaction (the 'reading' of

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[3] Roger Gomm, *Social Research Methodology: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 2.
[4] M. Crotty, *The Foundations of Social Research* (London: Sage, 1998), p. 4.
[5] Ibid., p. 10.
[6] Austin Harrington, *Modern Social Theory* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), p. 1.

interaction and making meaning from social communication of all kinds as symbolic and representative) operate as helpful tools that enable the formulation of a theory, or range of theories, that can systematically describe and explain the phenomena observed.[7]

Particularly relevant in my research is the deliberation and selection of concepts that will inform and shape more specific theories in this process. According to Berg, concepts are the building blocks of theorising, and in specifying their symbolic and definitional elements as clearly as possible for the present project, they form an operational foundation from which to analyse and shape meaning from data collected through the research process.[8] In formulating a theologically applied concept of *ubuntu,* therefore, I will be drawing upon a cluster of theologically conceived concepts related to socialising behaviour, that is, concepts of identity, personhood and community. Inevitably, there are huge numbers of sociological concepts formulated around these themes, but it is beyond the scope of this research to do anything other than acknowledge them to have played a part in my literature review. Instead, I will reflect with care on theologically conceived concepts, as discussed in Chapter 5. This will allow me to select concepts that offer an operational definition that is pertinent to my field of work and that can be used consistently throughout. However, it should also be noted that it is not always appropriate to concretise precise concepts, particularly in research areas such as my own, where the very fluidity of the concepts are the main focus of my task and observations in field work.[9]

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[7] D. Layder, *Sociological Practice* (London: Sage, 1998), p. 100.

[8] Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 7th edn
    (Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 2009), p. 22.

[9] Ibid., pp. 39–40.

The relationship between conceptualising a sociological and theological understanding of personhood and community, and analysing data generated in the light of these developing concepts will form an important part of my research, and in this way, the concepts used and developed may well prove to be both orienting and sensitising. They will offer both a backdrop to my research and act as a springboard from which subsequent data analysis is reflected upon and by which it is informed, in order for me to formulate a theologically applied concept of *ubuntu*.[10]

Religious epistemology and ontology

So far, I have focused upon paradigms and philosophical foundations within the social sciences, but my area of study is primarily a theological one, so it is to this academic discipline I now turn to address some of the most fundamental issues of where my research process sits within the two disciplines, before concluding how they might illuminate one another.

In seeking areas of agreement, many theologians and social scientists would concur that there is no such thing as a detached position in research: all academic work carries an ideology, and the more explicitly this is communicated, the easier it is for readers to grasp the argument being presented and to question it. My position, therefore, should be declared at this stage. Instead of working as an objective, external observer of the subjective accounts of the phenomenological experience of others, I am writing as someone attempting theology from within the Christian tradition, as a practitioner and member of the global Christian communion and adhering to the tenets of orthodox Protestant Christian belief. In undertaking this research, I am

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[10] Layder, pp. 101–11.

seeking ways to enhance, develop and inform the relational life of the church as a member of that community. An example akin to the stance I am taking would be in Black theological studies, where academics are working from a deliberately partisan position in order to empower Black individuals and communities through a hermeneutic of liberation.[11] While non-Black and non-Christian practitioners can and do engage with these particular areas of study, it necessarily becomes an ethnographic exercise of a different quality and type of academic engagement founded upon a different experience of the subject matter.

With respect to any overlap between the disciplines of theology and social sciences, Harrington observes that challenges soon present themselves as the ontological foundations of the two are very different, and questions arising from those foundations cannot be framed from the standpoint of social-scientific enquiry alone.[12] Many writers have debated this issue across the social science/humanities spectrum, an overview of which is provided by Malcolm Hamilton in *The Sociology of Religion*. Writing primarily as a phenomenological sociologist, Hamilton notes that there is often a lack of clarity in investigating religious belief, because what can be observed or measured as real experience can be contested, as to how this might be described or interpreted appropriately.[13] He acknowledges the work of Eliade and Bellah as significant voices in this debate, who contend that religious phenomena cannot be reduced to a framework of social or psychological facts, but must be

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[11] See, for example, Immanuel Lartey*, In Living Colour,* 2nd edn (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2003).

[12] Harrington, p. 12.

[13] Malcolm B. Hamilton, *The Sociology of Religion: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 3.

understood on its own terms as autonomous.[14] Hamilton notes that others, for

example, Segal, would critique this stance, taking a reductionist approach that

there is no justification for this autonomy based upon 'evidence', and therefore

religion and religious experience should be explored as a social construction

along with other phenomena.[15]

Most social scientists now would seem to take a position of

'methodological agnosticism' and follow a reductionist lead, treating religion as

a human product open to explanation and analysis like any other form of

behaviour. Hamilton's own position is one of tempered reductionism: whilst

acknowledging that there are aspects of religion that cannot be accounted for or

explained in traditional interpretivist forms, this, he asserts, does not preclude

exploring and describing beliefs and experiences in terms of external concepts

and relationships which may not be held by that individual, but are useful

analytical tools.[16]

It should be noted that Hamilton is discussing religion in the widest

possible sense, and observes the difficulty encountered by all social scientists

in this arena in presenting a cohesive definition for the term that is appropriate

in all cultural contexts. In terms of Christian theology, it is helpful to observe that

the world faiths generally encompass what might usefully be termed religion,

faith and morality, whereas other more culturally bound belief systems may only

incorporate one or two of the three.[17] Taking *ubuntu* as a worldview or

philosophy as previously described, for example, it would seem to focus

primarily on the arena of morality and religion, rather than faith in any specific

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[14] Ibid., pp. 3, 8.
[15] Ibid., p. 4.
[16] Ibid., pp. 9–10.
[17] Ibid., pp. 19–21.

sense, until Tutu developed an *ubuntu* theology which 'refounded' the concept in faith terms. This shift in formulation is explored more fully in Chapter 5, which develops a theological critique of *ubuntu.*

I would wish to counter Hamilton's position on faith. It seems to me that whilst those aspects of belief deemed part of 'religion' or 'morality' fit relatively well within this framework of social theory under an interpretivist paradigm, faith is an altogether more fluid, challenging and transcendent concept that does not easily fit within it. Faith requires a different intellectual structure, one that renders the familiar strange: theology.[18]

Returning to the foundations of methodology, we find Christian theology to be based upon a very different paradigm for our being in the world and our knowledge systems within that world. Christian ontology expands the horizon of what we understand people and the nature of our being to be about. Orthodox Christian belief speaks of a triune creator God and unfolds as a metanarrative of this same God active through salvific history. This metanarrative is understood as initiated by the Father, in fulfilment of his purposes in Jesus Christ and in his people (ultimately beyond this life on earth), through the agency of the Holy Spirit. A different *telos* comes into play: such a radical interpretation of the end point of being and its purpose inevitably transforms the understanding of being in the first place. Christian theology — the study of God and God's action in the world as understood through the tenets of the Christian faith — is therefore a complex and nuanced combination of academic disciplines. There is order, critical rational thought, verifiable exegetical

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[18] This phrase is redolent of John Milbank's work, *The Word Made Strange* (1997). Whilst I wish to acknowledge a reframing of the title, I have not relied upon his work in this context, because of a difference in position on ecclesiology.

precision, and historical critique of texts alongside interpretation, contextual hypothesising and subjective opinion, all subject to revelation.

Revelation as a theological paradigm

Constructionism may be the epistemological foundation for most social sciences within an interpretivist paradigm, but within Christian theology revelation forms the foundation with, if you will, God as the ultimate constructionist: he constructs meaning for those who acknowledge it.

> [A]ll of human history and culture is capable of being understood as the place of, and transformed by, God's intervention. The task of the theologian is to find, articulate and proclaim this *intrusion* of God.[19] (Italics mine)

Whilst the above quote augments the previous statement, the use of the term 'intrusion' is both curious and merits some exploration. It should be noted that such an understanding of revelation as referred to here stands in stark contrast to that of natural theology, a theological position which assumes that aspects of God's nature are reflected in, and can therefore be deduced from, the world around us by reason. Rather than being a place of God's intrusion, the created world is recognised as a locus for understanding God more clearly. Whilst not affiliating themselves completely with a natural theology position, many orthodox Christians now would wish to accept, even embrace, the created world as a locus of revelation, a 'second book' from which to read, interpret, and discover more of God. One of the primary exponents of natural theology,

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[19] Darren C. Marks, 'Method as Creative Fidelity: *Habitus* and the *Sensus Communis*', in *Shaping a Theological Mind: Theological Context and Methodology,* ed. by Darren C. Marks (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2002), p. 138.

Thomas Aquinas, would concur, however, that Jesus Christ is the full and final revelation of God. The person of Jesus, 'the Word made flesh',[20] is our primary source of revelation alongside Scripture, which will be explored shortly, and can hardly be viewed as intrusion into the world but rather for the orthodox Christian church, the fulfilment of all meaning-making within it.

Revelation is therefore God's activity, an offering of knowledge or a way of understanding that does not originate with us as conscious beings, and 'points to a world that surpasses anything we could have created out of our own self-interest'.[21] Revelation is a monumental paradigm shift — 'before we speak, we are addressed', an event that generates a hermeneutic enterprise, according to Hart.[22] Revelation is defined by Swinton and Mowat as ideographic knowledge, that is, it is non-scientific, unique, non-replicable, fluid and changeable, and can be received or revealed in a variety of ways.[23] It is central to a Christian epistemology, and because it is not initiated in conscious thought or experience, it is a phenomenon that is difficult to assess or evaluate empirically, and is often treated with a high degree of scepticism by many social scientists, particularly in the arena of truth claims.[24]

The sources of revelation within a Christian theological framework, aside from the primary revelation of God in Jesus Christ, have typically been expressed as four components which relate and interact with one another, their emphasis varying in degrees according to the preference and theological

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[20] John 1. 14.

[21] Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Sources* (London: SCM Press, 2007), p. 24.

[22] Ibid., p. 28, citing R. L. Hart, *Unfinished Man and the Imagination: Toward an Ontology and a Rhetoric of Revelation* (New York: 1968), p. 99.

[23] John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2011), p. 43.

[24] Ibid., p. 73.

position of that contextual church tradition. They are Scripture, tradition, reason and experience,[25] and are now often referred to as the Methodist, or Wesleyan, Quadrilateral, by virtue of John Wesley's own theological stance, rather than any specific teaching he might have given on the matter. A summative statement from the Methodist church indicates how this has been interpreted by the denomination:

> Wesley believed that the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason.[26]

Graham, Walton and Ward reflect upon these four sources, likening them to the four basic molecules of DNA sequence: depending on the arrangement and combination, very different configurations can emerge, resulting in a variety of styles of valid theological practice which should arise out of a worshipping community.[27] A quadrilateral arrangement may be taken to imply equality in all aspects; however, it is unlikely that Wesley would ever have agreed that all forms of revelation were so. He would argue that Scripture was primary but never isolated from the others, which interdependently enrich and interpret fundamental tenets of Scripture.[28]

The Methodist Quadrilateral and other contemporary equivalents rest upon 1,800 years of developing Christian practice that came before it, and

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[25] I am aware that other denominations would proffer their own version of these elements or others, for example, the Anglican Chicago Lambeth conference of 1886.

[26] W. Stephen Gunter and others, *Wesley and the Quadrilateral: Renewing the Conversation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), p. 9, quoting the Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 1996, pp. 68, 74.

[27] Graham, Walton and Ward, p. 2.

[28] Gunter and others, p. 9.

many Christian historians have written in detail as to the formation of Christian canon. However, in order to understand how Christian doctrine and practice continue to develop, it is helpful to reflect upon how revelation was first received and understood by returning to the foundations of theological work at the beginning of the church's life, 70–400 CE.

The four revelatory elements indicated above seem closely connected in the early church's life. For example, traditions and practices such as baptism were communicated orally at first, handed down from the apostles, as understood to have been received from God through Jesus.[29] Reason and experience were bound up in developing and living out this revelation as an expression of a new way of life, under a paradigm of new faith. The very rawness of these early church developments brings a significant point of clarity to the debate concerning the foundations of understanding within theology and the social sciences. According to Wiles, decisions taken over Scripture and orthodoxy were seen as the outcome of the activity of God with and through fallible humans, whose involvement brings an interpretive element to its outcomes.[30]

Of particular interest to me in my research is that the Church Fathers and Mothers were always working from within the living faith and worshipping body of the church. The New Testament became a written record of that faith over time, partly out of necessity as the church grew, but also to provide an authenticated account that would distinguish believers from other, heterodox sects, for example, Gnostics, and somewhat inevitably became the primary

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[29] Maurice Wiles, *The Making of Christian Doctrine: A Study in the Principles of Early Doctrinal Development* (Cambridge: CUP, 1967), p. 45.
[30] Ibid., p. 12.

source for all subsequent doctrinal formulation.[31] Yet what happened when these same believers met was also of vital importance in formulating doctrinal belief: worship shaped and informed doctrine, reinforcing key ideas such as the nature and status of Jesus, and transmitted these key ideas as the church spread geographically.[32] Fundamental doctrine such as an understanding of God as triune arose from the Fathers' experience in the church as reasoning worshippers, for example, Basil of Caesarea.[33] Most of the Church Fathers were conversant in Greek philosophical methods, a framework the West is now so deeply embedded within that it is difficult for us to envisage the stark contrast it would have made with the Jewish/Middle Eastern worldview that the Hebrew Scriptures were founded upon. It brought both strengths and weaknesses to the process of doctrinal development: it was useful as a tool in exploring the evidence of revelation, such as that seen in trinitarian theology, but susceptible to abuses when inconsistencies emerged, and thus opening the door to dissent and schism.[34]

Wiles argues that doctrine was developed in the early church from three revelatory foundations: the developing canon of Scripture, the tradition and act of worship, and the experience of salvation, all underpinned by reason, in the context of the body of the church.[35] Church life and doctrine have indeed changed and developed over time and according to context, even in the last 50 years, but these elements have remained largely constant, finding different emphases within the range of church traditions. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore other historical examples in more detail, except to reflect

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[31] Ibid., pp. 41–46.
[32] Ibid., pp. 62, 68.
[33] Ibid., pp. 79–81.
[34] Ibid., pp. 115–38.
[35] Ibid., pp. 160–74.

briefly on Wesley's era, where too there was no question but that the locus of theological reflection was the church, hence the assumption that all four elements of the Quadrilateral were in dialogue within the context of the community of God. During the Enlightenment era, Wesley and others reflected upon the place of tradition as part of God's revelation, specifically the model of the early church, and that reason be seen not as an independent source of knowledge to be exalted, but as a tool that enabled processing of revelation through other means and thus to enable faith.[36]

Theological theoretical perspectives and concepts

It is notable that many of the issues that concerned Wesley mirror many of the issues of the early church, so that understanding how the church receives, acts upon, interprets and lives out these aspects of revelation in any particular context is still highly pertinent. How, for example, does the church (I reflect here on the Protestant tradition) read and receive Scripture in a way that enables its members to live 'Christianly' in a particular culture and context? Conversely, how does personal experience, the favoured element of revelation of postmodern times,[37] inform any understanding and interpretation of Scripture? What place does reason have in our postmodern context, and how is this exercised in the church, when a fragmentation of authority and a multiplicity of theologies often means that only pluralism is seen as valid? Similarly, how does the Protestant church perceive tradition and its revelatory value when dogmatic consensus seems to have been lost, and the only alternative appears to be a

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[36] Gunter and others, pp. 64–77.

[37] Craig M. Gay, *The Way of the Modern World: or, Why it's Tempting to Live as if God Doesn't Exist* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 185–91.

retreat out of modern/postmodern society in order to find restoration?[38] Mudge also questions the place of ecclesial authority in our times: does the West's traditional 'faith and order' position, with the 'professional guilds' of theological education, resonate at all in postmodern society, or does the contextual theology of the South take precedence?[39] These complex issues all seem to require a careful consideration of the socio-cultural context in which the church and its members find themselves and express faith within. Cameron, Richter and others reflect that contextual layers must be noted when embarking upon sociological study of the local church: local, national, and global strands, as well as a church's 'positioning' of self in cultural terms, are all demonstrated within a particular context.[40]

In my research regarding relational life in the Western church (specifically the contemporary urban British context), revelation through experience would seem to be the primary element for exploration but the dialogue between experience, Scripture (in order to define and understand biblical concepts), reason (formulating a critical analysis of data and observations), and tradition (in particular, trinitarian thought and its impact on our understanding of personhood and community) will prove crucial in developing a coherent piece of research, firmly grounded in a theological framework. These four elements will be brought into conversation with the experience of those interviewed in my chosen method of fieldwork, that is,

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[38] Reinhard Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 16–18.

[39] Lewis S. Mudge, *Rethinking the Beloved Community: Ecclesiology, Hermeneutics and Social Theory* (Lanham, MA: University Press of America, 2001), p. 136. See also Helen Cameron, Philip Richter, Douglas Davies and Frances Ward (eds), *Studying Local Churches: A Handbook* (London: SCM Press, 2005), pp. 17–18 on the locus of theological reflection in situ as a main tenet of practical theology.

[40] Cameron Philip Richter, Douglas Davies and Frances Ward (eds), *Studying Local Churches: A Handbook* (London: SCM, 2005), pp. 54, 59.

qualitative interviews, to create a fuller, multi-dimensional exploration of communitarian life and *koinonia.*

The theoretical perspective that seems most appropriate within a theological framework and that values all four elements of revelation as given is ecclesiology. The latter is, in one respect, a social theory of the church, its structures, purpose and ontology, but is also an exploration of the agency of the Holy Spirit through and with those adhering to Christian faith, often referred to as the body of Christ. Ecclesiology can be approached hermeneutically to develop a coherent theory for my research within the paradigm of revelation.[41] Mudge proposes moving toward 'a hermeneutic for ecclesiogenesis', reflecting upon Leonardo Boff's pioneering work. In order to explore an interpretive process that needs to be governed by a structured reflection on its meaning, Mudge seeks to develop 'a coherently thought-through understanding of what is going on when believers form a community which interprets the world as the space of God's reign'.[42] This method of reading and interpreting the text of all four elements aims to facilitate the development of a practical wisdom for the church in the form of Christian nurture, an informing of identity as a faithful community, and to communicate faith in dialogue and critical reflection.[43]

In addition, developing a theory of ecclesiology reaffirms the church as the locus of theological reflection, of revelation and of lived experience in dialogue with those engaged in theology as an academic discipline. The task of theology has often been siphoned off and been seen as the work of the professionals alone for several generations now in the Western Protestant church. To speak of shared revelation, tradition and lived experience as the way

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[41] Mudge, p. 7.
[42] Ibid., p. 164.
[43] Graham, Walton and Ward, p. 1.

of formulating theology can often seem a powerless form of theory in the face of grander social theory in the modern intellectual world, just as knowledge that is local, personal or communal is viewed as inferior to the global (and interpretive data is 'soft' data), which the church seems to have accepted for many years.[44] If the dialogical relationship between the body of Christ and the academy is restored and balanced by sharing the theological task, then the church may rediscover that 'thinking about divine things' also restores a right sense of identity, purpose and clarity in its life as the *koinonia* of Christ. This could be viewed as the restoration of Christian *habitus* — the practice of theological reflection through skills and dispositions embedded in the life of faith.[45] Specifically in my work, this kind of theological endeavour is a form of practical theology, that is, interpreting practices of the church and world as an ongoing source of theological understanding in order to critique, shape and inform a life of faith in a particular context.[46]

Within this theoretical perspective, the work of Stanley Hauerwas, Leonardo Boff, Karl Rahner and others working in the field of ecclesiology are pertinent. Hauerwas is one of the foremost theologians in recent times to re-establish the importance of ecclesiology in the Protestant tradition, considering the locus of faith and doctrinal development, as well as the place of the church

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[44] Mudge, pp. 137–38.

[45] Ibid., p. 156. This forms an interpretation of a wider social theory concept, most famously expounded and developed by Pierre Bourdieu: 'Habitus […] refers to the physical embodiment of cultural capital, to the deeply ingrained habits, skills and dispositions that we possess due to our experiences'. 'Habitus: Pierre Bourdieu', *Social Theory Re-wired* (Routledge), <http://theory.routledgesoc.com/category/profile-tags/habitus> [accessed 21 May 2015].

[46] Swinton and Mowat, pp. 9–11, 16.

itself in society.[47] In Catholic theology, Rahner significantly focused upon themes such as local *koinonia* and its interaction with the global communion.[48] To aid the development of a theory of ecclesiology, Christian theological concepts will be used as a tool, exploring key clusters of themes such as personhood, identity, and community, as previously indicated. In Tutu's work, the primary source of writings around a theological concept of *ubuntu* focuses largely upon the notion of *imago Dei* in the creation accounts in Genesis for his exploration of identity and personhood. Similarly, writers such as Alistair McFadyen have explored and developed a Christian concept of personhood from both scriptural and sociological frameworks,[49] whilst trinitarian theologians such as Colin Gunton posit that our very concept of personhood has sprung from our understanding of the nature of the triune God as three Persons in community.[50]

It can be surmised from this background to my methodology that my research process will be thoroughly shaped and informed by the paradigm of revelation, as understood within the orthodox Protestant Christian faith and its practices. It should also be apparent, however, that the crucial interplay of context and experience form an important part in this research, and that the interpretivist paradigm can neither be disengaged from nor ignored from the standpoint of engaging in practical theology. We have already seen that in many ways the fields of social science and theology are not compatible in their

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[47] See Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1989).

[48] See, for example, Karl Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments* (London: Burns & Oates, 1974).

[49] See Alistair I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990).

[50] See Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990).

fundamental understanding, and yet what is theology if not a contextual or an interpretive act? By its very nature, it cannot be ahistorical or abstract.[51] In an attempt to find a potential solution to these issues, Swinton and Mowat propose a model of practical theology that is developed from 'a mutual critical correlation'. This draws upon hermeneutical practices, upon seeking correlative knowledge and upon reasoning which engages in a critical stance between a variety of fields including those traditionally identified as revelatory in Christian praxis, all within research founded upon a theological framework.[52] In this model, 'theological understanding is assumed to be emergent and dialectic rather than simply revealed and applied',[53] which contrasts somewhat with Wiles' exploration of doctrinal development in the early church.

I am inclined to agree with Swinton and Mowat's position of mutual critical correlation, but would wish to concur with a crucial point of clarification that is made: in seeking correlative knowledge, it is not necessarily appropriate that all dialogue partners have equal weighting. Revelation, in my understanding, has priority as knowledge from God over that of human beings, therefore in my work it is not balanced symmetrically and is not regarded as purely interpretive.[54] Theology and the social sciences can therefore be in dialogue in this model, but not, in my view, as equal partners. In a similar way, ecclesiology can be seen as the key theoretical perspective that shapes my research; it can dialogue with the wider framework of social theory, but it takes precedence as a social theory which is formed and acts as part of the activity of God. Lastly, any conceptual tools used will similarly have unequal weighting in

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[51] Swinton and Mowat, p. 24.
[52] Ibid., pp. 74–76.
[53] Ibid., p. 82.
[54] Ibid., pp. 83–88.

any usage helping to formulate theoretical frameworks: whilst concepts of personhood, community and identity from the arena of social sciences will be invaluable in this research, they will always be evaluated critically and comparatively alongside biblical concepts and those from the Christian tradition.

Choice and background to research methods chosen

It has been important to reflect upon this epistemological basis for several reasons. Firstly, it is crucial for me as a researcher using qualitative research methods to consider how I perceive knowledge to be formed, created and communicated, as this has implications for the methods chosen and for the ensuing analysis of fieldwork, particularly in social interactions such as qualitative interviewing. King and Horrocks contend that any epistemological position impacts how we perceive qualitative interviews, and so 'read' them accordingly.[55] They suggest that researchers usually adopt one of three positions in interviews: they either take a *realist/*positivist position, accepting knowledge from the participant as a direct experience that they are communicating, without intervention or influence from the researcher; a *contextual* position, where all knowledge is local and situationally dependent and qualitative interviews can reveal aspects of cultural and historical meanings, with the researcher actively recognising their own contextual basis but not acting as a bias in the process; or a *constructionist* position, where knowledge is being actively constructed in narrative as the researcher and participant talk in a 'guided conversation' that results in a co-produced version

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[55] N. King and C. Horrocks, *Interviews in Qualitative Research* (London: Sage, 2010), pp. 10–13.

of social reality.[56] All three positions are valid, as long as they are acknowledged and consistently applied in how data is treated and analysed.

At this point in my research process, I believe that I am taking a contextual position, but seeking to embed this in a contextual theological position. This leads naturally to the wider question I am effectively posing in my fieldwork, which is in itself epistemological: How do people know what they know about *ubuntu*, and can this knowledge be transferred or learned across differing cultural contexts?[57]

The context for qualitative interviewing: group work[58]

In considering methods for this piece of research, it seemed most appropriate to the study of a subject such as *ubuntu* to reflect its inherently communitarian character, as well as choosing a method which would best deliver the kind of information being sought. I have chosen to use qualitative interviewing, therefore, but in a group context, interviewing two groups of students from The Queen's Foundation, Birmingham, all of whom originated from sub-Saharan Africa. Group interviews offers an enriched conversation incorporating focused dialogue and can explore similarities and contrasts in experiences and opinions, whilst the group size can be small enough to offer respectful attentiveness to all that is shared by each member. This differs somewhat from focus group

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[56] Ibid., pp. 17–23. See also David Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research*, 4th edn (London: Sage, 2013), p. 45.

[57] See also later discourse regarding the 'four theological voices' approach, reflected upon by Cameron and Duce, *Researching Practice*, p. xxx.

[58] In my proposal, I outlined my intention to conduct a small case study, interviewing African women clients and volunteers from a small local charity in Birmingham to explore understanding and practice of *ubuntu* in a Western context. Unfortunately this has not been possible, and I have therefore focused upon gathering data from interviews with African students at The Queen's Foundation, an aspect of my research which I originally foresaw as taking place as focus groups, but have re-designed as group interviews, further outlined in this chapter.

interaction where participants rarely know each other, and relate and share information in a very different way.

Designing and implementing qualitative interviews

Qualitative research interviews can generally be placed in one of three categories: structured, semi-structured or unstructured. The majority of qualitative interviews are semi-structured (the method I have also used), because there is a sense of purpose and progression in the interview with the same questions on particular topics being asked, but with the capacity to allow the participant and the researcher to engage in social interaction and growth of communication. This can generate a more open response in what Weiss terms 'a research partnership'.[59] Seeing the interview as a partnership facilitates a sense of collaboration rather than the interrogation of a 'text' to gain knowledge or information, and is likely to result in higher quality interaction than through more formal methods.

The role of the interviewer/researcher as a craftsperson is the central argument for Kvale and Brinkmann, a craft which requires intellectual and social skills but is essentially something to be learned and practised.[60] Equally, others such as Brewer would argue that the researcher's input as the one 'crafting' the interview can in fact potentially diminish the value of the data produced; a possible solution to addressing this bias is to opt for a completely unstructured

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[59] Robert S. Weiss, *Learning From Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), pp. 12, 65.
[60] Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, 2nd edn (London: Sage, 2009), pp. 17–18.

format (a highly skilled role for the researcher), giving the participant greater freedom to articulate their behaviour and experiences more accurately.[61]

In planning and designing an interview study, there are several approaches that have been advocated. For example, some would recommend a reflexive approach throughout every stage of the research process including the interviews themselves, so that what is essentially a piece of action research takes shape — a responsive, constantly adapting plan.[62] For my own research, however, I have been inclined to take a more structured approach. Once initial research questions have been generated, it is then appropriate to question how these can be answered or investigated; along with a clear reflection upon theories available, thematisation and clearly articulated aims, it is hoped that high quality data can be collected and relatively straightforward analysis can be completed. Taking a structured approach such as this can inhibit or suppress information beneath the researcher's own agenda and ideas, but I have endeavoured to maintain a degree of reflexivity and responsiveness in my interaction with data collected.

I have therefore explored theological concepts around identity and community to formulate questions for the participants about their experience of relational life in their countries of origin and in urban Britain, to reflect on community and kinship networks, both generally and in a church context. These questions had both a thematic and a dynamic dimension in order to investigate what relatedness looked like for them in their unique context, and concluded as appropriate with more complex questions of self-interpretation.[63]

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[61] J. D. Brewer, *Ethnography* (Buckingham: OUP, 2000), p. 66.

[62] Kvale and Brinkmann, pp. 103–07, quoting H. J. Rubin and I. S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (One Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005).

[63] Ibid., pp. 131–35.

My research questions specifically concerned *ubuntu,* but the themes surrounding an *ubuntu* approach were also explored. It was my hope that participants would refer directly to *ubuntu* or its equivalent from their original communities.[64] This kind of topical questioning inevitably carried with it a sense of narrative, of chronological reflection on personal history, and this is reflected in methods of analysis selected (see later notes).

I interviewed two groups comprising two and three students respectively, covering four to five areas or themes during a one to two hour single interview. The student body of the Queen's Foundation is diverse, but for the purposive sample of exploring *ubuntu*, I approached sub-Saharan African students, both women and men of mixed ages and diverse backgrounds in terms of their existing role, marital and residential status, and church responsibilities. All have come to the UK or specifically to Queen's to study theology, to participate in ministry formation or to conduct research.

Issues in implementation

Interviews work on the premise that the researcher and the participant are sense-making together and share an understanding as to the topic being researched, as well as the participant being able to respond to the questions being asked in a way that the researcher anticipates.[65] This does not always turn out to be the case, however, and for all sorts of reasons, participants' responses can be skewed or inaccurate in some way, which I explore below.

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[64] Silverman, p. 206. Silverman notes that it is unwise to ask questions in interviews that directly relate to our own research questions, but interviewing fellow students in a theological college setting presents an unusual context, in that they are peers and therefore highly aware of my reasons for interest in the subject matter.

[65] William Foddy, *Constructing Questions for Interviews and Questionnaires* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), pp. 23–25.

Making assumptions concerning the outcomes of qualitative interviews is widespread. It is easy for a researcher to assume that the participants' responses are a reliable indicator of their behaviour, experiences, attitudes and feelings, as it is to assume that the questions asked have been understood as the researcher intended them to be. Ambiguous questioning, poor preparation and a low level of skill on the part of the interviewer may also contribute to data that is ineffective and unclear.[66] Accurate recall of events can be an issue for some participants, as can taking an extreme position or articulating a clear opinion on an issue. Consequently, a 'middle bias' response is acknowledged as possible in semi-structured interviews, as well as in survey work.[67] Participants may also veer towards generalising rather than giving concrete examples that may seem trivial: in an attempt to give weight to experiences or to alleviate the discomfort of the revealed detail, there is a tendency to theorise, thus selecting what seems important for the researcher to hear, pre-empting any kind of analysis.[68]

In addition to these common issues, a range of specific challenges presented themselves in my own work. Firstly, there was the challenge of cross-cultural misunderstanding and language conventions; interviewing people from different cultures 'may involve different norms of interaction with strangers concerning initiative, directness, modes of questioning'.[69] I also noted from my past experience in an NGO working with African women that it is often difficult to ascertain true feelings about anything related to the clients' new life in the

[66] Brewer, pp. 63–64.
[67] Ibid., pp. 100–01.
[68] Weiss, p. 73. This may prove especially problematic with my chosen interview participants, in that as theology students themselves, they bring skills and experience in analysis and critical reflection from their own studies, as well as an ability to theorise from discussion.
[69] Kvale and Brinkmann, pp. 144–45.

UK, as any form of criticism may be deemed highly impolite, even risky. There may have been, therefore, a certain degree of response from the participants according to what they thought I wanted to hear. This is generally known as the 'interviewer effect', and calls into question the authenticity of responses made. Similarly, it is acknowledged that having anyone else present during the interview will inevitably affect both what can be asked, and what can be reported.[70] I have already expressed that I believed there to be great value in a group interview in this particular context, but there were also disadvantages. For example, the degree of disclosure of personal information, even to trusted others, might have been limited. There may have been a reluctance even in appearing to question 'home' culture, or to appear not to follow *ubuntu* or its equivalent wholeheartedly. Cameron and Duce offer a methodological approach which brings pertinent reflections to this key aspect of exploring *ubuntu* when conducting research in practical theology. They suggest that a dialogue between 'four voices' is helpful in analysis: operant theology, espoused theology, normative theology and the formal theological voice, that is, academia.[71] Little has been written in formal or systematic terms on an *ubuntu* theology, but the conversation between how *ubuntu* is seen in daily operation, what is espoused and what might be construed as theologically normative or orthodox is highly significant, and it is my hope that some of this theological dialogue emerges through analysis of the interviews.

There are no easy solutions to these issues, but some miscommunication or skewed responses may have been lessened, I hope, with good planning and clear guidelines in the introductory meetings; clarification of

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[70] Weiss, p. 144.
[71] Cameron and Duce, pp. xxx–xxxi.

meaning and intentions (that I sought to learn from their experience, and that there were no 'right answers') in the interview process; an open and accessible interviewing technique which gave the participants opportunity to reflect, check meanings of words and converse with me as a trustworthy recipient of their information, and the inclusion of an open-ended question which gave the participants the chance to add what they felt had been missed from the interview, if necessary.

Analysis choices

An array of choices are available in social science research when it comes to interview data analysis, ranging along a quantitative/qualitative spectrum, according to their form. For example, content analysis (coding words and calculating the number of times they appear) would be deemed as a highly quantitative approach, whilst narrative analysis (exploring aspects or overviews of life stories and making links between events, social climates and historical-cultural roles) would be seen as highly interpretive, and therefore at the qualitative end of the spectrum.[72] My main focus remains upon a hermeneutic approach to the results of the interview process, although it may be enhanced by statistical data related to the study.[73]

I have digitally recorded the interviews, and worked from brief notes made during the interviews and a summary form after each one, and then transcribed the interviews. Grbich notes that the transcription process is a time-consuming one, but crucial in the attempt to deeply engage with what has been said, focusing upon gaining a deeper understanding of meanings, values and

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[72] Carol Grbich, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Introduction*, 2nd edn (London: Sage, 2013), pp. 221, 245.
[73] Ibid., p. 25.

shared experience rather than critiquing or summarising a participant's words.[74]

Kvale and Brinkmann would concur, but highlight that the recorded interview

remains the primary source of data for analysis purposes, identifying

transcription simply as a tool to aid in analysis. They argue that much is lost

when verbal expression is 'translated' into a written form, for example, a

conversation's temporal pace, pauses, tone of voice, body language. Decisions

concerning the level of detail of transcription can affect this considerably, but

the transcription remains, they conclude, a decontextualised rendering of a live

conversation.[75] My analysis framework has been a thematic analysis using a

primarily deductive coding mechanism as a tool, driven by concepts that have

already been considered and conceived as being of importance to the subject

of the interviews.[76] Coding, according to Coffey and Atkinson, reflects our

analytic ideas but is not the analysis itself: it sets the stage for interpreting and

drawing conclusions from data collected. In the case of thematic analysis,

coding expands the data into the use of conceptual frameworks and links the

two, although it can also be used to simplify large amounts of data by use of

segmenting or categorisation.[77] I have sought to code and analyse the

transcripts and related notes according to key categories in my research:

concepts of identity, community, relatedness, accountability, belonging and

isolation. Using these themes or categories in a consistent way through my

analysis has allowed me to relate my fieldwork findings in a coherent, valid and

appropriate way without violating the original text of the interviews. The process

has also in part been inductive, a spiralling reflexive experience, where coding

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[74] Ibid., p. 21.
[75] Kvale and Brinkmann, pp. 177–83.
[76] Ibid., p. 202.
[77] A. Coffey and P. Atkinson, *Making Sense of Qualitative Data* (London: Sage, 1996), pp. 27–31.

categories were revisited as data was re-read and redefined as analysis took place, and was impacted by subsequent changes in interpretation arising from interaction with the data.[78]

In addition, I was aware of the potential value of using narrative analysis, a more socio-cultural approach in analysing transcripts of interviews. There seemed a likely incidence of narrative element in the interviews as participants reflected upon their experience of relatedness in the UK and in their original communities. This also had historical and diachronic elements to it, linking the present and the past as they made sense of their experiences.[79]

Forming generalisations

There are many aspects of interpretation of results to consider for the qualitative researcher, and as already indicated, my interpretation of data collected has been largely influenced by thematic analysis, in dialogue with my literature review. This involved adopting a hermeneutic approach, where I attempt to move between parts of the 'text' and back to the whole in a spiral type movement, seeking meaning that was coherent, critically argued, and reliable in research terms, that is, free from bias, consistent with research aims and replicable.[80]

More contentious in the field of qualitative interviewing is the arena of drawing generalisations. Kvale and Brinkmann reflect upon this issue, arguing that even if findings meet the above criteria, it still remains to be asked whether the findings are local/specific in nature, or transferrable to a wider range of subjects or situations. They offer the suggestion that generalisations are not

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[78] Weiss, pp. 155–56. See also Cameron and Duce, pp. 104–05.
[79] Grbich, p. 221.
[80] Kvale and Brinkmann, pp. 210, 242–45.

always valid or necessary to make research worthwhile, but that it is possible to develop general theories based upon specific interviews such as my own fieldwork.[81] Where 'thick', rich data has been generated it is unlikely to also have breadth, but rather than concrete generalisations emerging, such small interview groups may permit theoretical inference.[82] The diversity of results should be fully recognised, reported and deductions formed, as variance informs and shapes thinking as much as conformity in my expectations and interpretation.[83]

Most pertinent to my own research is perhaps the view held by Swinton and Mowat as they identify issues raised in using qualitative methods in a theological discipline. They suggest that instead of seeking to make generalisations, it is more helpful to look for any sense of identification in situations, so that experiences that are not identical (statistically) but hold enough similarities (conceptually) create a 'transformative resonance'.[84] I believe this has been the case with findings from my interviews, with regard to the potential value of adopting or adapting an *ubuntu* approach within a Western contemporary church context.

Ethics by design

Ethical practice within all forms of qualitative research is expected to be embedded in the whole research process: an ethical topic choice, data collection method and dissemination of resulting information or reporting. There

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[81] Ibid., pp. 260–63.
[82] Brewer, p. 77.
[83] Grbich, p. 11.
[84] Swinton and Mowat, pp. 47–48.

are basic principles which I shall now reflect upon, as well as focusing upon some issues specific to my own research.

Farrimond outlines the foundational ethical principles as privacy, anonymity and confidentiality. These indicate the basic ethical tenets of: respect for persons (their autonomy and protection of the vulnerable), justice (fair treatment of all), beneficence (doing good, usually by adding to knowledge), non-maleficence (do no harm), and fidelity (trustworthiness).[85] In practice, these are demonstrated by three primary conventions: gaining informed written consent, anonymising data and an assurance of confidentiality. Farrimond suggests that oral consent, recorded as part of the interview, may be acceptable in some cases, and gaining consent should be considered as a process rather than as a one-off event.[86]

Removing identifying data in order to anonymise interviews is challenging in that it risks a loss of overall meaning, but it is important to do so in order to prevent harm from identification, and to conform with the confidentiality requirements of data protection.[87] The particular challenge in this piece of research has been that individuals who form part of a web of relationship were still highly recognisable to each other within the confines of the analysis, and in order to offer copies of the completed research to participants with impunity, I have carefully considered the use of keys and pseudonyms in my analysis.[88]

In offering confidentiality to participants, Farrimond notes that researchers are bound only by moral obligation rather than a legal one to

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[85] Hannah Farrimond, *Doing Ethical Research* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 25.
[86] Ibid., p. 112.
[87] Ibid., pp. 128–29.
[88] Ibid., pp. 128–29.

disclose any material referring to potential harm.[89] In my own research, it was possible that part of the narratives included entering the UK after trauma and abusive situations had been experienced. This did not arise in the interviews, but if it had been the case, I would have conferred with my superiors and checked relevant guidelines, and ensured that I clarified what I meant by confidentiality and its exceptions at the time of interview.

My primary ethical concerns regarding my fieldwork were that of beneficence and non-maleficence. It is unlikely, Farrimond contends, that participating in qualitative research will cause harm to someone, and that a participant becoming tearful or upset by speaking about things, for example, does not transgress ethical boundaries.[90] Weiss agrees that a skilful interviewer would take a sensitive approach if someone became distressed, offering to stop recording or taking a break.[91] 'Doing no harm' indicates avoidance of a truly detrimental occurrence to a participant, and whilst it may be emotionally wearing to speak of painful past experiences, I anticipated that all of the participants were in a stable enough position either to deal with this or to articulate their need to close the conversation if needed.[92]

Beneficence was also an important consideration: what good did the participants receive in exchange for their time and involvement? For these students, supporting a fellow student in their work was considered 'good' to do, as was being able to contribute to wider discussion and thought in the formation of the church. In addition to this, I clarified that there was no reciprocation or

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[89] Ibid., pp. 133–34.
[90] Ibid., pp. 96–98.
[91] Weiss, pp. 129–31.
[92] It may have been appropriate that I formed some kind of 'risk assessment' for the interviews in order to minimise the likelihood of harm occurring. See Farrimond, pp. 141–45.

other specific individual or group beneficence, other than the empowerment of telling one's story.[93]

My role as researcher

Many of the important aspects of my role as researcher conducting fieldwork have already been commented upon, for example trust, building a positive relationship and working collaboratively in interviews, the complex nature of impacting responses by participants, and reflexivity in the research process. Consequently, it has proved imperative that I critically reflected upon my role in terms of power, and I perceived that a helpful tool in enabling me to do so was feminist theory. Fundamental principles of feminism such as empowerment, liberation, respect for each person and collaborative working clearly have relevance in addressing critically how qualitative interviews might be conducted, and have shaped research towards this end in postmodern times.[94] My challenge was this: how to bring these participants' stories into the academic arena without creating a sense of disempowerment?[95] In all interviews, there will be an asymmetry of power because the interviewer is initiating, guiding and controlling what occurs,[96] but in addition to this, I was aware of further layers of hierarchy or power inequalities, for example, race and social status, that I knew must be minimised if authentic collaborative work was to take place. Brewer suggests that this can be achieved by being as reflexive as possible in interviews, and to create a positive prejudice in order to empower women and to

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[93] Farrimond, p. 149.

[94] Nicola Slee, Fran Porter and Anne Phillips (eds), *The Faith Lives of Women and Girls* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), p. 1. See also Brewer, *Ethnography,* pp. 67–69.

[95] Slee, Porter and Phillips, p. 25.

[96] Kvale and Brinkmann, p. 33.

give them a greater voice.[97] It is apparent that in the most interpretive forms of research such as thematic and narrative analysis of interviews, the researcher cannot be an objective observer, a 'miner' digging for knowledge that lies as an object outside herself.[98] I am convinced that qualitative interviews are a collaborative work, but whilst acknowledging the constructionist approach, that is, that social reality is constructed as the interview unfolds, I have adhered to my preference of adopting a contextual approach. I have therefore endeavoured to recognise my own context that I brought to the interview collaboration, and attempted not to unduly bias the situationally dependent revelation of meaning, experience and values bound in social, historical and cultural form. This implies that there is an additional skill of the interviewer to those already listed, which might be recognised as the ability to put self out of the way in order to focus upon the other, whilst fully engaging self in the listening process.[99] This, perhaps, was the reflexivity I needed that could overcome the power inequalities of the interview relationship, in order to achieve the desired outcomes.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to outline the ontological and epistemological basis of both sociology and practical theology in order to find, in their intersection, a form of mutual critical correlation which offers an appropriate locus for my research on an applied *ubuntu* theology and its possible

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[97] Brewer, p. 69. Weiss appears to reject the feminist argument, commenting that in regard to personal attributes, the interviewer is guaranteed to be seen as an insider in some respects, and an outsider in others. He has little experience of status, race, gender or age impacting upon research results. See Weiss, pp. 137–41.

[98] Kvale and Brinkmann, pp. 47–49.

[99] Slee, Porter and Phillips, p. 19.

applications in a Western contemporary church context. By exploring *ubuntu* through the theoretical perspective of ecclesiology, shaped by both the interpretivist paradigm and that of revelation, I have been able to select with confidence the use of thematic analysis as my primary methodology, and applied it through qualitative interviewing.

It can be surmised from this exploration of epistemology, theoretical perspectives and concepts, methodology and methods employed in my research that the adoption of qualitative interviewing was a challenging, useful and highly appropriate tool in exploring themes of relatedness and community in a UK context from a very specific viewpoint. In my role as researcher, I have found the collaborative journey of qualitative interviewing to be equally challenging but satisfying, relying upon elements of reflexivity and engagement in creative ways.

In the next chapter, it is my intention to reflect on the fieldwork that took place through two group interviews using thematic analysis, and to engage both the literature review on *ubuntu* and my theological critique of *ubuntu* theology in dialogue with key sociological and theological concepts. Through this, I will attempt to derive a theologically applied concept of *ubuntu* that can be used to conclude whether such a concept has relevance and/or benefit to relational life in a Western contemporary church context.

Chapter 4

Analysis of Group Interviews

Introduction

In the last chapter, I sought to explore and clarify the epistemological and ontological foundations for my qualitative research. I also reflected upon how group interviews may be formulated to provide, as far as possible, an authentic collaborative text of experience and interpretation which could be brought into dialogue with my previous research concerning *ubuntu* and *ubuntu* theology. This dialogue would also include theological concepts of identity, personhood and community. My intention is first to respond reflexively with the data gathered from the group interviews in order to gain a deeper understanding of meanings, values and shared experience of relational life of the participants (significantly so, I believe, in a group context), as opposed to a particular summary or critique of their words,[1] and by doing so, to allow this dialogue to illuminate any subsequent formulation of an applied *ubuntu* theology in a Western contemporary church context.

The group interviews, separated by a nine month period, took place with two and then three Queen's Foundation students respectively, all of whom originated from Eastern and Southern Africa but had resided in the UK for at least six months.[2] The framework of the interview comprised three elements. It primarily concerned the participants' understanding and experience of *ubuntu*

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[1] Carol Grbich, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Introduction*, 2nd edn (London: Sage, 2013) p. 21.

[2] Two pairs of students originated from the same two countries, but in each case, came from different tribes and took part in different group interviews. One student had been resident in UK for over 20 years, whilst the others had recently come for the purpose of studying.

in their country of origin, but also their experience of relational/social life in the UK generally and/or specifically within a church, and their reflections on whether *ubuntu* might realistically be practised and experienced in a UK contemporary church context (see Appendix A for question framework). Transcripts were then made of each interview, referring to each student by a pseudonym (see Appendix B and C for copies of full transcripts). I have selected pseudonyms for each participant in order to anonymise the interviews and in analysis, although inevitably the individual may still be recognisable to the other participants who were present, and by virtue of shared experience across both groups. The first interview was conducted with 'Catherine' and 'William', and the second with 'Mary', 'Toby' and 'Helen'.[3] It should be noted that the participants, most of whom had only been in the UK for a relatively brief time, may have experienced isolation and loneliness during their stay but this likely would have changed over time, thus impacting their reflections upon this particular theme at this particular time in their study.

Four inter-related themes or thematic groups emerged across both group interviews: identity and understanding of self in relationship with 'other'; belonging; isolation or exclusion and loneliness; and responsibility and accountability. I soon realised that there was a close relationship and merging of dialogue within the four themes. In discussing a sense of belonging in community, for example, evidence of isolation or exclusion comes into play, but I have endeavoured to group evidence around the themes that have emerged. Of the four themes, I had previously identified understanding of self in community and belonging as key, which inevitably shaped both how I

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[3] These 'European' names have been deliberately selected to further obscure the identity of the participants, in preference to selecting more pertinent names from their country of origin.

conducted the interviews and how I have analysed them, but the latter two themes of isolation/exclusion and responsibility/accountability have emerged more clearly from the interviews themselves, arising from a reflexive approach. The first theme concerning self, identity and relatedness draws upon many aspects of the interviews, and is therefore the most comprehensive part of the data analysis.

I will conclude the chapter by summarising what I believe to be the fundamental question arising from my fieldwork, namely, 'What is the epistemological basis of *ubuntu,* and can this knowledge be transferred or learned across different cultural contexts?' In other words, is there a 'transformative resonance' within *ubuntu* that cannot be generalised statistically across such differing worldviews and cultures, but has sufficient aspects of similarity that can be identified and applied to relational life in a Western contemporary church context such as urban Britain?[4]

Theme I: Self is always in relation to an 'other'

It was very apparent from the outset of the interviews that all five participants understood, had experienced and operated out of the foundations of communitarian life as expressed in the concept *ubuntu*, although offering a specific definition proved more challenging. In considering how to define it, all the participants referred variously to *ubuntu* (or its equivalent) by implication as a human quality, a way of life or kind of philosophy shared and understood by the wider social group. Words expressing feelings were used predominantly to explore the relation to the 'other' who stands at the core of life — not self in any

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[4] John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2011), pp. 47–48.

individual sense. The very essence of how each of the participants understood themselves and their societies was embedded in, and threaded through with, relatedness. For example, as 'Catherine' expressed, it, 'You are a person because I am a person too'.[5] 'Mary' described *ubuntu* (its equivalent in her country of origin) as 'a result of, or a manifestation of the community, where you come from. [...] So you were made who you are by the people who surround you'.[6] There was high value encapsulated in relatedness, belonging and community, which appeared to be intrinsically part of the participants' sense of identity, an orientation towards relationship and the 'other' upon which personhood itself depended.[7] An identification with the 'other' constructed part of their own identity. 'Catherine' put it this way: 'Whatever you feel, I also feel. If you are in pain, I am also in pain, if you are in joy, I am also in joy; I am concerned about you and you are concerned about me'.[8] It is a prevalent approach to life amongst sub-Saharan Africans to operate out of this communitarian understanding,[9] but even if removed from that context, the 'spirit of *ubuntu*' apparently remains (see later discussion).

The formulation of the term *ubuntu* and its meaning are closely linked, the root being *–ntu* or 'being'. Indeed, this was 'Toby's' understanding of the word, quoting from a book that he had brought to the interview in order to help with such definition.[10] None of the participants during the interviews referred to

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[5] Tr. I. 101–02.

[6] Tr. II. 26–28.

[7] See also Thaddeus Metz and Joseph B. R. Gaie, 'The African Ethic of Ubuntu/Botho: Implications for Research on Morality', *Journal of Moral Education,* 39 (2010), 273–90 (pp. 274–75).

[8] Tr. I. 102–04.

[9] Nisbert Taisekwa Taringa, 'Possibilities and Limitations for Inter-cultural Dialogue from the Perspective of Ubuntu Philosophy', *Swedish Missiological Themes,* 95 (2007), 185–96 (p. 190), quoting Paris (1995), p. 101.

[10] Khofi Authur Phiri, *African Traditional Marriage: A Christian Theological Appraisal* (Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2011), p. 20.

God as the Supreme Being or Creator, nor related *ntu* with a specifically spiritual meaning,[11] contrasting with Tutu's reflections upon the spiritual foundations of traditional society and his application of *imago Dei*.[12] 'Helen' and 'William' did agree that *muntu* or *umuntu,* the word for 'person' created from the suffix –*ntu*, characterised different kinds of being derived from this basic reality. All five participants equated *ubuntu* (or another equivalent word, i.e., *utu* and *hunhu*) with the word 'person', which may have been formed differently, but in meaning were inseparable from this understanding of a person always existing in the context of other people. This clarified the confusion I initially felt when reviewing literature concerning the derivation of the term *ubuntu,* where phrases concerning the person and the relation with others seemed to be used interchangeably. In hearing the participants so clearly equating 'person' with 'relation' themselves, I have come to understand that the two concepts are usually inseparable in an African worldview. This was confirmed when both 'Helen' and 'William' quoted adages from their own tribes, reflecting the most common framing of *ubuntu* within proverbial sayings: 'A person is a person because of other persons'.[13]

The term 'person', therefore, seemed to be full of meaning in terms of relatedness and interdependence in sub-Saharan Africa, and contains inherent value in a way that is often lacking in a Western context. This merits further comment, resonating as it does with a trinitarian theological understanding of

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[11] This may be because the Christian denominations the participants belong to have been historically established in the West and they would separate traditional culture and belief from the Gospel. The practice of *ubuntu* in the church is addressed later in this chapter.

[12] Michael Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1997), pp. 54–59, 62–64.

[13] '*Muntu nyantu*' (Tr. II. 103–05) and '*muntu numuntu chifukwa chamanyake*' (Tr. I. 78–79), respectively.

personhood.[14] Both 'Toby' and 'Helen' reflected on the possible loss of 'personhood'; a person becomes like an animal if certain expectations of behaviour are not met, if proper relatedness is broken in some way. A person who lacks *ntu* is no longer a person, because of their inappropriate behaviour, for example, killing another person. 'Mary' and 'William' explained that there was vocabulary in their respective languages for those considered 'not a person', equating to those who do not practise or live by the values of *ubuntu.*[15] 'Catherine' noted that there was even a popular saying in her language regarding a person without sense of the primacy of relational being: '*gunuwatu na kiatu*', meaning they are as unaware or as senseless as their shoes.[16] Again, a close correspondence between personhood, values and praxis were highlighted by these comments,[17] and correlates closely to writings concerning *ubuntu* by African philosophers and theologians.[18]

However, I am uncertain whether the participants interviewed realised they were using the terms 'human being' and 'person' somewhat interchangeably, which may have warranted questioning in more detail. Whilst I saw parallels between my own research into the essentially relational nature of personhood from within a theological framework, I did not perceive that the participants were formulating such stark boundaries, or distinguishing meaning through particular vocabulary. When 'Mary' and 'William' therefore used the

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[14] See, for example, John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (New York: Seminary Press, 1985), p. 105.

[15] 'Mary' referred to those not living by *ubuntu* values as *vanu* or *hasimunu* (Tr. II. 231–50). 'William' referred to those not living by *ubuntu* values as 'a bad person' or *ichimuntu* (Tr. I. 351–63).

[16] Tr. I. 406–09, 424–28.

[17] I am using the term *praxis* in this context without politicised meaning, but rather to reflect the emphasis on practice enriched and undergirded by custom and tradition.

[18] See, for example, Mluleki Mnyaka, 'The African Concept of Ubuntu/Botho and its Socio-moral Significance', *Black Theology*, 3 (2005), 215–37 (pp. 223–25).

term 'person' in reverse, framing *ubuntu* as meaning 'humanity' — that we can

be a person, but if we lack *ubuntu* we are no longer human [beings], I do not

believe that this contradicted the fundamental aim of all the participants in

defining this spirit of relatedness and focus upon the 'other' that lies at the heart

of sub-Saharan social structures. The consensus between the participants'

responses was notable, particularly when discussing such a nebulous term as

ubuntu. In these initial discussions, none of the participants referred to an

individual except in negative terms to highlight, for example, who would not be

considered a person.

The non-practice or loss of *ubuntu* was a theme that recurred throughout

both interviews, both as an aid in defining what *ubuntu* is, and in specific

responses to questions addressing issues of isolation, disparity and relevance

in their country of origin and in the UK. 'William' and 'Toby' clearly distinguished

between the conceptual form of *ubuntu* and its praxis when attempting to define

it, although both concept and praxis are obviously important in formulating an

overall understanding of the term, and cannot be easily separated. As Gathogo

suggests, *ubuntu* does appear to be both a descriptive and a prescriptive

term.[19] From 'Catherine's' examples of church life, it seems that there is often a

discrepancy or at least a contrast between ideology and lived experience. This

discrepancy is most marked, she asserted, between the urban and rural context

where rural life tends to retain more traditional patterns of life.[20] 'William'

commented on urbanisation several times, noting firstly the historical roots of

'loss of *ubuntu*' through colonialism, before reflecting upon the negative impact

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[19] Julius Mutugi Gathogo, 'African Philosophy as Expressed in the Concepts of
Hospitality and Ubuntu', *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa,* 130 (2008),
39–53 (p. 46).
[20] Tr. I. 206–10.

of business/busyness and raised economic status upon the respecting of traditional practice of communitarian life. This may lead to the subsequent reduction of family to mean nuclear family alone in everyday life.[21]

The frustration and resignation at *ubuntu* as an ideal being somehow eroded by modernity and urbanisation was touched upon repeatedly by all participants, and will be explored more fully when considering the theme of accountability and responsibility. 'Toby' particularly emphasised the difference between what is still inherently understood of the ideals of communitarian life, and what is actually happening 'on the ground' as kinship circles change and responsibilities shift.[22] Intriguingly, as part of her own assessment of the impact of modernisation, 'Helen' observed that 'greater support from the larger community is now going down, such that now […] we do things in smaller communities'.[23] It seems that, despite an erosion of the stability and structure of traditional societies through urbanisation, the fundamental concept of relatedness that lies at the heart of personhood is still important. *Ubuntu* is apparent where those committed to its practice still live, and will be in evidence but in smaller groups, for example, in nuclear families and with close neighbours, who are still regarded as 'your community'. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to investigate more fully the psychological implications of this observation, but it should be noted that there is a real question as to whether globalisation and urbanisation have directly impacted the sense of self in this context, whether changing values are truly becoming embedded, or indeed, simply as a result of changing values, there is just no time to practise *ubuntu* in modern, urban life. The importance of 'time' in practising *ubuntu* was significant

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[21] Tr. I. 177–91.
[22] Tr. II. 80–91.
[23] Tr. II. 117–18.

when participants considered its potential transferrence to the UK context, and will be reviewed later.

The foundation of communitarian life or *ubuntu* is inevitably reflected in their original church contexts according to the participants because, as both 'William' and 'Toby' expressed, the church has been formed collectively from diverse groups, but it is also a part of the community and therefore mirrors its wider context in terms of traditional values.[24] 'Mary' reflected that the life of the church 'enhances what we already do'.[25] 'Helen' similarly commented that the church is 'an extension of wider society',[26] although in stark contrast, she also observed that occasionally individuals would withdraw from this pervasive sense of communitarian life if they embraced their new faith in an extreme way — this seemed an uncomfortable concept to the other participants present.[27] Another equally distasteful issue to the participants, but one that they all recognised as occurring frequently in both church and wider society, was that of hierarchy within relatedness. Concepts of status, class and individual pride — 'putting myself above everybody else' — had negative consequences both in terms of a sense of isolation and exclusion, either chosen or imposed by others, and its impact on that community and the maintenance of *ubuntu*.[28] Status and how it may isolate individuals by choice or imposition through lack of accountability or a sense of belonging will be explored later.

The idea, therefore, that the Western contemporary church might wish to be counter-cultural with regard to relational life in its context would appear to contrast sharply with the participants' experience in their country of origin. Their

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[24] Tr. I. 159–66 and Tr. II. 163–71, respectively.

[25] Tr. II. 180.

[26] Tr. II. 185, 196–98.

[27] Tr. II. 186–93.

[28] For example, 'Mary', Tr. II. 254–57.

experience of relationship in the UK church specifically or society in general had clearly left the participants somewhat bewildered, often hurt or thankful in equal measure, but always aware that a different, more individualistic worldview was in play, whether this was articulated or not. A fascinating reversal, or qualification, took place in this section of the first group interview. 'Catherine' began by speaking very positively of her experience of *ubuntu* in churches here, but as she processed the realities of that and shared examples, it appeared to become for her a more complex picture where a different worldview and attitude toward relational life (here in the West) had obviously bemused her. For example, formality and restraint in relationship, and inconsistency of relating began to strike her as she reflected on her experiences: 'what you expect from them is not what you have seen'.[29] 'William' also had experienced a sense of behaving 'wrongly' in a church context, speaking freely with everyone, which he perceived to be the African way, when what was expected of him was the Western way, to communicate or stick with one person, as he saw it.[30]

One of the characteristics of the first interview was that of appreciation. 'Catherine' and 'William' seemed pleased that they were so warmly welcomed in UK churches, and that many people had taken an interest in them and their country of origin. My interpretation of such interest is that, in general, people in the UK are curious and vaguely welcoming towards those who are 'other', as long as they are not a threat to their livelihoods or place (it may be that as an island nation we have learned to adopt this stance over many years). This interest might develop into genuine relationship, but it is my observation that for many of us, this attraction to the 'stranger' combines the reserve of the islander

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[29] Tr. I. 545–6.
[30] Tr. I. 692–711.

with a utilitarian attitude to relationship, in order to gain something that we want from the 'other', for example, 'now we have a place where we can go on holiday' (a UK church member's comment to 'Catherine' as she prepared to return home).[31]

'Helen', 'Mary' and 'Toby', participants in the second interview, were also grateful for kindness shown to them, particularly at Queen's, but were more specific in their reading of how they had experienced relational life here. They particularly identified that connectedness or relationship could be formed, but often had to be initiated: it could not be assumed from any common understanding of how people 'rightly' relate and care for one another, because it was as if they were reading a different 'text'.[32] 'Toby' expressed it in this way:

> [M]any people have opened their homes, they have supported us […] and so in their own way, I think they have been supporting, […] rendering to us the expense of their time. […] So you cannot say it [*ubuntu*] is not happening here, it is happening in its own way, in its own style.[33]

'William' also had some understanding of this. He accepted that many aspects of *ubuntu* are universal human qualities, for example, hospitality, generosity, kindness, and could therefore be found here, but that he and 'Catherine' would inevitably read them and act upon them as *ubuntu* principles, because of their own embedded worldview, and that people in the UK were 'not really acting *ubuntu*'.[34] 'William' went on to explain that for him, the key distinction was that

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[31] Tr. I. 564–67.
[32] 'Mary', Tr. II. 598–607.
[33] Tr. II. 582–92.
[34] Tr. I. 627.

'*ubuntu* is about […] the denial of individualistic kind of life. [...] It's important to give space to an individual, so that he or she determines her own way of doing things, which is also good, but at the same time, it is also important because, if it's *ubuntu* a person must be given that freedom to act in his or her own capacity. […] But there are certain things that infringes [impinges] on other peoples, because you are doing it as an individual, you forget about the community. And those are things that now […] divide the community as part of the *ubuntu*.[35]

In other words, individual freedom to act does not seem to be a bad thing in 'William's' observation, but means that the community inevitably becomes displaced as primary, and can cause division or a fracturing of relational life as a result. As an example of this in academia, 'William' expressed discomfort that any credit for success could be placed on an individual alone rather than seeing it as a team achievement, and that such claims of individual success in African political leadership had cost wider society dearly.[36]

'Catherine' concluded that, whilst you can find people all over the world who do not care about others, that there was a pervasive individualistic element to life here that she was aware of: '[T]here is a sense of individualistic life where everybody would want to be in their own corner […] so much'.[37] 'Mary' put it more forcefully, saying, 'I can't understate the impact of the individualistic approach that people have to each other. They [people who helped her on arrival in the UK when she was homeless] were good to me, but not the same to

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[35] Tr. I. 637–38, 657–60, 662–64.
[36] Tr. I. 668–79, 986–1000.
[37] Tr. I. 572–73, 611–13.

each other'.[38] 'William' articulated the same opinion in a more reflective way, observing that people 'speak more about themselves [here]',[39] and that there is great emphasis upon individual rights, whereas in Africa 'most of the personal rights are trampled upon because it's for the good of the community'.[40] In their original communities, participants generally agreed that such a focus upon self would be frowned upon, and that person seen in a negative light as being selfish: '[T]his one is a "me, myself and I" — everything is about yourself — which is what we say, that is not good, "Me, myself and I", everything is just about you'.[41]

Theme 2: Belonging/not belonging is fundamental to life with others

Subsequently, having articulated that their sense of identity and personhood is established and grows out of relationship with others, it was not surprising to find that the participants referred throughout the interviews to concepts of belonging, community and shared experience. 'William' summarised it in this way, demonstrating belonging to be at the heart of African life when reflecting upon his church context: '[W]hatever we do, we do as collectively, I would say [...] because *ubuntu* is about community. Everything that you do is about [...] the group'.[42] This sense of belonging seemed applicable in biblical passages describing the life of the early church, such as Acts 2, and for 'William' was highly evocative of *ubuntu*, sharing what they had and the promotion of a communitarian life.[43] Eating together, a communal habit exercised around the

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[38] Tr. II. 555–56.
[39] Tr. I. 645.
[40] Tr. I. 655–56.
[41] 'Catherine', Tr. I. 835–36.
[42] Tr. I. 152–55.
[43] Tr. I. 273–91, 982.

world but diminishing in the West,[44] was mentioned by both 'Mary' and 'William' as a particular reinforcement of shared life.[45]

It follows that experiences of not belonging, of feeling excluded or being left out, were highly emotive topics, and were strongly expressed accordingly. For example, when discussing the church in her country of origin, 'Catherine' used the term 'outsider' several times throughout the interview to describe and contrast her own experience of who is accepted and belongs, and who is or does not.[46] This seemed to indicate the high value and expectations of others placed upon *ubuntu* or communitarianism, and the high level of hurt and offence caused when it is perceived to be, or is, withheld or forgotten. It is something that cuts deeply into the frame of reference of being, as I have alluded to in Theme 1 and is, literally, very personal. 'Catherine' went on to say,

> '[C]os they think it is important to be there for one another, such that it is you and it is me, and when you're not there for me, why should I care? So sometimes it will affect you […] because people really value that kind of life, where we care for one another. […] It's very important to be there for one another.[47]

A sense of belonging seemed to be highly valued and sought after, especially when the context would appear to work against the practice of *ubuntu.* 'Helen' identified that people would form and associate in groups by language and culture, thus creating for her the sense of being a stranger in a UK church

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[44] See, for example, Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 3.

[45] Tr. II. 428–32 and Tr. I. 283–87, respectively.

[46] Tr. I. 213–26, 936–51.

[47] Tr. I. 248–54.

context where she would be surrounded by fellow Africans and therefore may have given the impression of belonging, but 'I will not fit in'.[48] 'Mary' responded to this comment, by asserting that in her own culture 'the stranger is our best friend. […] We don't want them to be alone',[49] thus appearing to directly contradict 'Helen's' assertion. This reinforced the high value placed upon the practice of *ubuntu*, to the point that the ideal must be esteemed and be seen to be maintained, despite contradictory evidence.

Experience of 'not belonging' can be a painful one for anyone but especially for those who place such a high premium upon being part of a community, when relatedness is seen as formational to their sense of identity and being. The participants gave several examples of situations in the UK where an invitation had been issued for an event, such as a baptism, celebration or funeral, which in their home culture would have included everyone. 'Not fitting', 'being outsiders', 'being in the wrong place', 'not part of this family' were some of the phrases which 'Catherine' used to express two of her experiences, both within a UK church context.[50] It was striking to hear 'Toby' state, therefore, the assumption of a 'spirit of *ubuntu*' at work in them as disparate people from across sub-Saharan Africa, something deeply embedded in them as persons that they would exercise regardless of context:

> For us who have come, we are, because of *that* thing which is in *us,* even when
> we are here, we are still maintaining *that*, it is helping us to be *one* […] and to

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[48] Tr. II. 218–19.
[49] Tr. II. 225–28.
[50] Tr. I. 749–60, 928–50.

participate in the affairs of my sister without any problem.[51] (Italics showing emphasis given)

'Mary', citing the example of being in need and whom she would turn to in expectation of help, also referred to this reliance upon one another and unspoken understanding.[52] Shared values and shared experience seem to create a sense of community that allows communitarian-focused people to survive in an individualistic society.

'Mary' also referred to 'not belonging' in the UK several times when defining *ubuntu*, despite having lived in the UK for many years. However, she also felt it unlikely that she would belong in her original culture now either.[53] She was able to refer to her fellowship with others from her country of origin as an 'anchoring of the community, of belonging'.[54] The nature of diaspora life, its potential loneliness and the perceived loss or confusion of identity is a fascinating area, but beyond the scope of this chapter to explore further. Broader themes of isolation, exclusion and loneliness that related closely to this feeling of not belonging will be explored in the following section.

Theme 3: Isolation, exclusion and loneliness are shaping experiences

This theme has already been identified as occurring for a variety of reasons, such as the perceptions of being an outsider in social contexts in the UK and in the participants' country of origin. In both interviews, it was fascinating to observe the lines between what people choose and what is imposed upon them

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[51] Tr. II. 742–45.
[52] Tr. II. 645–58.
[53] Tr. II. 50–61.
[54] Tr. II. 47–48.

becoming blurred in my analysis. Did people not practise *ubuntu* from choice or from circumstance, and did they perceive themselves to be isolated or lonely as a result? For example, people may wish to consider themselves of higher status once they have adopted a more 'Westernised' model of urban life in sub-Saharan Africa which has implications for how relational life is exercised, but they may be very content in that change of social patterns and responsibility. 'Mary' believed that this adoption of new ways of living arose from a change of worldview — these individuals do not fit in and are indeed isolated, whether they perceive it or not, as they no longer do what is expected of them.[55] 'William' noted that those individuals who had been exposed to 'non-African' ways of doing things may distance themselves from practices such as *ubuntu,* if these are seen as traditional conventions and irrelevant to modern life, something that those who remain in rural settings are unlikely ever to conclude.[56] 'Toby' saw the breakdown of the wider social networks of relation founded in the traditional rural context being reduced to a focus upon the nuclear family alone due to globalisation and the economy, as people have poured in to the urban centres in search of work.[57] It seems logical to conclude from these comments that urban life does not afford the strong bonds of community and belonging that a smaller rural context can offer, and those who find themselves with higher status and/or in urban settings may indeed feel, or be made to feel, isolated as a result. The responsibility to practise *ubuntu*, or lack of the same, in an urban context will be explored in the following section.

Non-practice of *ubuntu* may be more or less tolerated, therefore, in general urban contexts as an unfortunate by-product of modern life, but not,

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[55] Tr. II. 231–44.
[56] Tr. II. 200–11.
[57] Tr. I. 177–91.

apparently, in rites of passage such as weddings and funerals. 'William' gave a

clear example of how a self-imposed decision by someone he knew not to

practise *ubuntu* gave way to a sense of exclusion being imposed upon that

individual by the wider social group: by only sending money to families at times

of bereavement rather than giving of himself in physical presence, the man

concerned subsequently found himself alone when his own family member

died.

> They [those who had been offended by the man's non-practice of *ubuntu*]
>
> stayed away so […] the people decided not to act *ubuntu* because they wanted
>
> to discipline that [man], and partly that other people should see, when one
>
> derails from *ubuntu* people should learn what happens. […] They don't tolerate
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> […] and they […] also sent some money to him but he couldn't now mourn
>
> alone, he needed people to give a hand.[58]

'William' also observed that some in the church can easily be offended if the

practice of *ubuntu* is deemed lacking, for example, not being visited when sick,

when those individuals need to be cajoled back into relationship.[59] 'Catherine'

reflected that a person always has a choice when such a social offence has

occurred: to act in the 'spirit of *ubuntu*' or to hold a grudge and refuse to

reconnect with the other, for example, a wedding where one has not been

invited until late in the day.[60]

It may be, therefore, that those who do not practise *ubuntu* appropriately

at such critical moments in the life of a community are shunned or even

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[58] Tr. I. 337–48.
[59] Tr. I. 486–93.
[60] Tr. I. 766–99.

punished by exclusion from the life of the community, in order for them to 'learn', with the expectation that they may wish to be re-integrated. 'Helen' observed, however, that there will always be those who remain excluded due to the nature of their misdemeanours, for example, murder.[61] 'Toby' reflected upon the role of the head man or woman in rural areas, who maintain both a sense of belonging and also of accountability in community life lacking in urban centres, who would initiate, promote and protect that community life, resulting in people wanting to be involved in each others' lives in a very different way.[62] This evidence suggests again that there are strong connections therefore between praxis, acceptance, belonging and accountability in *ubuntu.*

When discussing peoples' experience of not belonging in their country of origin, participants in the first interview considered that some individuals see themselves as being of lower status than others in the church, and withdraw from relational life as a result. 'Catherine' shared her experience that many perceive that they do not 'fit in' with those of higher status within the church, and so will stay on the edges of fellowship, believing themselves unworthy in some way. Ironically, many who are deemed to be of high status through education or employment are also likely to remain peripheral to the relational life at the heart of the church, out of busyness.[63] 'William' agreed that a development of 'inferiority and superiority complexes' can occur, and those of differing statuses will not easily combine in the life of the church.[64] This was not such an evident theme in the second interview, but 'Toby' did observe that there are many in poverty who perceive a lack of support from the church because of

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[61] Tr. II. 488–92.
[62] Tr. II. 266–83.
[63] Tr. I. 302–20.
[64] Tr. I. 370–82.

their low status, resulting in a feeling of isolation and exclusion. This, he felt, was even replicated in families, where family members turn to those who have resources to help them, whilst discounting those who do not. For 'Toby' this seemed, from his expression, to be another regrettable fracturing between the praxis and concept of *ubuntu*.[65]

Lastly, there will always be some individuals, according to 'William' and 'Catherine', who are naturally averse to such a relational life, or do not wish to be held in such an accountable framework to others. This may be due to aspirations of being more 'Western' and somehow of higher status,[66] although in his country of origin, 'William' felt it was very unlikely that anyone would ever instigate such a sense of not belonging as desirable or beneficial.[67] Interestingly, having espoused the great benefits of *ubuntu* in so many aspects of relational life, 'Mary' was able to observe a more negative implication of *ubuntu*, presumably from having lived in the UK for many years, raising the absence of privacy in communication as an issue.

> The disadvantage to *ubuntu* is that it can really impinge on privacy. […] The boundaries of what is secret, what is private and what is public, it can be really difficult to define, and if people are invading each others' space, so much, then they begin to blur into each other, and I find that […] hard, whereas I find it easy here, if I want to be private. […] So while it's positive to be supported it's not every time one wants support in that sort of […] form.[68]

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[65] Tr. II. 468–87.
[66] For example, 'Catherine', Tr. I. 125–27.
[67] Tr. I. 385–87.
[68] Tr. II. 369–81.

From this I understood that she could see some advantages to a more individualistic choice and freedom from an imposed close relational network in the UK: some aspects of isolation can be positive.

'Helen' reflected further upon one's choice about what is shared. She had come across a news item from the US illustrating the lack of knowledge or shared life individuals in the West can often experience even with immediate neighbours. This was to great detrimental effect in the case that she had seen, where two girls had been abducted and had lived in the perpetrator's house undetected by neighbours for many years. There can be an appearance of communal life, even a sense of belonging, but in her opinion it was often 'limited'.[69]

Reflecting upon loneliness both in her country of origin and in the UK, 'Mary' saw that any person can experience a sense of isolation that minimises or counters their experience of belonging. An example of a circumstance in which an individual might feel lonely, even if not alone, would be in bereavement. Whereas loneliness would be quickly identified in an African context, she thought that this might not be the case in the West:

> [H]ow we meet those needs may differ, so loneliness where it has been identified where I come from, people quickly rally there, […] and I think it's quickly identified, because you are part of this community, you are in relationships with people. […] I think living here, in isolation, it can take a very long time before people pick it up.[70]

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[69] Tr. II. 630–44.
[70] Tr. II. 450–57.

Actively seeking support is not really necessary in her home culture, as others

will seek you out but in the UK, 'Mary' observed that the usual route was to find

'professional' help or support, for example, counselling — a way of dealing with

loneliness and isolation from others that she found alien, the foundation of

relatedness being absent.[71]

Theme 4: Accountability/responsibility to the 'other' is a primary aspect of communitarian life

> You belong to me and I belong to you, so I'm accountable to you, whatever I'm doing I'm accountable. I shouldn't […] take my rights to decrease where it affects you, no, it's important that I'm accountable so, in short, we are accountable to the community and for each other. […] We can still go back [referring to instilling 'old' values in modern life] to where I am accountable to the people and people are accountable to me as well. It's two way.[72]

In both interviews, the theme of accountability and responsibility as an inherent

aspect of *ubuntu* recurred. To be an essentially relational being, a person,

means in *ubuntu* that the 'other' has primacy in how one's life is subsequently

conducted. The needs of the community take precedence over any individual

needs, so closely interwoven are the sense of self, belonging and the

responsibility to others in the social group.[73] To *not* be accountable to others in

this way, therefore, is to not really be a person at all.[74]

Throughout this analysis, it has been challenging to separate out these

themes in any kind of discrete form, but this proves especially the case when

considering accountability. A person is accountable in *ubuntu* because of

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[71] Tr. II. 459–66.
[72] 'William', Tr. I. 1070–86.
[73] Mnyaka, p. 223.
[74] Ibid., pp. 224–25. See also 'Mary', Tr. II. 231–50.

relatedness, because of belonging, and belongs *because* of their accountability and responsibility to others. The following examples could thus have been placed in other thematic groupings, and most have been alluded to previously.

Expectations of how a person behaves according to an *ubuntu* worldview or philosophy were repeatedly touched upon by all the participants, and has been explored in some detail. Of note in respect of this particular theme was the notion that accountability for behaviour was not solely placed upon an individual, but the community as a whole. 'Mary' related this understanding as follows:

> So our humanity, we have expectations which are not very different from any other culture, but we place the responsibility, not just on the individual, but on the whole community, so if somebody fails, it's because their family failed them, […] the community failed them. […] These things, they didn't just start now, they should have been looking out for those things and they should have done something.[75]

This is at the heart of a collectivist philosophy, and reflects that failure, success, care and sustenance of the community are seen as a shared enterprise.[76] The term 'kin' was not used by any of the participants, but there were various comments related to how lines of responsibility may be drawn up in their social networks. Immediate family, closest friends and neighbours would take precedence if necessary in terms of care and support, followed by an unspoken but widely understood responsibility for the extended family and other

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[75] Tr. II. 147–54.
[76] 'William', Tr. I. 154–56.

neighbours.[77] 'William' also spoke of his congregation as his 'larger family', whom people would ask about when greeting him.[78] Such ways of relating and of communicating that relation bind him to demonstrate this responsibility through his actions, for example by mourning alongside or attending all funerals in that area, even of those people he does not know because it is an aspect of his obligation as part of that community.[79]

From an external perspective, it is difficult to ascertain what might therefore be considered an appropriate level of responsibility in an African context, what would be considered behaviour that undermines or disavows the community, and who determines the standard. The rule of apartheid and extremes of lawlessness would be considered anti-*ubuntu* without question, but 'Helen' also referred to 'expectations, do's and don'ts of the set-up'.[80] I understood this as tacitly understood behaviour that may be considered either normative or in fact operant; in reality, both aspects of *ubuntu* seem to be fragmenting through modernisation and appear as nebulous as the term *ubuntu* itself, in an urban setting. This may be due to a variety of reasons, some of which have already been raised, for example, busyness in modern work contexts, the pace of global economic operations with differing priorities, desire for status and a more individualistic lifestyle.

In the rural African context, head men and women continue to shape and control normative behaviour or codes of conduct. 'Toby' confirmed that non-participation in community matters would be addressed and firmly discouraged

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[77] 'Catherine', Tr. I. 828–59.
[78] Tr. I. 886–94.
[79] Tr. I. 277–80.
[80] Tr. II. 112–17.

in an effort to maintain the essence of communitarian life.[81] My interpretation of this assumed accountability structure is that it is both real and contextually viable – most if not all of the participants had had experience of the rural context as well as the urban in their country of origin – but that there is a high degree of idealism involved when discussing it. Such accountability to one's community in traditional society is esteemed as demonstrating the highest form of personhood, which makes it quite difficult to know what happens in reality, as individuals and groups want to be *seen* as maintaining *ubuntu* in its highest form in this context. This is not to suggest that any of the participants were exaggerating or fabricating the narratives of their own practices in the interviews to appear more committed to these ideals, although this can occur in qualitative interviewing;[82] all participants shared experiences in balanced and realistic ways, and seemed aware of the discrepancies between intended and actual life patterns. This theme of responsibility then is, perhaps, a good illustration of the inter-relationship between the four 'voices' that Cameron and Duce refer to when conducting fieldwork analysis in practical theology. What is construed as normative is very significant, and certainly impacts *ubuntu* in operation and in adoption of certain practices, but despite being closely inter-related, they are not the same thing.[83]

As already indicated, there is therefore a real sense of hurt and disappointment when the ideal of communitarian life is not fulfilled by others, no

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[81] Tr. II. 260–82.

[82] Robert S. Weiss, *Learning From Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), p. 73. As theology students themselves, the participants brought skills and experience in analysis from their own studies, as well as a tendency to theorise from discussion. There may also have been a reluctance to question 'home' culture. See research methods chapter, 'Issues in implementation'.

[83] Helen Cameron and Catherine Duce, *Researching Practice in Ministry and Mission: A Companion* (London: SCM Press, 2013), pp. xxx–xxxi.

matter how unrealistic that ideal may or may not be. This was most tangibly felt

when the participants related experiences of church life where accountability

had not been demonstrated as anticipated. 'Helen' spoke of establishing

women's fellowships as cell groups in rural areas where members took it in

turns to host, and the dismay experienced when others failed to appear at their

home. Often this was the result of that member neglecting to visit others herself,

reinforcing the expectations and the cyclical nature of relatedness, belonging

and accountability that is expected in *ubuntu* praxis: neglecting one aspect will

damage the entire framework, albeit temporarily.[84] 'Catherine', 'William' and

'Mary' also related how church members would be held to account for their

absence from fellowship. This is out of care for these members but also, I

conclude, in order to sustain a flourishing faith community, avoiding structural

fragmentation, and upholding values of commitment to the 'other' and a

responsibility for maintaining relational life.[85]

Such discussion concerning accountability led to one of the more

poignant narratives in the first interview, when 'William' illustrated how

relatedness is prized as the most significant aspect of accountability. While

some of the previous examples had a retributive or legalistic character to them

('You scratch my back, I scratch yours'),[86] 'William' related a saying from his

country of origin that had enabled him to maintain a relationship in his

congregation where trust and accountability had been lost. He explained:

> There is a saying or proverb that says '*Mwana ka sembe*', meaning 'a child is
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> an axe', […] so that literally means when a child misbehaves or misfires, you

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[84] Tr. II. 410–26.

[85] Tr. I. 432–42, Tr. I. 486–99, and Tr. II. 433–45, respectively.

[86] 'Helen', Tr. II. 425–26.

are the parent, you should still bring them closer to you, because you need him and you need to correct him, so that also applies in the church. Those who do not act *ubuntu,* people still have that kind heart to say, 'maybe they'll change'. […] Because, there have been many times when I tried to follow the regulations, and then maybe the elders will tell me, 'No Reverend, *mwana ka sembe* […] even if he made a mistake, he is […] one of your children, you don't have to throw him. […] Bring him closer to you'. […] With those words you happen to soften your heart again and find a way of helping that particular person […] even if one goes offline, [in *ubuntu*] you still have to go back and try to help.[87]

I believe that there are several layers of meaning to be discovered within this. Firstly, the driving force to be accountable seems to be deeply embedded in the relational centre of personhood, so that at all costs, an individual will be held in the relational web of social structures for their own benefit, but also for the benefit of others. Secondly, the foundations of *ubuntu* are confirmed as inherently relational and not legalistic: individual rights are damaged, offence taken and punitive measures may be exercised as part of daily human interaction, but the greater good of the community, and the persons held within that community, will almost invariably take precedence. If a person is reprimanded, therefore, it is in order to draw them back to where they can best function, in the structure of the social group. Lastly, the rights of the community take priority over individual rights or retribution. In the West, as 'William' later went on to state, our primary focus is upon individual rights, and therefore others are excluded, 'thrown away' if an offence is committed. This reflects again a more utilitarian attitude to community and relatedness.

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[87] Tr. I. 457–82.

This strong sense of accountability within a framework of relatedness leads to shared responsibility, a recurring example of which was childcare. 'Catherine' and 'Helen' referred to children belonging to the community and sharing care for them with wider family and neighbours.[88] 'Mary' also explained,

> Young girls […] belong to a community, there are certain behaviours that are placed upon them, and they are accountable to any one of the mothers in the community, not just me. […] I think it's hard to bring [up] a child on your own.[89]

'Mary' had previously expressed this sentiment earlier in the interview, where she observed how very difficult she had found it to manage work and childcare in the UK without the network of support she would have experienced in her country of origin: there was a cost to her in a variety of ways.[90]

A lack of accountability or responsibility was something that the participants highlighted as part of their general observations of UK society, and as has been alluded to previously, can have both positive and negative implications. '[M]y experience here is, you get about your business, you are not accountable to anybody.'[91] Whereas the participants expressed a tangible awareness of others and their responsibility to them arising from their worldview, they realised that Western students and church members around them were operating from a worldview where the considerations of the individual usually came first. This apparent loss of relational accountability may well be at the root of the lack of initiative taken by others to relate in the UK, as experienced by some of the participants: it needed prompting by someone

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[88] Tr. I. 129–31 and Tr. II. 122–27, respectively.
[89] Tr. II. 357–67.
[90] Tr. II. 28–46.
[91] 'Mary', Tr. II. 350–51.

intent upon relatedness.[92] Other practical examples of lack of social accountability in the UK were given, from washing up responsibilities in a communal kitchen,[93] to appropriate dress codes,[94] and care for one's neighbour: '[Y]ou may not even know what is *happening* with your neighbour. […] You continue with your life as long as you are OK.'[95] (Italics showing emphasis given) All three participants in the second interview recalled being shocked earlier in the academic year by the principal of the college coming to work after the loss of a close family member the previous day: they felt they had to 'unlearn' what was the appropriate thing for them to do, and also to accept the principal's actions as being culturally appropriate.[96]

'William' and 'Toby' acknowledged that this difference in social structures and breakdown of accountability in the UK may be a fairly recent development historically, which had occurred for a variety of reasons. 'William' reflected upon a conversation he had had with some older UK citizens about life in 'back to back' houses 60 years ago, and wondered if such accountability and communitarian focus could ever be resurrected.[97] 'Toby' recalled a challenge made to him by a UK minister 15 years ago, that such care for the extended family might fragment and disappear in Southern Africa, just as it had in UK, primarily for economic reasons: 'We [African society] are almost going there, because of the economic hardships, people are fearing to marry, because

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[92] 'Mary', Tr. II. 598–658.
[93] 'Catherine', Tr. I. 572–87.
[94] 'Mary', Tr. II. 340–53.
[95] 'William', Tr. I. 677–83.
[96] 'Toby', 'Mary' and 'Helen', Tr. II. 608–29.
[97] Tr. I. 1010–38.

how/what am I going to be giving this person? […] In case I have children, what am I going to give […] my children?'[98]

A breakdown of accountability and belonging, and an increasing experience of isolation seem to be mutually correlative. The sociological reasons as to why these phenomena are to be observed is beyond the scope of this chapter, and are inevitably more complex than any broadly drawn summary can sufficiently express, but I will reflect upon some implications in my concluding chapter. A particular aspect that the participants drew upon repeatedly was the impact of urbanisation in their countries of origin, and how they perceived this to be a potential and actual destructive force in the breakdown of the main tenets of *ubuntu* as expressed in these analytic themes. Urbanisation in sub-Saharan Africa has been alluded to in several examples, and some reasons as to why modern life and an urban context are detrimental to communitarian life have already been explored. In terms of accountability, it is appropriate to return to this theme, particularly to an example of government legislation attempting to reverse this trend as expressed by 'Helen' as she described the *nyumba kumi* initiative in her country of origin.

The *nyumba kumi* ('ten houses') initiative has been drawn up by the government of 'Helen's' country of origin as a response to a breakdown of social structures and accountability in the urban centres. The rapidly growing cities have been identified as places which allow such levels of anonymity that they have resulted in the infiltration of those intent upon acts of terrorism and lawlessness. Such anonymity and lack of accountability in a city is something assumed and even sought in the UK context but in sub-Saharan Africa, the contrast with principles of communitarian life are stark. 'Helen' explains thus:

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[98] Tr. II. 700–14.

> [I]n urban set-ups […] they will count ten houses, and from those ten houses
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> you are supposed to know each other, where one comes from, and then you
>
> live as one community. […] [So] a stranger comes and rents a house, and
>
> before you know it bombs and other explosives are planted, tested, so to cut
>
> that, they say *nyumba kumi* initiative. To me that promotes *ubuntu* because you
>
> care, and no stranger will come […] and it is reducing security risks, in estates
>
> in urban set-ups where people are living from different communities without
>
> knowing each other, you don't know who is your neighbor.[99]

Where the urban context in sub-Saharan Africa is lacking such initiatives,

neighbours seem to be left feeling powerless and unable to practise *ubuntu* in

terms of accountability. 'Toby' gave an example of neighbours in a city suburb

feeling unable to go and assist a woman being beaten in the night for fear that

they might suffer reprisals.[100] Above a natural instinct to survive, as 'Toby'

implied, urban neighbours seem somehow aware that the traditional, normative

behaviours of *ubuntu* no longer apply unless specifically enforced or re-

introduced; it becomes difficult to hold a person to account if there is no

relationship with them, and no accountability structure in place from which to

work. Ignorance of the 'other' brings suspicion and a powerlessness to relate

that takes a great deal of energy to overturn.

Conclusion: Transferrence of *ubuntu* and transformative resonance

In this chapter, I have sought to analyse my fieldwork of two qualitative group

interviews held with participants originating from sub-Saharan Africa but

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[99] Tr. II. 319–36.
[100] Tr. II. 291–309.

currently living in the UK, in order to explore further the meaning of *ubuntu*

contextually, and its application in daily life and in the church as a community,

both in the participants' countries of origin and in the UK. I have endeavoured to

work reflexively and reflectively in this process, grouping participants' comments

and subsequent interpretation of the text of lived experience under four broad

and inter-related themes.

In concluding this chapter, I wish to consider what I perceive to be the

fundamental question arising from this fieldwork, in order that I might go on to

draw final conclusions to my thesis, exploring an applied *ubuntu* theology. At its

most basic level, the question at the heart of my research is an epistemological

one: How do people know what they know about *ubuntu,* and is this knowledge

of a kind that can be transferred in any useful form to a Western contemporary

church context? As 'Catherine' put it as we closed the first interview, 'How can

we be people together?'[101] In order to answer this, I will look more specifically at

analysing the participants' responses and conversation concerning the potential

transferrence of *ubuntu* into a UK church context. As previously indicated, it is

not feasible to draw statistically accurate generalisations of any value or

substance from this type of qualitative data, particularly working across such

widely differing cultures and worldviews as it does. Instead, I will seek a kind of

'transformative resonance', where there are sufficient conceptual similarities

that present as identification points between the two differing contexts.[102]

When asked if she thought it was possible for *ubuntu* to be applied and

practised in the UK church, 'Catherine' concluded that it was unlikely, unless

someone from the global South was present to teach and model such a

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[101] Tr. 1. 1123.

[102] Swinton and Mowat, pp. 47–48.

worldview.[103] 'Helen' also identified the importance of a cross-cultural group in which to learn and then practise *ubuntu* – without Africans or other communitarian peoples present, it would remain a novel and alien way of life here.[104] 'Helen' emphasised at this point the racial and cultural elements to the make-up of any church congregation, apparently seeing no hope for 'purely white congregations', although 'Toby' reflected that he had observed a significant difference in white people from the West who had lived in Africa, and those who had not. He recognised a 'spirit of accommodating others' in them that meant they dealt with issues differently, presumably in a more recognisably 'African' way,[105] and that their experience would aid any attempt to apply *ubuntu* principles in a Western church.

Interestingly, 'Mary' focused upon the role of the church and particularly its leadership in demonstrating *ubuntu* and forming a bridge between traditional and modern cultures. Her motivation may have been in part driven by a concern that the spread of individualism from the West might eliminate communitarian life altogether as a fundamental principle of African life. A new way of learning, or re-learning, is necessary in both Africa and the UK.[106] She also referred earlier to institutions such as Queen's acting as places where such community life might be enforced or learned as an active choice in pursuing a counter-cultural life in the Western context.[107]

'Catherine' felt quite strongly that such a change was not really possible, indicating that she saw the individualistic pattern as too entrenched to break out of; examples of being treated as an 'outsider' in the church were again

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[103] Tr. I. 951–58.
[104] Tr. II. 689–97.
[105] Tr. II. 527–40.
[106] Tr. II. 754–75.
[107] Tr. II. 677–734.

offered.[108] Her reasoning, that *ubuntu* 'has been practised before we were born', seemed to mean that *ubuntu* cannot truly be learned or adopted across contexts; this will be explored shortly. 'William' appeared somewhat more optimistic in his conclusions by suggesting possibilities for success, such as a refocussing from individual to communal rights, alongside a reworking of a communal focus into many aspects of life, for example, academia, leadership (teamwork and accountability being the essential strands), and neighbourhoods, as it had been in the past.[109] He went on to identify that there were many universal elements to *ubuntu* that he had experienced through others in the UK, but in order to overcome our predisposition to act individually at the cost of the wider community, there would be a need for institutions (such as the church) to facilitate and nurture a different way of belonging and being together.[110]

Such a 'stepping down' or away from a more individualistic life and protection of our personal rights will reverse the cost from the community onto the individual. Participants spoke candidly, without any particular resentment or regret, of the cost of living a relational life where the 'other' takes priority over one's own preferences or rights. In 'William's' words:

> Most of the personal rights [in Africa] are trampled upon because it's for the good of the community. […] [So] for me […] the first thing that should be worked on is the individual rights, and that is critical. And it's very hard to break that!

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[108] Tr. I. 923–38.
[109] Tr. I. 964–83.
[110] Tr. I. 1052–71.

> Because you have deep and high respect for individuals, […] so it is that thing
>
> that should break, in order for communal […] kind of life to be promoted.[111]

'Helen' also identified this sense of cost, particularly through the giving of time:

> [I]t takes a lot of time to practise *ubuntu*, […] so for the West I don't know, it's
>
> quite a challenge, where people are busy busy, tension. […] When do you have
>
> time now for this, like eating together and all that so probably, time is one thing
>
> that […] needs to be looked at, for it to change, to work. […] In the West […]
>
> time for me is a very vital problem when you are talking about *ubuntu*.[112]

'Mary' similarly reflected on the 'investment, the willingness to give up time' as
'an expensive' thing to do in the UK, and a 'barrier' to practising a more
communitarian life, but concluded that it was not insurmountable.[113]

 Ubuntu has been accused by some as a nostalgic movement, attempting
to help recover traditional African values in an 'African renaissance' as part of
post-colonial independence.[114] Is there a similar yearning for a 'narrative of
return' in the UK, trying to recreate something perceived as a golden age of
community life? 'Toby' identified again, at the end of the second interview, that
there is a difference between the academics of discussing *ubuntu* and 'what is
happening on the ground'.[115] He seemed to recognise the huge complexities
and challenges of attempting to re-introduce a normative pattern of behaviour
based on relationship back into modern/postmodern Britain, even as the

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[111] Tr. I. 655–56, 966–74.
[112] Tr. II. 511–24.
[113] Tr. II. 667–70.
[114] Christian Gade, 'The Historical Development of the Written Discourses on Ubuntu', *South African Journal of Philosophy,* 30 (2011), 303–29 (p. 304).
[115] Tr. II. 716–20.

operative nature of *ubuntu* is diminishing in its original context under the weight of global economic growth and urbanisation.

Having investigated *ubuntu* academically and attempted to read the text of lived experience of these participants, I have concluded that *ubuntu* as a worldview, a set of values or principles is essentially mismatched to the individualistic sense of identity and utilitarian attitude to community that is prevalent in Western society. Whilst many positive, universal human characteristics can be demonstrated anywhere in the world regardless of cultural context, there is something inherently non-communitarian in our lived experience and expectations of how society and cultural groups function in the West. In saying this, it should be noted that I am not dismissing the potential for an applied *ubuntu* theology to facilitate our shared life in a church context, which I will explore shortly.

How do these participants 'know what they know' about *ubuntu*? What is the epistemological basis for their lived experience as sub-Saharan African people? I believe *ubuntu* (or its equivalent) is something they have absorbed and learned from birth: it is a fundamental attitude, a learned system and set of values that are adopted and held, always in the context of the community or group. Just as my life has always been embedded, as a white UK individual, in a nuclear family context where groups were joined for a specific purpose or function and thus I have absorbed a Western worldview without even being aware of it, so the participants have learned and adopted behaviour and a worldview that reflects that of the culture in which they have grown up. All behaviour is learned, therefore, theoretically, *ubuntu* can be learned too, but my interpretation of these interviews is that Western society in general has no real desire to change, or to pay the price that the participants reflected on. I do not

wish, however, to include the church in this conclusion, as I contend that there are different priorities, values and narratives at work there that mean Christians, as members of the body of Christ in the West, can and should be living differently.

I believe that for the Western church, there is more to seeking a valued and intentionally relational life than pure nostalgia, or resigning itself to mirroring the surrounding culture. The principles of *ubuntu*, as expressed through these four interwoven themes, have many aspects in common with a theological concept of personhood and participation. The essentially relational nature of the person and the fundamental premise of belonging in a mutually formative community are present in my reading of and implications for *imago Dei* in Genesis 1. In my exploration of trinitarian theology, I have found elements of perichoretic life in the Trinity that echo elements of the mutual care and responsibility that the participants have reflected upon here. The pain of exclusion, isolation and loneliness is real for all persons, because of our inherently relational nature. These are the 'transformative resonances' that I have sought, rather than a socio-cultural resonance between South and West, which I am not convinced can be found.

A Christian model of community, belonging and accountability, in my understanding, is well served therefore by being a multicultural and diverse body as indicated by the participants, but even more fundamentally, will be *best* served by a return to or a re-learning of, a well-developed and vibrant understanding and experience of personhood and relational life as evidenced in God as Trinity. Here is a model of personhood, community, belonging and mutual accountability that can and should underpin the church's actions as a body, whatever the cultural context. The alternative for the Western

contemporary church is to perhaps attempt relational life from a nostalgic model of how communities used to operate historically here: this, I believe, is neither theologically valid, or viable. The results of this model are what many Christians in the UK have experienced for years: at best a dissatisfying and half-hearted attempt at being *ekklesia* (the 'called out ones') or at worst, a complete ignorance as to what the *koinonia* of Christ might really mean. The church in the UK has largely chosen to mirror our society, I believe, rather than act counter-culturally. The cost of living as community, in a way which reflects the perichoretic dynamism of the triune God that offers a participative role to the church as the Body of Christ, has been too great.

How can we be people together? This is the subject for my conclusion, as I seek to develop an applied *ubuntu* theology that will combine elements of *ubuntu* with concepts drawn from biblical and trinitarian understandings of personhood, identity, belonging and accountability, contrasting and relating these as appropriate with sociological concepts of the same. Prior to any conclusion, however, I wish to draw upon a theological exploration of identity, personhood and relatedness from Scripture and the Christian tradition in order to critique Desmond Tutu's development of an *ubuntu* theology, before summarising whether such a theology might be effective within a Western context.

Chapter 5

An Exploration of *Ubuntu* Theology in Conversation

with Scripture and Christian Tradition

Introduction

In an earlier chapter, I reflected upon Desmond Tutu's development of an *ubuntu* theology, which seeks to combine elements of traditional African cultural practices regarding relational life and belief with orthodox Christian doctrines of the *imago Dei,* the Trinity and ecclesiology.

In this chapter, it is my intention to develop this further by bringing the concept of *ubuntu* into direct conversation with these core concepts, using the more contentious (for Protestant theologians) doctrine of participation and the concept of *perichoresis* (mutual indwelling/coinherence). This will be developed within and alongside wider trinitarian thought through which to consider our relational being, and the nature of our engagement with God and with each other as persons. In doing so, I hope to elucidate both the strengths and weaknesses of an *ubuntu* theology specifically in terms of participation and perichoretic life, and to identify how such conclusions might facilitate a robust contribution to any discussions of relational life in a Western contemporary church context.

My argument is that, whilst *ubuntu* theology offers valuable and challenging input to our consideration of *koinonia* in Western churches, particularly in the concept of interdependence, there are intriguing discrepancies between an *ubuntu* theology as developed by Tutu and the foundations of *ubuntu* as a contextual philosophy, which have implications for its potential application in a wider context. Offering this possible conclusion

seems to reject, at a qualified level, an applied *ubuntu* theology; however, it is my contention that for the church community, relational life historically has been and should be based instead upon the fundamental experience of God as triune *koinonia.* I contend that this focus, rather than an applied *ubuntu* theology, embraces all Christian people in some way in a participative role as the Body of Christ. Whilst Tutu alludes to this fellowship, I believe his lack of explicitness leaves us with a highly contextual framework, restricted in its usefulness in any other context than sub-Saharan Africa. An informed understanding of the 'open' Trinity, on the other hand, could liberate the whole church into relational life as a gift from God, whatever the cultural context.

This is potentially a wide-ranging field of study; therefore, I will attempt to maintain a sense of boundary around the scope of the discussion. Within the constraints of this chapter, I will not be able to explore the concept of gender within *imago Dei,* humanity's relationship with the rest of creation, or the implications of the Fall on the nature of image-bearing. In my brief exploration of trinitarian theology, I will not focus in any detail upon the complex attempts to describe the nature of the Trinity, the historical development of the doctrine, or the East/West divide that has ensued. Rather, in reflecting upon Tutu's theology, my intentions are to draw broad conclusions within a framework of practical theology for my own context, which contrasts with Tutu's specific contextual frame of post-apartheid South Africa. In so doing, I move away from Tutu's dual foci of forgiveness and reconciliation, not with any intention of dispensing with them, but in order to place them as part of a wider foundation of *koinonia* that is embodied in a relational life with God and with one another.

Imago Dei and the scriptural establishment of relation and personhood

The concept of *imago Dei* and being in relation is central to Tutu's *ubuntu* theology, as we have already seen. To carry God's image as a human being has manifold implications. Primarily, Tutu understands it to mean that people are intimately related to God, and that as relationally created beings reflecting God's image, humans are therefore potentially persons, because of God's triune personhood.[1] This brings value and status to each person, which is fundamental to Tutu's vision for reconciliation in place of retribution in South Africa, but also affirms and confirms our relational being — this is what we are made for, because this is what we were made 'from'.

Tutu's theological development, briefly stated here, is founded in orthodox Christian doctrine, but several issues arise upon closer review. In none of his popular writings does Tutu actually elucidate what *imago Dei* might mean from a scriptural exposition or tradition; similarly, little explanation or development of trinitarian thinking is offered in support of the concept of personhood. The relationship between a traditional African understanding of God as Creator, the concept of *ubuntu*, and how any interdependence might be expressed in and through the *imago Dei* is also unclear, therefore it is my intention to address some of these issues.

The creation narratives in Genesis 1 and 2 are some of the most challenging to interpret in the Hebrew Scriptures, and have been commented

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[1] It should be observed at this point that the concept of personhood has a very different meaning in theological terms from that usually conferred sociologically. The notion of person, or *hypostasis*, when first used by the early church in developing its understanding of God out of its experience of God, referred to the essence of one's being in relation, not an individual as we would generally equate it in contemporary language. The concept of person and relation will be addressed in more detail with reference to trinitarian theology later in this chapter.

upon extensively as significant biblical texts.[2] My focus is upon the account of the creation of human beings as related in Genesis 1. 26–27 because of the particular attention the writers pay to humanity's essential nature, and it is the source of reference to *imago Dei*:

> Then God said, 'Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (TNIV)

Whilst a reflection in any depth on the biblical creation texts are beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to note that most commentators identify some marked differences between Genesis 1 and 2, particularly related to the distinct voices of the source documents which these texts are ascribed to, referred to as P and J respectively,[3] and other Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) creation accounts.[4] Jónsson, reflecting upon the last century of Hebrew Scripture scholarship concerning this particular text, notes that the potential influence of ANE texts upon Scripture, and differences between them, only came into focus in the 1930s and cast new light on its theological

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[2] J. Richard Middleton, amongst other Hebrew Scripture scholars, refers to Genesis 1 as a prologue and deliberately placed as such to set a particular scene and reference point for the rest of Hebrew Scripture. See Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005), pp. 268–69. See also Anthony Phillips, *Lower than the Angels: Questions Raised by Genesis 1–11* (London: BRF, 1983), pp. 1–2, who describes Genesis 1–11 as crucial in understanding the whole of Scripture, exploring the nature of God, and our relation to him.

[3] For ease of reference, I am referring to Genesis 1.1–2.3 (P source) as Genesis 1, and Genesis 2.4–3.23 (J source) as Genesis 2.

[4] Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 1–15* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), p. 69, identifies that relationships are to be harmonious and intimate, an alien concept in other ANE creation texts.

interpretation.[5] Jónsson and Middleton are also keen to highlight the effect that time and cultural influences play upon any interpretations of the text: all readers bring preconceptions and previous knowledge to text that are difficult to cast aside, especially when the provenance of the verses is unknown.[6]

Of significance to my own exploration of *imago Dei* is the unusual focus upon relationship in the creation narratives — between human beings and God, between humans and other creatures, and with wider creation.[7] There is complexity and ambiguity in the meaning of the Hebrew words used, particularly in Genesis 2, and subsequently a range of emphases that different commentators place upon what the writer may have wished to convey.[8] The primary topics for discussion in the verses above revolve around what may have been meant by the use of two Hebrew words for 'image' and 'likeness', and by the use of the plural voice for God. I will conclude this section of the chapter by exploring *imago Dei* in relation to *ubuntu*.

a) Image and likeness

Westermann notes that the verses of Genesis 1. 26–27 follow a markedly different pattern from those preceding it: the writer seems to move from the command of God that initiates acts of creation to plural deliberation, and to go to some lengths to repeat and emphasise the image/likeness motif.[9] Such

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[5] Gunnlaugur A. Jónsson, *The Image of God: Genesis 1. 26–28 in a Century of Old Testament Research* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1988), pp. 2–4.

[6] Ibid., pp. 2–4. See also Middleton, pp. 17–18, 93, 186. For example, Middleton argues that Barth's interpretation of these verses was strongly influenced by a cultural context of rising German socialism, hence his desire to affirm relationship, pp. 21–23.

[7] Wenham, pp. 87–88. See also Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*, trans. by John J. Scullion SJ (London: SPCK, 1984), p. 155.

[8] See, for example, Robert Alter, *Genesis* (New York: WW Norton & Co, 1997), p. 9.

[9] Westermann, pp. 143–44. It should be noted that Westermann is now in something of a minority in upholding the relational interpretation of these verses (see later

rephrased repetition usually indicates an important theme, and for most commentators the question of *imago Dei* is widely understood to be highly significant in scriptural terms but also open to interpretation, particularly in view of the use of the plural voice for God.[10]

At its simplest level of translation, it can be understood that to be made in someone's image, someone's likeness, must mean to be like them in some way, to resemble them. An image is, after all, intrinsically dependent upon the original, and what can be said about the former must in some way rely upon what can be said about the latter.[11] Blocher, amongst other scholars, identifies the two Hebrew words used and contrasts them according to their usage in other Jewish scriptural texts. *Selem* ('image') is repeated twice in Genesis 1. 26 and is commonly used to mean a concrete form, something made according to the original, whilst *demût* ('likeness') has a more abstract connotation, an aspect of the nature of the image which has features similar, but not identical, to the original.[12] In the past, for example through the work of Irenaeus, discussion has ranged across defining these two words in order to distinguish between a physical and spiritual likeness to God. Westermann, however, would argue that this does not reflect the wider understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures of what a person is, which is that there are no separate components, and thus he concludes that the writer was using them somewhat interchangeably.[13] Middleton traces the development of interpretation of image/likeness in this text,

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notes on the three models of interpretation of *imago Dei)*, but his exegesis is still commonly referred to in more recent scholarship.

[10] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Creation, Un-creation, Re-creation: A Discursive Commentary on Genesis 1–11* (London: T & T Clark, 2011), p. 25.

[11] Tom Smail, *Like Father, Like Son* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2005), p. 2.

[12] Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Leicester: IVP, 1984), p. 85. Blenkinsopp, p. 26, notes that the same phrase is used in Genesis 5. 3, referring to Adam fathering a son in his own likeness. The image of God is also referred to in Genesis 9. 6.

[13] Westermann, p. 150. See also Wenham, pp. 29–31.

identifying that scholars have indeed moved on from an early emphasis on a purely spiritual likeness to God, which he refers to as a substantialistic interpretation. This position seems to have been influenced by Platonism in the West, based on the concept that there was some kind of direct relation of the soul or mind to God in humanity's ability to reason. In the East, to carry God's likeness meant moving toward divinisation, or deification, which I will explore further as part of the doctrine of participation.[14]

Of the three primary models of interpretation of the meaning of *imago Dei* in contemporary scholarship, the most widely accepted and favoured proposition at the time I am writing is referred to as the functional/royal calling interpretation.[15] This most recent theory, arguably brought to the fore in von Rad's seminal work using ANE texts in 1972, proposes that to carry the image of God means that people reflect, as well as behold, something of God's glory in a particular and unique way. ANE texts derived from Egypt and Mesopotamia relate that a sculpture of a man would be placed as a sovereign emblem, representing the king and claiming his authority in that land during the king's absence, and it is thought that the use of *selem* in Genesis 1 reflects this cultural practice.[16] It implies that humans similarly are 'the king's representatives', exercising his dominion and governance as earthly viceroys responsible for the blessing and welfare of other creatures and of the created earth as commanded in Genesis 1. 28,[17] and also referred to in Psalm 8.[18]

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[14] Middleton, pp. 19–20. It seems likely that Middle Platonism may have influenced the Greek translation of the text in the Septuagint with the (originally Stoic) concept of *logos spermatikos*, 'the spark of life', which humans have received as souls, and which can be received back into God as a part of the wider universe. Note also the Greek translation *ikon* as 'image' in the Septuagint, and the significant meaning and use of images in the Eastern church.

[15] Ibid., p. 26.

[16] Ibid., p. 26. See also Blenkinsopp, pp. 26–27.

[17] Blocher, pp. 80–81, 85, and Wenham, pp. 29–31.

Blocher notes that this contrasts strongly with other ANE texts where human beings self-create, and become divinised, whilst in other ANE texts, only the king would assume a divine image. Blocher further comments that there are elements of sonship understood within *imago Dei,* which the writers of Genesis seem to steer way from to avoid any misunderstanding with other ANE cultures that would seek to divinise such an exalted position, yet these are clearly alluded to by the psalmist in Psalm 8.[19] The use of *selem* also comes dangerously close to depicting human beings as idols, a concept which Blenkinsopp suggests the writers of Genesis 1 might have used intentionally in defiance of idol worship at the time of the neo-Babylonian Empire.[20] Radically, the writer/s of Genesis 1 seem to be asserting that all humans have been made in the image of God.[21] Thus, Middleton concludes, the image (*selem*) humanity bears means that people can fulfil the office of God's representatives, being like God (*demût*) in exercising this royal calling on earth. The writer/s use both words deliberately, Middleton claims, to emphasise the integral connection between calling and function.[22]

This in itself implies a key aspect of bearing God's image that forms the basis of the third interpretation model: that of a communicative relationship. As humans, there must be some way to both correspond and co-respond with God in order to fulfil this role, to dialogue with the Creator. This suggests worth and

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[18] Middleton, p. 27.

[19] Blocher, pp. 89–93.

[20] Blenkinsopp, p. 28. Middleton, p. 186, reflecting on the likelihood that Genesis was possibly written in exile, and certainly in the shadow of the Mesopotamian civilization, suggests that Genesis 1 articulates an alternative worldview,   and is 'intentionally subversive literature'.

[21] Blocher, p. 82.

[22] Middleton, pp. 88–90. Middleton also suggests that the *imago Dei* includes a priestly dimension, mediating divine blessing to the rest of creation, corresponding to Israel's vocation as a 'royal priesthood'. This role is a fascinating addition to the concept of *imago Dei* and bridge into Israel's identity, but beyond the scope of this chapter to pursue.

dignity for all people — something not generally assigned to humanity in ANE texts.[23] Some commentators even call human beings God's counterparts,[24] an intriguing term which I will return to when reflecting upon the doctrine of participation. This focus on the *imago Dei* as God's creative deliberation founded upon personal encounter forms the third model of interpretation, known as relational or ethical interpretation. According to Middleton, this was first seen in Luther and Calvin's work in developing their soteriology, but most significantly upheld by Barth in his exegetical development of the text in *Church Dogmatics,* and continues to be championed by Westermann, although this position has now been largely overtaken through scholarly consensus that it is the functional interpretation which is the most accurate and appropriate reading of the text.[25]

However, the relational interpretation of *imago Dei* seems to be what has shaped Tutu's rationale for his *ubuntu* theology: his emphasis is largely upon the implications of how people subsequently relate to one another as human beings, which he sees as being established upon a deep conviction of the transforming nature of a fundamental relationship with God. Readers are directed by the writer/s of Genesis 1 to focus on the Creator, above all — not to a detailed explanation or description of human nature but to an action of God that is founded upon initiating relationship.[26] Human beings, or more accurately, persons, exist as God's image by derivation.[27] This relationship with the Creator God as the basis of being then allows me to draw out the concept what it

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[23] Blenkinsopp, pp. 26, 27.
[24] Westermann, pp. 151,158.
[25] Middleton, pp. 20–24, 29. Middleton would argue that Westermann and Barth's position is not based on current ANE scholarship or accurate exegesis, but a more contextual focus.
[26] Westermann, p. 155.
[27] Blocher, p. 82.

means to be a *person* as central to my argument, as the term carries inherently relational meaning.

It is my contention that the functional interpretation of *imago Dei* does seem to be the most accurate exegetically, but in application must surely be undergirded and resourced by the primary relationship between Creator and human beings. I believe therefore that the writers of Genesis 1. 26–27 would seek to point the reader not only towards a vision for human agency in a royal calling, but to focus attention upon God and the relationship that he has initiated, as this constitutes very being, human nature, which is relational and allows people to fulfil the role of viceroys.[28] I would argue that the *imago Dei* is the clearest foundation to explain what a person is. As Westermann observes, 'The relationship to God is not something which is added to human existence; humans are created in such a way that *their very existence is intended to be their relationship to God'.*[29] (Italics mine)

b) The plural voice of God in Genesis 1

To whom are people so uniquely related? The use of 'Let us…' by the writer/s of Genesis 1 has excited a range of responses throughout history, although it may have proved too easy for some in the church to immediately read a trinitarian interpretation into these ancient words, rather than consider more carefully what might be meant by them. The reality is that they remain unclear. One possibility is that they may reflect something of the polytheism of surrounding cultures, although with few other such references in the biblical text, this seems

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[28] Ibid., p. 85. Westermann, p. 150, also refers to Barth's exegesis of this text in the latter's *Church Dogmatics III/I.*

[29] Westermann, p. 158.

unlikely.[30] Another proposition is that of a judicial court-like scenario, where God chooses to make a plural deliberation.[31] Others suggest that this is to converse with angels, but again there is no other reference to such conversation elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures. Similarly, the use of the 'majesterial plural' is suggested but not attested elsewhere in Hebrew.[32] Blocher and Hughes base their conclusions on Clines' work, reasoning that God seems to address self as distinct Persons and still Godself depicted as God and the Spirit earlier in Genesis 1.[33]

c) *Ubuntu* and *imago Dei*

God's creation of human beings in his own image, male and female, can be claimed to initiate relationship and to establish people as relational beings, but can also be seen as emerging out of a relational community referred to as God and Spirit in Genesis 1. These are themes that Tutu often returns to in his references to *imago Dei* in order to support his *ubuntu* theology. He argues that if each individual were to grasp fully their inheritance as creatures fundamentally related to God by bearing his image, then this would transform any understanding of who they are, and enable humanity to recognise themselves and others as persons, with far-reaching implications for reconciliation amongst South African peoples. This basis to an understanding of personhood would also speak powerfully into a Western context such as urban Britain, although, as has been already expressed, the dominant philosophy of

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[30] Blocher, p. 84. See Genesis 3. 22 and Genesis 11. 7 for other 'plural voice of God'l references, which are beyond the scope of this chapter to explore further.

[31] Westermann, p. 145.

[32] Blocher, p. 84, and Westermann, p. 145.

[33] Blocher, p. 84, and R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), p. 36. Blenkinsopp, p. 29, suggests that it may simply be referring to an internal dialogue to decide on a course of action.

individualism has far-reaching implications for this view, combined as it is increasingly with a highly secular, often agnostic or atheistic worldview.

Whilst a primary connection with the Creator God is acknowledged in many traditional African societies (along with all other beings and ancestors), it seems that relational life experienced in human community is what defines an individual as a person above all else in that context; this community is usually understood as prior to the individual, rather than them being mutually formative.[34] When *ubuntu* is practised, personhood is shaped and realised.[35] Equally, when *ubuntu* is not practised or is neglected, personhood can be lost; in some cases, some individuals are never considered as persons at all.[36] This concept of the person seems fundamentally at odds with Tutu's premise taken from Scripture and Christian tradition. *Ubuntu* as a philosophy seems to be saying that the human community is what shapes and defines an existence as persons, with no reference to a concept such as *imago Dei* rooting human existence directly to relationship with and for God. God as the ultimate life force may or may not be the source of all relation in traditional thought; what comes across more strongly is a sense of connectedness with all, of which God is one, albeit important, connection.[37]

By contrast, Tutu seems to accept a traditional understanding of personhood in *ubuntu* from its foundations in human relationships with all their volatility and potential exclusion, but forges it with an understanding of

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[34] Michael Onyebuchi Eze, 'What is African Communitarianism? Against Consensus as a Regulatory Ideal', *South African Journal of Philosophy,* 27 (2008), 386–99 (pp. 386–88).

[35] Mluleki Mnyaka, 'The African Concept of Ubuntu/Botho and its Social–moral Significance', *Black Theology*, 3 (2005), 215–37 (p. 223).

[36] Ibid., pp. 224–25.

[37] Thaddeus Metz and Joseph B. R. Gaie, 'The African Ethic of Ubuntu/Botho: Implications for Research on Morality', *Journal of Moral Education,* 39 (2010), 273–90 (pp. 274–75).

personhood founded upon relationship with and initiated by God, as alluded to in Genesis 1. In doing so, and in an effort to be inclusive of all peoples, I believe Tutu does not fully articulate what is implied by *imago Dei*, that is, the nature of human existence resting solely on a relationship with God, existing before any other relationship. It is my contention, evidenced above, that humanity is created for community, and finds fulfilment in what is given and received from other human beings, but it originates from, and is rooted in, a prior relationship with God, which brings ultimate fulfilment of relational being.[38] Tutu goes on to use the concept of *imago Dei* as a basis of his applied theology, creating an acceptable Christian vehicle in which to carry his message of forgiveness, reconciliation and equality for all peoples. These are honourable and thoroughly Christian pursuits, particularly in his national context, but a closer inspection of his theological construct does not seem to fully satisfy either a desire for scriptural integrity, or *ubuntu* as a communitarian philosophy.

Tutu develops his concept by focussing upon Jesus Christ as the complete image of God, and his fulfilment of the reconciliation of human beings into relationship with God through the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection. This is another crucial part of the transition of *ubuntu* from a philosophy to a Christian theology, but one that has proved contentious for many African academics.

The importance of the incarnation and its centrality in any discussion of the doctrine of participation is something that I will return to. For the moment, I now wish to focus upon the Trinity, the God to whom people may relate as to

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[38] Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), p.113.

Father, Son and Spirit, in order to develop an understanding of the concept of personhood, as framed by the nature of the Trinity.

The Holy Trinity as the source of relation and personhood

The doctrine of the Trinity is the complex basis of orthodox Christian tradition and belief in God. It is a concept derived and developed both from scriptural inference and from personal encounter through praxis, prayer and experience of the salvation of God; yet the Trinity is more than just a concept to facilitate understanding. To attempt to speak of or to articulate something of God's nature, substance or being could lead perilously close to theism: making God comprehensible, rationalised and compartmentalised could compromise the sense of both utter transcendence and immanence that he must combine. God is, as Johnson claims, 'a mystery, awesome and attractive'.[39]

The Christian experience of the salvation of God in Jesus through the activity of the Holy Spirit required new language, new metaphors and new ways of seeing very early on in the life of the church. The doctrine of the Trinity, in its most simple terms, that God is three Persons but of one substance, cannot be reduced to 'complex celestial mathematics', but neither can it form a specific description. Instead, it can be seen as an interpretation drawn from the understanding of the good news of salvation spanning the whole of Christian

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[39] Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), pp. 12–16. Similarly, I would wish to reject deism and the depiction of God as removed and beyond relationship on the grounds that the Incarnation demonstrates a specific historical encounter with God in Christian understanding, revealed in the person of Jesus. He is knowable, and therefore God is knowable in some way, because of Jesus' words and actions. (Other arguments against a deistic stance would refer also to the significance of *imago Dei*, as previously discussed: human beings are derived from a relational creative act of God; therefore, he is knowable by virtue of potential relationship.)

Scripture and from personal experience that confirms this.[40] The scope of this chapter does not permit a wide ranging exploration of such a fundamental doctrine; I will therefore focus shortly upon the metaphor of perichoresis used to enable some form of description of the nature of the Trinity that has particular relevance for a critique of *ubuntu* theology.

a) Origins and development of trinitarian thought in church tradition

Trinitarian conceptualising arose early on in Christian tradition. By the 3rd century CE the Cappadocian Fathers (and Mothers) were most notable in their efforts, rooted within the church's practice, in interpreting Christian Scripture and experience in trinitarian terms to express what remains orthodox trinitarian belief today. They formed part of the wider leadership of the early church, whose priority came to be formulating doctrine and liturgy that examined and subsequently rejected heterodox teaching.[41] Working from affirmations and implications in Christian Scripture regarding the nature and character of God as Father, Son and Spirit,[42] they responded to the revelation of God in salvation as

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[40] Ibid., pp. 202–04, 208.

[41] The most significant doctrinal developments with regard to the Trinity were defined at the great Ecumenical Councils. Nicaea in 325 CE rejected any form of subordinationism, most notably the work of Arius, and asserted *homoousious* as the correct way in which the relationship between Father and Son should be understood. At Ephesus in 431 CE this was reasserted when Mary was declared *Theotokos*, 'God-bearer', rather than *Christokos*, 'Christ-bearer', and where the issue of the two natures of Christ was discussed. In this instance, Cyril's argument defeated Nestorius's in asserting that the two natures were without distinction; however, the stance was later expanded at Chalcedon in 451 CE when both solutions to the two natures controversy were accepted. The person of the Son was recognised, therefore, in two natures, without confusion, and without change (Nestorius's position), but also without diminution and without separation (Cyril's position). Thus, Jesus Christ was affirmed as consubstantial with God and with us as human beings, neither nature being diminished by this union.

[42] Paul M. Collins, *The Trinity: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T & T Clark, 2008), pp. 11, 15: 'While the foundations of later trinitarian refection […] cannot simply be read out of the New Testament, neither do they have to be read back into it.'

a relational being whose essence is love, and recognised that he cannot be spoken of outside this framework of union: the Trinity is a primordial ontological concept.[43] The nature of God's being was also, for the Cappadocian Fathers, founded in the concept of three distinct but co-inherent Persons, as will be explored further.

This radical conceptualising of God as three Persons, of one substance 'being in communion', was not effectively supported across the church as history unfolded, with some belonging to the Western church drifting potentially towards modalism (God as essentially a singular deity for whom substance is primary, community is secondary) and away from the ontological foundations of relation, as emphasised by the Cappadocians.[44] In time, the concept of the Trinity seemed to lose ground in favour of unity, and a person in the West became more aligned in philosophical and real terms to the individual; this culminated in Enlightenment thought, most commonly associated with Descartes' work on our cognition of the natural world, where to question everything but self led to his oft-quoted reflection, 'I think, therefore I am'.[45]

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[43] John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), pp. 16–17. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (Chicago: Harper San Francisco, 1992), pp. 41, 53, observes that, before the Arian controversy, the focus of the church was upon the economy of salvation and upon encounter with God in his triune personhood. Following Nicaea, the emphasis of theological reflection was upon the mystery of God's being, which left the church speaking about him, separate from their salvific experience of God.

[44] Gunton, pp. 33–51. Gunton argues that, although for many years Augustine has been upheld as the prominent Western trinitarian theologian of the early church, it is now widely accepted that the foundations of Greek philosophy that undergirded his thinking cause essential flaws to show even in Western trinitarian theology today, For example, Augustine's cerebral analogies for the Trinity and his minimal emphasis on the Person of the Holy Spirit. This, Gunton argues, has implications for modern Western pneumatology and ecclesiology.

[45] This quotation is often taken as the 'flagship' of Western individualistic philosophy, and has been used by John Mbiti and other African philosophers and theologians to posit their own contrasting understanding of the person. See Eze, p. 388.

Trinitarian theology, the most fundamental of theological endeavours, became sidelined in Western practice as an intellectual exercise until fairly recently, with the emergence of theologians from all traditions who desired to reinvest it as of central importance to the orthodox Christian faith which, I also believe, it merits.[46]

b) The concept of personhood

The concept of personhood is one which demands careful reflection as it is core to our understanding of the other concepts of relation, otherness and agency which flow from it. Whilst currently fashionable in the social sciences, the term has changed in its meaning and use considerably throughout history,[47] and has particular significance in a theological framework, as we have already seen. At the time of the early church, the concept of a person with unique identity was alien in Greek and Roman thought, with no relation to a state of being — the Greek word *prosopon* referred to a mask or a theatrical form, whilst *persona* in Latin was used to describe an individual's legal role and their interplay with others, which also gave rise to the use of *hypostasis* in this context. It was the Church Fathers who took the concept of person in order to 'give ontological expression to its faith in the triune God'.[48] In other words, the concept was appropriated to enable the early church to express or give meaning to what they

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[46] Karl Barth was instrumental in redressing the 'loss of the Trinity' from modern theology after Schleiermacher's treatment of the concept as a notion in an appendix. Most notable and highly instrumental in a resurgence of interest in trinitarian theology in the last 50 years are theologians from across Catholic, Reformed and Eastern Orthodox church traditions, such as Karl Rahner, Leonardo Boff, John Zizioulas, Catherine Mowry Lacugna and Colin Gunton.

[47] *The Forgotten Trinity, Vol. 1: The Report of the BCC Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today* (London: BCC, 1989), p. 20. The report notes that the term 'person' did not even appear in the *International Encyclopaedia of Social Science* until the work's demise in 1985.

[48] Zizioulas, pp. 29–36.

experienced of God, as three distinct but inherently united Persons, of one substance or being. A person in theological terms is not the same as an individual. As Gunton explains, a person's reality can 'only be understood in terms of their relations to each other. […] The persons [of God] are therefore not relations, but concrete particulars in relation to one another'.[49]

This is difficult for modern Western individuals to assimilate, as our usage of the term 'person' has come to mean something completely different; for our society now, an individual is a person, and vice versa. This is unfortunate, colouring how we can now receive this highly nuanced foundation to trinitarian thought. Zizioulas puts it thus:

> The significance of the person rests in the fact that he represents two things simultaneously which are at first sight in contradiction: particularity and communion. Being a person is fundamentally different from being an individual or a 'personality', for a person cannot be imagined in himself but only within his relationship.[50]

The other term used interchangeably with 'person' at the time of the early church's exploration of trinitarian thought was *hypostasis*. This term did have prior ontological meaning philosophically, translating approximately as the 'essence' of an individual, which related inseparably but distinctly to the concept of *ousia*, or 'being'.[51] At the First Council of Nicaea, the term *homoousia* ('one being or substance') was crucial in developing understanding of the relationship between the Father and the Son, and elevated the terminology of person as an

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[49] Gunton, p. 39.
[50] Zizioulas, p. 105.
[51] Gunton, p. 39.

ontological principle, departing from Greek cosmology and philosophy with the formulation: '*homoousios/mia ousia, tres hypostaseis*'.[52] In English, this would be understood as 'one substance or being, three persons' and served as the basis for developing an understanding of the condition and identity of 'being in relation' as revealed in personhood.

This adaptation of thinking enabled the early church to look upon God as being knowable in terms of relation: the Creator and the creature. To be, and to be in relation, became identical in Christian thought about both the personhood of God, and through the concept of *imago Dei*, that of humanity.[53]

Such a radical re-imagining by the Fathers brought inevitable challenges. Before any definition was arrived at and agreed upon at the great Ecumenical Councils, there was fluidity in understanding which gave rise to what later became understood as heterodox ideas in some churches, which effectively taught, among other views, subordinationism, tritheism, modalism and Arianism.[54] These focused the work of the Councils of Nicaea, Ephesus and Chalcedon, from which emerged a sometimes still contested orthodoxy (see earlier notes).

The contrast between this understanding of personhood and that found in *ubuntu* philosophy has already been highlighted. It is intriguing, however, to observe that the strength of *ubuntu* — its essentially relational character — is correspondent, and that *ubuntu* also largely defines the nature of the person according to relation, but from a personalist philosophy. This is a philosophy espoused by Macmurray, amongst others, where personal existence is primarily

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[52] LaCugna, pp. 8, 244.
[53] Zizioulas, p. 87.
[54] Arius asserted the nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son as *homoiousios*: the Son as similar, but not the same, substance to the Father.

constituted by relationship with other persons to form a community focused on the other, not on the self: 'a person is a heterocentric, inclusive, free, relational agent'.[55] It should be noted that whilst this philosophy is compatible in several respects with the doctrine of the Trinity, God is absent from the relational web in any initiatory sense, which seems also to be the case in the foundations of *ubuntu*.

Where does God as primary being fit into *ubuntu* as a worldview? Whilst Tutu draws upon the traditional Nguni/Bantu understanding of a creator God as the originator and sustainer of life, the most high being who has always been, it is unclear whether the concept of personhood would ever be applied to that being, and how 'christianised' Tutu has made the traditional view of God in order to formulate an *ubuntu* theology. Ogbonnaya, whose work explores an African interpretation of the Trinity, argues that perceiving the divine as a community itself reflects more accurately an African understanding of being. This is not intended to introduce polytheism where it does not exist, but simply recognises that for many Africans, their ontological reality is social not individual, and therefore God must be understood within that social framework, not as an isolated being for whom community has been added on.[56] To consider God as being of one substance but of three Persons therefore is feasible within the African relational mindset, but equally the concept of One as chief among many gods is also a reality.[57] It proves difficult from this to establish, therefore,

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[55] LaCugna, pp. 256–59.

[56] A. Okechukwu Ogbonnaya, *On Communitarian Divinity: An African Interpretation of the Trinity* (St Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1998), pp. xiii–xviii. Ogbonnaya states that God's nature must be set in relational terms, as to be alone in most African cultures is to be cursed. In an effort to drive out polytheism, seen as superstitious by Christian missionaries, Ogbonnaya reflects that the African worldview was denied, where it could have been valued for bringing fresh understanding to such a central doctrine as that of the Trinity, pp. 13–21.

[57] Ibid., p. 26.

what exactly Tutu has drawn upon in developing his *ubuntu* theology, combining as it does threads of traditional belief and understanding with orthodox Christian practice. It also fails to illuminate how relational being might be initiated by God, except that Ogbonnaya, drawing upon Tertullian's early reflections upon the nature of God as relational, recognises that emphasis is placed upon God as 'spirit', the basis of all that is, which translates directly into the concept of *ntu*, the foundation of life that can interpenetrate all living things, in an African worldview.[58]

I would argue that Tutu, in developing an *ubuntu* theology, similarly posits the nature of personhood as founded upon relation, but does not emphasise as strongly as Zizioulas, for example, that the essence of being, of relation, originates in and through God despite Tutu's focus upon all people bearing the image of God. Where such emphasis is placed upon the human relationship itself, it would seem possible that the distinct identity of the person might be subsumed, dissolved into the relation rather than being held in particularity by it. This is confirmed by writers such as Mnyaka and Mbiti, whose understanding of traditional African community is that relationship is primary over the rights or even constitution of the individual, who is subsequent or resultant from the communal relationship.[59] Tutu argues for the distinctiveness of persons within community, but this seems to contradict the more radical undertones of the traditional concept of *ubuntu* as a philosophy, where dissent, difference and individual preference are usually rejected for the greater good of

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[58] Ibid., p. 71. According to Ogbonnaya, Tertullian, an African, was the first theologian in the West to use the term 'Trinity'rbut was later charged with tritheism. His drawing upon a pluralistic African understanding of God was a step too far for the Jewish converts, who were fearful of anything that fell outside their monotheistic position.

[59] Mnyaka, p. 223, and Eze, pp. 386–88.

the community.[60] How persons inter-relate and view the 'other', then, is highly pertinent with regard to any understanding of *ubuntu* theology, and the Trinity as a true or perfect community.

The nature of the 'other' and relation: *perichoresis* and participation

When considering the nature of personhood, it would seem logical to recognise that if a person can only be a person when in relation, an 'other' is required to whom we relate, and through whom self is realised. Individuals may superficially interact with other individuals, but as persons, being itself is constituted through the relation itself. This does not lead to any loss of uniqueness. Instead, the uniqueness and the particularity of the person is preserved and enhanced through the relation. When *persons* are in communion, the 'other' remains essentially 'other'. In contrast, when individuals are held together only by social bonds, uniqueness is not preserved — the lapse into individualism, or indeed collectivism, through lack of proper relation brings a destructive streak of utility in regard to the 'other': 'What can I get out of them, what can they do for me'?[61] Zizioulas observes that, for a variety of reasons, we often operate as purely individual human beings, and suspect the 'other': 'We accept the other only in so far as he or she does not threaten our privacy or in so far as he or she is useful for our individual happiness'.[62] Without true relationship, persons can be lost in modern collectivism (the one into the many) or modern individualism (the many into the one), with the loss of true community evident in both.[63]

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[60] Metz and Gaie, pp. 277–79.
[61] Gunton, p. 96.
[62] John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness* (London: T & T Clark, 2006), p. 1.
[63] Gunton, p. 87. Examples of these dominant philosophies would be communism and Western individualism, with a utilitarian approach to community.

While humanity in the West might seek freedom *from* others in an individualistic mindset, and in a collectivist context the greater good of the many might mean a choice of freedom *instead of* others, the Trinity seems to express freedom *for* others. It is only through God, Zizioulas argues, that human beings may re-establish their personhood, and reconcile with 'others' in their life.[64] The true nature of personhood constituted by relation is primarily and most clearly expressed for the church in the Trinity, where otherness, or alterity, and communion are seen to coincide. Zizioulas writes at length on the subject, reflecting that the triunity of God does not remove diversity, but affirms otherness in freedom and mutual love.[65] From the Trinity, he argues, we learn that otherness is absolute; that is, it is not compromised by but rather is constitutive of unity, is ontological and is inconceivable apart from relationship.[66] This openness of communion and affirmation of the 'other' may even extend to human persons through participation, which will be explored later in this section.

Otherness and communion can coincide, then, and this is demonstrated perfectly and eternally by the triune God: otherness is not a threat to their unity, but the essence of it, bringing true freedom to them as Persons.[67] This mutual reciprocity, the full honouring of the particular and the relatedness within which it rests, is a fundamental and radical aspect of the coinherence of the Trinity, and may be best understood through the metaphor of *perichoresis*.[68]

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[64] Zizioulas, *Communion*, pp. 2, 9.

[65] Zizioulas, *Being*, p. 106.

[66] Zizioulas, *Communion*, p. 5.

[67] Collins, p. 123.

[68] It should be noted that some writers refer to *perichoresis* as a metaphor with a range of possible applications, while others refer to it directly as an expression of the triune relationship, that is, a facet of the relational life of the Godhead. See Johnson, pp. 214–20.

a) *Perichoresis*: origins and semantics

This metaphor was first used, it is thought, by Gregory of Nazianus in a Christological context as he contemplated the two natures of Christ,[69] a crucial use of *perichoresis* in a context other than the Trinity, which I will reflect upon shortly. Implicit in much of the Cappadocian Fathers' writings concerning the Trinity, it was later adopted by John Damascene in the 8th century CE, in an attempt to describe the unity of the three Persons of God as a defence against tritheism.[70] When used in reference to the Trinity, its essence lies in attempting to capture the dynamism of the inclusive, loving, free fellowship of the triune God: the three Persons of Father, Son and Spirit, mutually interdependent and interpenetrative, co-inhering in one another, who can only be what they are in relation to each other. There is no blurring of each Person, but also no separation.[71] This contrasts with the prevalent understanding at the time in the Eastern Church of the Father as prior, and the Son and Spirit as subordinate and therefore hierarchical in relation, aspects of which rolled onwards into the Great Councils of the 3rd century CE, and beyond.[72]

The semantics of the term are unclear: LaCugna accepts the Greek root of the word connecting it to choreography, hence the common reference to

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[69] LaCugna, p. 270.

[70] Ibid., p. 270. Richard Norris claims that Cyril of Alexandria also used the term to express reciprocal indwelling. See Norris, 'Trinity', in *The Holy Spirit: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. by Eugene F. Rogers Jr (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), pp. 19–43 (p. 39). Joas Adiprasetya and Zizioulas also recognise the contribution of Maximus the Confessor in this discourse and in the development of *perichoresis* as a theological term. See Adiprasetya, *An Imaginative Glimpse: The Trinity and Multiple Religious Participations* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), p. 105, and Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, p. 97.

[71] LaCugna, pp. 271–73.

[72] Gunton, pp. 71–80. The First Council of Nicaea (325 CE) focused upon this in order to quash Arianism, work only concluded by the Council of Constantinople in 381 CE. Zizioulas' contemporary Eastern Orthodox theology continues to draw upon the primacy of the Father, arguing that hierarchy and causality is present in the perfect community of the Trinity. See *Communion*, pp. 147–48.

perichoresis as a 'divine dance',[73] whilst the Latin equivalent, *circumincessio*, meaning 'to move around or permeate', or *circuminsessio*, meaning 'to sit around', offer different emphases.[74] Adiprasetya, however, sees the derivation of *perichoresis* as *perichoreo,* meaning 'to encompass', rather than *perichoreuo,* meaning 'to dance around'.[75] All these translations contribute well to a dynamic and balanced understanding of the love and freedom in relation shared between the three Persons of the Trinity. Moltmann, quoted in Adiprasetya, sums it up thus: '*Perichoresis* is an ancient concept that focuses on community without uniformity, and personality without individualism'.[76] In this way, *perichoresis* seems to offer something of a common ground between what later became framed as Eastern and Western theologians in their understanding of the triune God, and possibly contributing to a wider understanding of community and relational life.[77]

The metaphor has experienced a mixed reception. Its lack of any biblical foundations has meant its rejection in some quarters, whilst McFadyen and Barth, for example, have accepted and used it as a tool in their own reflections upon the Trinity.[78]

b) ***Perichoresis*** **and** ***ubuntu***

It has already been highlighted that one of Tutu's defining principles of *ubuntu* theology is recognition of the distinctiveness of persons within a framework of

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[73] It is interesting to note also Terpsichore, the Greek muse of dance, the derivation of whose name arises from *tereo* eto delight', and *choros*, a 'dance'.

[74] LaCugna, p. 272.

[75] Adiprasetya, p. 1. Adiprasetya cites Moltmann extensively, highlighting his comment that showing simultaneous movement and rest speaks well into our understanding of the Trinity, demonstrating a sense of balance and equanimity, p. 110.

[76] Ibid., p. 104.

[77] Ibid., p. 111.

[78] Collins, p. 78.

interdependence, derived from our common claim of *imago Dei.* Battle

comments that for Tutu, *ubuntu* is the human articulation of the fellowship

shared between the Persons of the Trinity, saying, 'The very nature of God

related in three persons becomes the Christian paradigm of *ubuntu'*.[79] Yet the

celebration of diversity and difference of the 'other' that Tutu embraces does not

seem to coincide with the wider precepts of *ubuntu* as expressed by fellow

African philosophers. Tutu's determination that proper relatedness affirms

individuality is evidently in part a critique of radical communitarianism he has

experienced in traditional African culture, but is also drawn from his trinitarian

understanding as it underpins his *ubuntu* theology. Yet *ubuntu*'s wider

understanding and practices clearly stem from the primacy of the community,

often diminishing individuality and otherness for the sake of the group.[80] Where

Tutu seems to be suggesting that otherness and communion can and should

mutually inform and sustain one another, as in the Trinity, many aspects of

ubuntu seem more aligned to a collectivist approach, where the 'other' becomes

a person's focus for the good of the many, not for their own benefit. Even the

strongest social bonds, then, can reduce an individual to a utilitarian unit of a

functioning group, such as that found in the Zulu system of *simunye* as

highlighted in Chapter 2 exploring *ubuntu*, where complete assimilation and

identification with the group is expected.[81]

Is *ubuntu,* therefore, a collectivist concept, where individual diversity,

autonomy and particularity cannot be held in tension, or rather a communitarian

concept, which *can* embrace and maintain individuality within a communal,

relational context? Collectivism would appear to deny the concept of

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[79] Michael Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1997), pp. 44–48, 164.
[80] For example, see Metz and Gaie, pp. 277–79.
[81] Eze, pp. 396–97.

personhood, otherness and *perichoresis* that is expressed in the *koinonia* of the Trinity, but communitarianism, unless in radical form, seems to hold being in relation with individual particularity in a creative tension. Again, the primacy of each person's relationship with God as the source of our personhood seems key in unravelling this distinction, releasing the person to rejoice in their own personhood, and in others, within an essentially relational (perichoretic) framework. Tutu's emphasis upon the centrality of *imago Dei* reveals his own desire to combine these three crucial aspects into the one concept of image-bearing: the primary nature and priority of a relationship with God, an essentially relational state of being which reflects all three Persons of the Trinity as people relate to them, and an affirmation of each person in their personhood.[82]

c) Three aspects of *perichoresis*

Until now, I have focused upon the metaphor of *perichoresis* in its application to the nature of the relational life of the Trinity, and this indeed is its most common reference. With regard to the Trinity, it is applied to three Persons of one substance, but has also been applied to the relation between two natures, and even between separate beings.

Firstly, it was historically used in reflecting upon the two natures of Christ and upon the implications of the incarnation, the clarification of which took much time and theological endeavour in the early church (see earlier notes on the Great Councils). Most specifically this description was clarified at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE, when the Person of the Son was recognised in two

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[82] Battle, *Reconciliation*, pp. 44–48 and Michael Battle, 'A Theology of Community: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu', *Interpretation*, 54 (2000), 173–82 (p. 174).

natures, the Creator and the created, that dwell or coinhere in Jesus Christ in hypostatic union, without confusion or change, but also without diminution or separation. This is a great mystery and of great significance soteriologically for the church.[83] Jesus Christ reveals both who God is, and who human beings are: his role in salvation cannot be separated from who he is as the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, and is therefore fundamental to how the doctrine of the Trinity developed and has meaning, which in turn anchors the doctrine of the incarnation.[84]

The third concept of *perichoresis* can be used to flow more widely into an understanding of a personal, human, relational life with God — Father, Son and Spirit. This is Adiprasetya's focus, using the metaphor to facilitate an understanding of 'God's cosmological embrace of the world that allows the world to participate in the inner life of God'.[85] He terms this third aspect of *perichoresis* as 'reality-*perichoresis*', crucially defining this within a participative context: as separate beings and completely 'other', God interpenetrates his human creatures, but so too can persons in some way interpenetrate that inner life of God, 'without confusion, separation or division', to adopt a phrase from the ecumenical Council of Chalcedon. This theological reflection is not new; according to Adiprasetya, the Church Fathers wrote about all three aspects of such perichoretic life, without necessarily using that term.[86] The doctrine of participation, and the essence of the Trinity as 'open', is something I will explore

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[83] A. M. Allchin, *Participation in God: A Forgotten Strand in Anglican Tradition* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse–Barlow, 1988), p. 63.

[84] Ibid., pp. 17–18, and LaCugna, p. 320.

[85] Adiprasetya, p. 1.

[86] Ibid., p. 109. See Adiprasetya's later notes on participation, quoting Athanasius as an early exponent of *theosis*, and the extensive reflections of Maximus the Confessor in the 7th century CE on deification. See Allchin, p. 69–71 for a summary.

more fully, linking with it all three aspects of perichoretic life as described above.

The metaphor of *perichoresis* as a dance seems to speak into this wider interpretation of perichoretic life, and offers an intriguing opportunity to consider the potential to be partners in such a dance, that is, of participation in the life of God, as favoured by feminist and liberation theologians, e.g., Patricia Wilson-Kastner and Leonardo Boff. LaCugna questions the theological basis for this, however, arguing that creatures are not essential to God's life of communion, and she therefore restricts this aspect of participation as falling outside the perichoretic nature of God.[87] In other words, LaCugna seems to reject Adiprasetya's use of *perichoresis* to extend to humanity in any way, in that people are unnecessary to God's perfect communion and unable to co-inhere in God, as is implied by the term. Volf also embraces *perichoresis* (or catholicity, as he prefers to term it), but perceives that 'the indwelling of other persons is an exclusive prerogative of God'.[88] There is some suspicion of those claiming in some way that humans can ever coinhere in the life of the Trinity, either now or even eschatologically; there is also understanding that all initiative, all impetus for relationship, rests with God, and that the fundamental and essential difference between God and creation is unfathomable.[89] Yet Adiprasetya argues that, all this understood, there remains in soteriological terms a question to be asked: what does salvation mean, if not (in one sense) to return to the origin of life and resting there, which must require participation of some kind? The

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[87] LaCugna, p. 275.

[88] Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 211.

[89] Adiprasetya, pp. 5, 107, and Alan J. Torrance, *Persons in Communion: An Essay in Trinitarian Description and Human Participation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), p. 363.

relation and initiative taken may be utterly asymmetrical, but the relation remains and is reciprocated nonetheless.[90] 'That God should be so intent on union with what is other than God is truly a mystery that defies explanation'.[91]

I will now explore the doctrine of participation in more detail, and conclude by reflecting upon the nature of the Trinity as 'open' and the implications that this may have for human beings as relational, image-bearing persons.

d) Participation, *theosis* and deification

Participation as a doctrine is closely linked with the doctrine of deification or *theosis* in the (Eastern) Orthodox Church,[92] and is a belief that human beings (more accurately persons) can enter into communion with God as an act of grace.[93]Anstall considers *theosis* to be 'the mechanism of deification', a voluntary reciprocity through which persons acquire an increasing likeness to God.[94] This is clearly related to the three aspects of perichoretic life outlined above: firstly, that the triune God is a relational being, co-inhering as three

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[90] Adiprasetya, pp. 112, 128.

[91] LaCugna, p. 324.

[92] Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay on the Trinity* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), pp. 349, 352, distinguishes marginally between participation and *theosis*, defining the former as something invitatory through God's grace, whilst the latter might be seen as something to be attained in the Orthodox Church by spiritual discipline, albeit requiring God's grace in doing so.

[93] It should be noted that for all parts of the church, this doctrine is not to be confused with a pagan concept of divinisation, where human beings are perceived as becoming gods or godlike, although the term is often used, confusingly, in connection with deification.

[94] Kharalambos Anstall, 'Juridical Justification Theology and a Statement of the Orthodox Teaching', in *Stricken by God? Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ*, ed. by Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 482–504, (p. 499). Anstall notes that this is an alien, even blasphemous concept in the West, as the influence of the juridical tradition means that we still hold to some kind of merit system for eternal access to God.

Persons of one substance, a relationship that may be perceived as 'open'; secondly, that Jesus Christ incarnate was fully God and part of the Godhead yet fully man, which again implies some form of openness to human beings as part of the created order; and lastly, that the incarnation allows the church as persons expressing belief and relationship in Christ to participate in the life of the Godhead in some way as the Body of Christ, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Athanasius, whose reflections could be summarised thus, encapsulated the doctrine in the early church: 'God became man, so that man might become God'.[95] In Eastern Orthodox theology, a proper *telos*, or 'end', is to be perfected in the image and likeness of God, as Christ is the true image of God. This can never be in substance as mere creatures, but in some mysterious way people can become partakers of God's communion.[96] Dart, however, reflecting on the work of Vladimir Lossky, argues that the work of redemption through Jesus Christ means that participation is not purely eschatological, but at the heart of what it means to be the Body of Christ now, the corporate reality of the church.[97]

The centrality of the incarnation is evident in this doctrine. In some traditions, it is framed in terms of ascent and descent;[98] that is, God has come down to humanity in Jesus Christ, but he has also lifted humanity up through the salvific action of Christ to be where he is, as a mediator.[99] The incarnation affirms the possibilities of humanity, creating a new level of intimacy between

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[95] Allchin, *Participation*, preface, citing Athanasius, Discourse 1, paragraph 39, 'Against the Arians'.

[96] LaCugna, *God For Us*, p. 284.

[97] Ronald S. Dart, 'Divinisation, the Church and Prophetic Politics in our Post 9/11 World', in Jersak and Hardin, *Stricken by God?*, 504–19, (pp. 504–09). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to engage more fully in the ecclesiological implications of these concepts.

[98] In early mystical tradition, For example, Dionysius, *theosis* is also referred to as 'procession' and 'return'.

[99] Allchin, p. 3. See also Julie Canlis, *Calvin's Ladder: A Spiritual Theology of Ascent and Ascension* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 55–57.

human and divine, and opens up the full implications of what it might mean to be partakers of the divine nature.[100] Canlis, exploring Calvin's theology of participation, chooses to use the term 'ascent' instead of participation, which she sees as being fraught with potential misuse and misunderstanding, possibly aligning too closely with deification or the Orthodox doctrine of *theosis*, which many Protestant theologians and churches rejected in the second millennia. Any ascent or participation, therefore, is entirely in and through Christ incarnate: 'Jesus as God is the destination to which we move; as man, the path by which we go'.[101]

    This questioning of the doctrine by the Protestant and Anglican Church has not always been universal, historically.[102] Allchin, in his work seeking to recover participation as a valid aspect of Anglican tradition, highlights the writings of Richard Hooker and Lancelot Andrewes as two early Anglican contemplatives,[103] who attempt to redress the balance between the work of Christ and a reciprocal relationship through the action of the Spirit, which bestows honour and glory on lowly human beings. For Hooker, the grace of God meant that God is in a person, and that person is in God, remaining distinct but no longer separate.[104] Later, the Oxford Movement similarly reaffirmed the doctrine of participation as foundational to any understanding of salvation and what it means to be partakers of the Holy Spirit.[105]

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[100] Allchin, p. 63.

[101] Canlis, p. 4, and p. 124 quoting Calvin's *Institutes III.2.1*.

[102] The Anglican Church, coming to understand itself in its early history as the *via media*, means that in its breadth of expression and history, some members see themselves as Catholic.

[103] It should be noted that Hooker was one of the chief framers of the Anglican Settlement, as reflected in '*Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie*' (1597).

[104] Allchin, pp. 7–13.

[105] Ibid., p. 49.

It soon becomes clear that if the incarnation is at the heart of participation, so too is the work of the Holy Spirit, the agent enabling individual human beings or, more accurately, the church as a community of faithful persons, to enter into and realise that relational life in God. The aim of the Christian life must be a similarly trinitarian outworking of this ascent — seeking to move towards the Father, of participating in Christ, the means of which is the work of the Holy Spirit.[106] LaCugna goes further, and asserts that the Holy Spirit deifies human beings, making persons holy and incorporating them into the very life of God; this, she contends, is the *koinonia* of the Spirit.[107] The different theological approaches to pneumatology and ecclesiology in what have historically been termed the Eastern and Western churches have myriad implications, then, not least for an understanding of the Trinity, but also for any understanding of what life 'in Christ' can mean.

Both Eastern and Western theologians focus upon the centrality of relationship, but their concepts are undergirded by differing worldviews and interpretations of personhood, as noted previously. Canlis, for example, reflects upon the use of the term *koinonia* by Paul in the New Testament as a way of conceiving the relationship between God and human beings, arguing that it fully expresses participation, indwelling or communion in a way that our impoverished English translation of 'fellowship' cannot impart, and which Christians struggle to 'create' in the West because of deeply rooted individualism, and punctiliousness (in Reformed theology) in maintaining clear delineation between human and divine.[108] *Koinonia* is used by Paul, John and

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[106] Ibid., pp. 3–4, and Canlis, p. 124.

[107] LaCugna, pp. 296–98.

[108] Canlis, pp. 1, 2, 6–8, 13. Canlis, pp. 15–16, 62, 65, defends Calvin's underlying argument, that although he strongly emphasised God's utter transcendence and

Peter in their New Testament letters in a range of ways, and this is explicitly affirmed in participatory terms in 2 Peter 1. 4, and in 2 Corinthians 3. 18.[109] LaCugna also focuses upon the *koinonia* of the Spirit, as seen above, as a powerful encounter with a personal God, the means by which persons are invited and incorporated into divine life through Christ, but 'at the same time it is also invitation and incorporation into new relationship with each other, as we are gathered together by the Spirit into the body of Christ'.[110]

For Zizioulas, the work of the Spirit in persons must be relational, therefore *theosis* is a transformation of biological persons into an ecclesial personhood, a true communion here on earth, which prepares and points this ecclesial personhood towards future and complete realisation of an eternal communion with God.[111] The motivation for this action of God? For Zizioulas amongst others, for example Moltmann, it is love: an outpouring of ecstatic (outward/other facing) love by God, which is the reason and the fulfilment of relation, and that can be experienced with God and with other persons.[112]

This is an act of love on God's part that is hard to comprehend:

> [T]he Trinity, though needing nothing and no-one and being in that sense 'absolute', quite naturally *does what it is.* For mere love's sake it shares being and motion and life with a created order that participates in a multitude of different ways in God's own life, and, in the case of 'personal' creatures, can

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otherness and our own unworthiness, this was merely his foundation for promoting how participation might function between Creator and creature, and therefore how two 'unlikes' can be properly related.

[109] Allchin, p. 6, Canlis, pp. 9–10 and Smail, pp. 275–76.

[110] LaCugna, p. 319.

[111] Zizioulas, *Communion*, p. 148. The limitations of this chapter preclude exploring this ecclesiological stance and its implications in further detail.

[112] LaCugna, pp. 264–65, 284.

image the very manner of God's being by being caught up in the identity of the

Word of God through the Father's gift of the Spirit. (Italics mine)[113]

Tutu also echoes Zizioulas here, emphasising the motivation of love that founds the relational essence of the triune God to desire connectedness with the created world. He identifies this primarily in the acts of creation and the incarnation, which Tutu perceives as resulting from an outpouring of love and self-emptying, known as *kenosis.*[114] To bear God's image, Tutu claims, is to be marked by love, which has the power not only to transform self-understanding but also any relationships as persons.[115] Tutu refers to persons, then, as God's viceroys or ambassadors; he does not focus upon the functional role of this aspect of *imago Dei,* but simply urges that every person should be treated with respect and honour. Intriguingly, in the light of this current exploration of participation, Tutu does not extrapolate this further. He emphasises to some degree the foundation of relationship with God, and of an essentially relational nature in humanity, but not the responsibility of being *theonomous* persons (persons founded and created for reflecting a relationship with God to others — an icon of sorts).[116] Instead, he chooses to remain within a more tenable inclusivist framework of interdependence, prioritising his vision to free South Africans to see the 'other' as a person, without necessarily exploring what other gifts and responsibilities may come with true personhood, or what the *koinonia* of the Spirit may mean for personal interdependence.[117] Participation may well

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[113] Norris, 'Trinity', in Rogers, p. 40.

[114] Battle, *Reconciliation*, p. 60.

[115] Ibid., p. 60.

[116] LaCugna, p. 347, uses this term.

[117] It may mean, for example, a sense of exclusion in identifying some people as included in the *koinonia* of the Spirit, that is, the church because of their faith stance, and others who are not. Tutu focuses on the most generic elements that

be part of Tutu's ecclesiology, but it does not appear to play a part in his *ubuntu* theology.

God has chosen to invite persons to share in his life and being, and this is intrinsically reflected in a self-emptying of Godself in the *imago Dei*, that is, into the 'personal' creatures that are human beings. Other theologians such as Westermann, as I have alluded to earlier, refer to people as God's counterparts in bearing *imago Dei* which implies a parallel responsibility or function (see earlier notes on the functional interpretation of Genesis 1), and a highly correlative relationship in order to fulfil it. This would suggest, then, that to carry God's likeness might imply a framework of relationship where participation, and possibly *kenosis*, is inevitable. According to Canlis, Calvin certainly thought so: his reading of Genesis 1-3 focuses upon *imago Dei* as a specific blessing bestowed upon human beings in order to align people fully in their relationship with the Creator.[118] Torrance goes further, linking *imago Dei*, not to any natural state to be claimed generally by individuals (as perhaps Tutu would assert as part of his inclusivist intention), but to the reconciling creativity of God in Christ Jesus as the second Adam, and that participation in the ongoing, dynamic *koinonia* of the Spirit constitutes people as the *imago Dei* — a new creation, moving towards fulfilment in the eschaton.[119] This 'completes the circle' of the role as persons being image-bearers: as mere human beings, Torrance argues, one cannot truly possess or claim *imago Dei*, but in Christ Jesus who is the complete image of God, persons in relationship with the triune God are thus

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he can draw out in *imago Dei,* quite understandably to be as inclusive as possible. See conclusion at the end of this chapter.
[118] Canlis, pp. 74–79.
[119] Torrance, pp. 367–68.

invited into participating in his completion of them as image-bearers, through the Spirit.[120]

This dynamic and invitatory characteristic of the communion of the triune God is referred to as the 'open' Trinity, most notably by Moltmann whose work Adiprasetya uses extensively to develop his concept of reality-*perichoresis*. The ecstatic love that is the foundation of a Christian understanding of the cross necessitated in Moltmann's mind the need to embed this in a trinitarian understanding of a God who can suffer, a communion that is willing to enter and give of itself to other beings.[121] The Trinity can be seen to be therefore always communal, dynamic and open to the 'other' (in this context created beings) because such a *koinonia* cannot be a self-enclosed and exclusive unity and still remain true to its essence.[122] I will refer to this sense of openness in the Trinity as 'hospitality' in my conclusion.

This invitation to participation seems to require little of those persons who respond, with all impetus and delighted creativity, grace and self-giving deriving from God. Yet there is an ineluctable response by those persons who would claim to be in the *koinonia* of the Spirit: there is a response of praise, of doxology, which is observed to be inevitable. For example, Torrance and LaCugna are cognisant of the Spirit's agency in enabling the church to worship.[123] It is an additional gift of grace, as Torrance asserts that worship is at

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[120] Smail, p. 277. Note that Smail's position is relatively conservative and exclusive theologically, compared to Tutu.

[121] Adiprasetya, pp. 115–18.

[122] Ibid., pp. 125, 127. The famous Rublev icon of the three angelic visitors to Abraham, now commonly referred to as an icon of the Trinity, attempts to express inclusion into the triune communion of balance, harmony and love, and is a relatively early example of a visual representation and interpretation of the hospitable being of God. For a helpful reflection on art and trinitarian thought, see Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, Chapter 5.

[123] Torrance, pp. 314–15, and LaCugna, pp. 341–47.

the heart of the relational life of the Trinity, already taking place and fulfilled within their communion, and the church is brought by the Spirit to participate in this.[124] LaCugna elaborates on this concept, reflecting that doxology, both lamentation and exultation, simply reflects the complete commitment and involvement of all of life turned to God in relationship, concluding that 'doxology is thus the animating power of right relationship […]. [W]e were created for the purpose of glorifying God by means of the whole network of our relationships'.[125]

This leads LaCugna to suggest that any participation in the divine life must be reflected and demonstrated in a life of love and communion with others, in orthopraxis that serves the reign of God in the widest sense.[126] This, I believe, embraces and undergirds what it means to fulfil a sense of calling in response to *imago Dei*, to be relational beings exercising true personhood and to practise the *koinonia* of the Spirit, both in the church and in the wider kingdom.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to explore the key concepts behind Tutu's *ubuntu* theology: the significance of *imago Dei,* the theological concept of personhood and relation as related to the doctrine of the Trinity, and subsequent implications for human relations with others and with God. In order to do so, I have employed the metaphor of *perichoresis* as a tool to examine more closely what coinherence, the particularity of the person, and the communion of the Trinity might mean for human persons in a relationship with

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[124] Ibid., pp. 314–15.
[125] LaCugna, pp. 341–47.
[126] Ibid., p. 383.

God and with each other. I have explored the resulting invitatory aspect of the 'open' Trinity, by reflecting on the doctrine of participation.

It is clear that Tutu's interpretation of *imago Dei* is firmly placed within the relational interpretation model, and is probably so for several reasons. Like Barth (according to Middleton), Tutu has also been strongly influenced by his context, and indeed his *ubuntu* theology would be deemed a highly contextualised theology.[127] Barth may have focused upon a relational reading of the Genesis 1 text due to the rising tide of social nationalism in Germany;[128] similarly, Tutu has sought answers in Christian Scripture to enable restoration of relational life in a fragmented and alienated society under apartheid and its aftermath. In combining traditional cultural practices of communitarian life (*ubuntu*) with a scriptural basis for relational accountability, the inherent value and importance of every person is potentially established. This is not to say that Tutu has rejected the functional interpretation of *imago Dei* that most Hebrew Scripture scholars would now accept; indeed, he often refers to human beings as God's viceroys or ambassadors.[129] Instead, I believe that Tutu sees this function as secondary, playing a part in affirming a sense of identity for all as human beings once more, despite the regime imposed; the need for a conceptual relational reconstruction was primary and necessary, and simply enhanced by a sense of 'royal calling' or agency.

Tutu's theology is also strongly based upon the doctrine of the incarnation as an act of love outpoured for humanity, which affirms a sense of identity through the mystery of God 'choosing to dwell amongst us', identifying

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[127] All theology should be contextual, it could be argued, but *ubuntu* theology is particularly characterised by context, which will be of importance in considering its transferrable qualities in the next chapter.

[128] Middleton, pp. 17–18, 93, 186.

[129] Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (London: Rider Books, 1999), p. 11.

himself with a particular culture and life. That the Son should become powerless or 'emptied' for human salvation is an emotive model, and for Tutu is reinforcement of relational life for humanity as persons.[130] The incarnation promotes a sense of power or agency that is significant for the oppressed; this is a focal argument that liberation theologians have embraced, and a theme to which I shall return to in my conclusion.

I believe that, in his efforts to remain as inclusive as possible, Tutu does not explore the full implications of participation as part of his *ubuntu* theology, although it should be noted that this may not be so in his general ecclesiology, which I have not discussed here. Rather, he chooses to apply his theological model of *ubuntu*, that is, a human identity forged into personhood from bearing the image of a relational God, with the hope that an interdependent, reconciled life might be accepted by all peoples, restoring a society previously shattered by division and hatred. Whilst choosing to be so inclusive is understandable, laudable and probably essential in the context of post-apartheid South Africa, I would contend that this leaves Tutu's theology, shaped around *ubuntu*, as somewhat depleted as to the basis of agency he has formulated.

I would contend that, by omitting a sense of progression in his theology which leads to an understanding of communion with the Trinity (through the desire of the Father, the work of the Son and the agency of the Spirit),[131] the implication remains that human effort/agency alone has the potential to resolve and redeem the tragedy of the South African context. By contrast, I believe that,

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[130] See also Peter Abelard's work exploring the affective nature of the atonement on moral behaviour and relationship with God (moral influence theory).

[131] Tutu does indicate that he sees the church as witness to the world of the fellowship of the Trinity by the church's own expression of *koinonia*, but this seems to be an addition to the main thrust of *ubuntu* theology, and refers to the distinctive nature of the 'other' that all should enjoy in the three Persons of the Trinity and in each person. See Battle, *Reconciliation*, pp. 44–48.

although human agency clearly plays its part in an outworking of a life of love shared with others, the primary agent at work is that of the triune God. The bestowal of *imago Dei,* the experience of relational life and personhood and of participating in the life of God, is all grace; all is gift. Certainly the life of doxology hoped for in the *koinonia* of the Spirit is for the church to shape, and may well be best demonstrated through the reconciliation and forgiveness that Tutu aspires to see as indications of relational life throughout South Africa. However, my understanding is that these are marks of life emerging from a relational life with God, and should be recognised as therefore beyond an individual's own action solely, and instead as a gift to be received which can then be implemented and shared.

By way of summarising this chapter, which has involved somewhat technical discussions concerning the nature of relation, personhood and otherness, it seems appropriate to focus on two particular themes which thread themselves throughout the chapter: these are hospitality and agency.

The hospitality or welcome of God is expressed primarily as blessing in the creation narratives, that all that is made is 'good'. Blessing seems to frame the scriptural basis of *imago Dei* in Genesis 1, the very essence of relational being and indeed the 'royal calling' as God's representatives that bearing the image seems to imply. As Middleton reflects, the key questions 'Who are we?' and 'Where are we?' are answered in a very distinctive way in Genesis 1: we are creatures, male and female, made in God's image and likeness and generously placed in a good creation, part of a peaceable kingdom. Emerging out of his love for what he had made, this is what God intended.[132] By placing the creation narrative at the start of the canon, Middleton argues, 'the text

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[132] Middleton, pp. 264–66.

signals the Creator's original intent for shalom and blessing at the outset of human history, prior to the rise of human (or divine) violence'.[133] The soteriological role of Jesus Christ in the incarnation aims to reinstate the shalom that has been broken, and by co-inhering as both God and human, the Son extends blessing, welcome and affirmation to human beings once more; this is fulfilled in part as the Body of Christ, the *telos* being participation in God, when the image will be made complete.[134] Boersma concludes, 'The fullness of the kingdom of peace — the Church and all creation brought to their final *telos* — will witness deified human beings participating in the unconditional hospitality of God'.[135]

The nature of the Trinity, therefore, is seen to bless, and this can be expressed through 'hospitality', where the three Persons of the Godhead are perceived to continually give of themselves in mutual indwelling, and in an outpouring of love and of self to humanity and the created order in Jesus Christ, through the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection. This may also be reflected in a human imaging of God, as LaCugna has suggested.[136]

So what might this mean in terms of agency or power, particularly in the face of violence or conflict? God's agency is focused, it would seem, upon an expression of blessing and freedom towards all of creation, but this is not the experience of many as they reflect upon the Hebrew Scriptures, or indeed upon their life. The Son as liberator from primordial, historical and systemic evil and violence is a powerful paradoxical image for the world's powerless and

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[133] Ibid., p. 269. Middleton, pp. 264–66, also notes the contrast with other ANE cosmogonies, which often arise from chaos and develop through violence.

[134] Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), pp. 17–18, 260.

[135] Ibid., p. 261.

[136] LaCugna, p. 319.

oppressed, and has forged a model of liberation theology, particularly with respect to the apartheid regime. The struggle against evil is real, but some theologians connected to the movement (notably Tutu for the purpose of this chapter) argue that the goodness of God is *more* real, and to this end Tutu's *ubuntu* theology is founded, I believe, upon hospitality first and foremost, and agency arising from the basis of that hospitality. By this I mean to conclude that Tutu's *ubuntu* theology must be fundamentally shaped in and through the *imago Dei*, of renewing and redeeming how one person perceives another, and from this a sense of agency is revealed. Such paradoxical agency or use of power is based upon exercising a radical interdependence in place of vengeance or escalation of violence: this is an act of generosity and love that reveals each person to be truly God's representatives, sharing power *with* rather than power *over* another, reflecting the nature of God as revealed in Genesis 1.[137] This is what we are made for, because this is what we are made from, and is fulfilled, I believe, through participation in the communion of God, the *koinonia* of the Spirit.

In the next chapter I hope to draw this exploration into a framework of practical theology that will allow me to conclude, in the light of fieldwork analysis, what, if anything, can be transferred from *ubuntu* theology into my own context of a Western contemporary church community.

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[137] Middleton, pp. 278, 294–97.

Chapter 6

Conclusion: Developing an Applied *Ubuntu* Theology

'How can we be people together?'[1]

Introduction

It has been my intention throughout this research to explore what might be considered one of the most fundamental human questions in theological terms: what does it mean to be a person, and how do people relate to each other and to God (specifically in a Western contemporary church context as in urban Britain)? By reviewing *ubuntu* and Desmond Tutu's applied *ubuntu* theology, I have sought to examine personhood and relational life through an African lens, questioning whether this might provide an alternative model for the contemporary Western church in its desire to live counter-culturally as *ekklesia* in the *koinonia* of the Holy Spirit.

Through my investigations, which have included an exploration of paradigmatic frameworks, analysis of fieldwork and a theological critique of *ubuntu* theology in dialogue with some key biblical concepts and Christian doctrines, I have become convinced that there is much to learn from a communitarian worldview such as *ubuntu*, both generally and critically. *Ubuntu* sheds light on issues for the Western church such as true interdependence which, in my opinion, urgently need addressing, whilst Tutu's applied theology offers many helpful and challenging insights into the nature of a person's relationship with God and the emerging responsibilities of reconciliation and forgiveness that he believes this implies. Tutu's principal focus, an applied reading of *imago Dei*, confirms the unique value of every human being and the

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[1] 'Catherine', Tr. I. 1123.

primary relatedness to a relational, triune God. This in turn allows each human being to be seen as a person, and to know both particularity in their personhood and interconnectedness, which is reflected in appropriate attitudes towards the 'other'.

Contextual, practical and applied theology

Tutu's *ubuntu* theology is highly contextualised, driven in its initial formation by an urgent and legitimate desire to see the apartheid regime and its consequences eradicated, and instead offering an alternative representation of relational life for South Africa to that of continued segregation, suspicion and retribution. As I have previously reflected, I am in agreement with Swinton and Mowat (and Tutu) that theology must be contextual and rooted in time and place as an interpretive, dialectic process that engages with revealed knowledge of God and his activity in the world.[2] This is what I seek as I draw together concluding thoughts on my research, based within a formulation of practical theology.

I do not perceive that Tutu is operating from within a practical theological framework, however, but an applied framework. I understand applied theology to mean that particular aspects of revelation, for example as expressed through Scripture and Christian tradition, are taken as authoritative, and directionally applied, in this case through the sociological construct of *ubuntu.* My understanding of practical theology is that of a thoroughly dialectic discipline: it allows members of the church to think theologically about life, ministry and mission in order to reflect on belief within action and vice versa, creating

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[2] John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2011), pp. 23–24.

theological reflection in the interplay of the two, through the agency of the Holy Spirit.[3] I would contend that Tutu has sought to apply revealed knowledge of the *imago Dei*, the Trinity and a derived concept of personhood within the South African context, in the hope of bringing significant social and spiritual change. By contrast, my intention has been to develop or explore an ecclesiology using *ubuntu* in dialogue with a biblically informed understanding of personhood and community, through the lens of trinitarian theology and the doctrine of participation, in order to draw together more closely both understanding and praxis concerning the church's relational life as a transcendent yet earthly body.[4] As Swinton and Mowat observe, 'Practical theology has a *telos* and a goal that transcends the boundaries of human experience and expectation'.[5]

Tutu is not, however, formulating a simple application of scriptural and traditional Christian beliefs in the South African context. As indicated previously, complex historical threads of Christian narrative run through Tutu's country, including that of liberation theology which Tutu would claim to a greater degree for himself. The systematisation and academic format of theology in post-Enlightenment Europe left little room for any concept of practical theology as I have described it above. Until recently, theory and practice have been treated as separate entities for a large portion of church history, and yet this division was an alien concept in the early church, as previously discussed. According to Graham, Walton and Ward, for many years pastoral or practical theology in Christian ministry 'were not regarded as generative of theological insight, but

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[3] Helen Cameron and Catherine Duce, *Researching Practice in Ministry and Mission: A Companion* (London: SCM Press, 2013), p. xi.

[4] Lewis S. Mudge, *Rethinking the Beloved Community: Ecclesiology, Hermeneutics and Social Theory* (Lanham, MA: University Press of America, 2001), pp. 7, 11–12.

[5] Swinton and Mowat, p. 9.

were merely applications of truth found within systematic theology'.[6] The

explosive entry of liberation theology in the 20th century, alongside the

development of practical theology as a discipline in the West brought freedom

in all sorts of ways, not least the liberty for all people to rediscover theory, belief,

context and practice without division or the siphoning off of theological concepts

into a purely academic realm.[7] The significance of personal experience, power

and agency for the oppressed is a key liberationist theme that is evident in

Tutu's construction of an *ubuntu* theology, and is something to which I will

return later.

I would conclude firstly, therefore, that there are elements of an applied

ubuntu theology that might be helpfully reviewed or even implemented in a

wider global context such as urban Britain, and I will explore these in the

following section. Yet it is more significant and of greater import to the Western

church, I believe, to retrieve or develop a practical theology around its

ecclesiology, based upon a fuller and more vibrant understanding of

personhood and the agency and hospitality of the 'open' Trinity, in which the

people of God are invited to participate as part of *koinonia.* This should be

constructed, I contend, through theological reflection based upon a

hermeneutical endeavour that is generated from all four aspects of revelation as

understood in orthodox church practice.[8] Without a revelation of *koinonia* that

draws upon Scripture, tradition, reason and experience, any ecclesiology of the

Western contemporary church may lose its identity and purpose to nurture and

sustain the people of God in their context. Like a poorly pitched tent, an

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[6] Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM Press, 2005), p. 3.

[7] Ibid., p. 4.

[8] Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Sources* (London: SCM Press, 2007), pp. 2, 28.

absence of any of these four principal 'guy lines' will mean that tent has less chance of survival in a storm.

Hermeneutic enterprise and practical theology

Every theological discipline entails interpretation, and practical theology is no different, offering as it does an interpretation of the practices of church and world in dialogue.[9] Hermeneutics, the interpretation of texts, can be seen as a legitimate analytical tool to be used by practical theologians in order to interpret the 'text' of social/cultural/ecclesial experience and activity, as part of the wider dialectic process.

Ecclesiology, the theological study of the church, is the key theoretical perspective that has framed my research. In sociological terms, the Christian church might be read as a social construction that enables people with common beliefs, values and morals to gather collectively for the purpose of Christian worship and identification. For those of us who would claim to be members of the global church, this is insufficient as an interpretation to express what the church is because it give no weight to the essentially revelatory and mysterious nature of the church as the Body of Christ, nor any recognition of the central relationship with God as Trinity that must inform and direct its identity and purpose, both in this world and in its final *telos*, or ultimate purpose. Using hermeneutics as an interpretive tool has proved most helpful in the intersection of the two paradigmatic frameworks of interpretivism and revelation, which I have attempted to hold in tension. Any development of an understanding of *koinonia* must be an interpretive construction, but it is one that is primarily

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[9] Swinton and Mowat, pp. 11–12.

shaped by revelation, the understanding and reception of God's activity and purposes in the world, to which I have already alluded.

To 'read' *ubuntu*, therefore, is to interpret a sociological construct that is highly contextual and operates solely, it would seem, within a communitarian worldview such as that found across sub-Saharan Africa. My review of literature on *ubuntu* as a human quality or characteristic, a philosophy or a worldview which was then related to subsequent fieldwork analysis, has led me to identify several key themes that are pertinent to any development of an informed understanding of personhood within the *koinonia* that I am seeking.

First and foremost, *ubuntu* can be interpreted as a social framework of interdependence, where the self is always in relation to an 'other', and identity is formed through that relatedness, within community. The community is prior to, and is formative of, the individual for many writing on the subject, although other African philosophers would take a more moderate line and argue that they are mutually developmental.[10] This primacy of interdependence was confirmed by the participants interviewed, who expressed their own sense of identity in wholly relational terms, only referring to an individual 'person' negatively when describing a non-practitioner of *ubuntu*, or, intriguingly, to themselves when in a UK context. From this fundamental concept of interdependence is derived a strong moral code of belonging, with identifiable social consequences for those who do not belong for any reason, and a crucial sense of accountability, which should be exercised by a person aware of their societal responsibilities within an *ubuntu* setting. The prescriptive nature of *ubuntu* is highly moralistic, yet vague: it is hard to separate out espoused or normative behaviour from what

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[10] See, for example, Michael Onyebuchi Eze, 'What is African Communitarianism? Against Consensus as a Regulative Ideal', *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 27 (2008), 386–99 (pp. 386–88).

may be actually happening in reality, or who, in truth, dictates what is acceptable behaviour in the first place. The stakes seem to be high in a communitarian society: to lose sight of the priority of relational life through non-practice of *ubuntu* indicates a potential loss of one's sense of identity, and certainly a breaking of trust and of the experience of belonging with others.

Most social scientists working in the field of community studies would concur with the most fundamental aspects of identity and community as espoused in *ubuntu*, for example, that humans are by nature essentially relational and social beings.[11] My reading suggests this to be a universal and indisputable truth; however, there is a marked contrast in the contexts in which human relatedness must operate globally, between the framework of a communitarian worldview such as that of *ubuntu* and that of a Western worldview such as is found in the UK, where the priority of the individual has largely obscured any relational foundation to human identity. A person in *ubuntu* terms is one who relates appropriately to and within the community, honouring and maintaining relationship through enacting accountability and demonstrating hospitality to others, sacrificing their own rights and choices for the good of the group if necessary. A person in Western terms is an individual, an autonomous, rational and self-constructed being with freedom to choose social interaction and accountability according to purpose.

How, then, can *ubuntu* transfer as a principle across this chasm of difference? It should be noted at this point that there are many communities living within the UK context, both generally and within the church, for whom the communitarian worldview is their own, and that to live within the individualistic

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[11] See, for example, J. Wentzel van Huyssteen and Erik P. Wiebe (eds), *In Search of Self: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Personhood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011).

society of modern Britain is an experience that causes great frustration and difficulty. I believe that these communities and the multicultural character of the church in urban Britain may play a vital part in any development of a more authentic relational life, and I will comment on this further when outlining my vision for a new understanding of *koinonia*.

One option that may allow transferrence of *ubuntu* across cultures is to meld two worldviews together in some capacity, as Tutu has attempted, I believe, in his development of an *ubuntu* theology. The four principles that he uses to summarise an *ubuntu* theology reflect a combination of the fundamental communitarian attitudes towards relatedness, but seek at the same time to preserve and celebrate the uniqueness of the individual in their particularity, which would appear to be drawn from a more Western understanding of self and personhood. Tutu has worked hard, I believe, to find a *via media* that holds the best of human potential in both unity and diversity. However, it is upon revelation through Scripture that Tutu has primarily focused, developing his application of a relational interpretation of *imago Dei* in order to overthrow the enforced separateness of apartheid.

In combining these worldviews, nevertheless, I believe he has underplayed the more negative or costly aspects of communitarian life (the sacrifice of time and personal choice/liberty), and those of individualism (the sacrifice of belonging and connectedness), so that this applied theology lacks conviction in either camp. I have already speculated in my thematic analysis that the sacrifice of time and personal choice, held within a framework of accountability and a prescribed code of behaviour, are not attractive prospects for the majority of those living in Western society — the cost is too great, even for the benefit of a gained sense of belonging and connectedness. In sub-

Saharan Africa, prioritising personal choice that celebrates one's differences would seem to lead quickly to an exclusion from the community, should its primacy be deposed in such a way and consensus threatened. Taking any exclusive position as an individual or focusing upon dissent or difference, specifically in the South African context, would be a theoretical position fraught with difficulties, and not, I suspect, what Tutu intends by his highly inclusive proposals.

I would suggest, then, that the significant contribution that Tutu's applied theology offers outside sub-Saharan Africa is that of an elevated ideal of interdependence, empowered by God and enacted through human agency for the Western church to reflect upon. It may even stand as a prophetic witness, a benchmark that challenges any future development of Western ecclesiology, forcing the church to consider carefully its relational life with humility and with thoughtful attention to all aspects of revelation. However, I do not believe it is something that society at large would even contemplate adopting for the reasons described above, and might only be considered transferrable to Western church contexts when the focus falls upon the fundamental elements of revelation that it rests upon, which I will explore in the following section. Neither Western society nor the Western church can, in my opinion, operate strictly within the confines of an applied *ubuntu* theology, for the very reason that it would be applied onto, and into, a social context that has significantly different foundations which cannot support a communitarian construct directly imposed upon it. The church may rediscover, however, with radical theological reflection and courage, patterns of relational life that derive from more ancient foundations than that of the modern society in which they currently find

themselves. It is to these foundations, which Tutu has used in developing an *ubuntu* theology, that I now turn.

Hospitality and agency: the 'open' Trinity

In establishing his *ubuntu* theology upon the basis of *imago Dei,* Tutu has effectively claimed that God has made humanity for relationship, firstly with Godself and also with others. God has initiated personhood — a person being understood as one who holds particularity in their identity but only within the context of relationship — by creating human beings as his representatives and with whom he relates out of his own relational, personal existence. Recognising every human being as bearing God's image and therefore as God's viceroys or ambassadors must, Tutu argues, impact how every person then treats the 'other': this was his hope and intention, his basis for calling for forgiveness and reconciliation in the post-apartheid era.[12]

Yet without true relationship — the context where the particularity of the person is enhanced through unity with the 'other' whilst free to remain fully 'other' — persons remain as individuals and see the 'other' as a threat, or of use, in some way.[13] In contrast to this impoverished relationship, Battle describes the Holy Trinity as 'the Christian paradigm of *ubuntu*',[14] which reveals the three Persons of the Trinity perfectly demonstrating this freedom for the 'other' in a loving triune relationship of coinherence, or *perichoresis.* *Perichoresis* implies reciprocity, interdependence and inclusion, but also a

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[12] Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (London: Rider Books, 1999), p. 11.

[13] See Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), p. 96 and John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness* (London: T & T Clark, 2006), p. 1.

[14] Michael Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1997), p. 164.

sense of welcome and openness, as to be 'closed' would be a denial of the essential nature of the communion.[15] It is the invitatory or 'open' aspect of the Trinity, a contentious idea for many Protestant theologians, which forms the grounds for my emerging understanding of true *koinonia* through the doctrine of participation. I will develop this further in the following section, but for now I wish to explore the themes of hospitality and agency which, I will argue, can be construed as the basis of an understanding of *imago Dei,* the Trinity and *koinonia,* and may prove helpful in clarifying further the place of an applied *ubuntu* theology in a Western church context.

The Hebrew and Christian Scriptures could be read thematically using the dual lenses of hospitality and agency throughout, not least, in the case of Christianity, with regard to the nature of relationship between God as Father, Son and Spirit, between the triune God and humanity, and within humanity itself. This was my conclusion, having explored in some detail the concepts and interpretations from Scripture and Christian tradition of identity, personhood and community as indicated above. Revelatory knowledge gained through Scripture, alongside that of tradition, reason and experience, indicates that God is ultimately hospitable, and is the primary agent in the created world in relational terms. This can be seen most clearly through the act of creation itself, as portrayed through the account in Genesis 1, signalling in the form of a prologue the intent of a creator God to bless, and to bring into being a good creation.[16] It is also demonstrated through the metaphorical imagery of *perichoresis* used

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[15] Joas Adiprasetya, *An Imaginative Glimpse: The Trinity and Multiple Religious Participations* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), pp. 115–18.

[16] J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005), pp. 264–66.

throughout Christian tradition, illuminating three aspects of relationship pertaining to God and human personhood.

Firstly, implicit in the perichoretic metaphor in respect of the Holy Trinity is that the triune communion of God is perfect and complete, and yet God chooses to create and to seek out relationship with his creatures: no other 'dance partner' is required, but all are desired and invited. Secondly, Jesus as the Second Person of the Trinity indwells two natures in hypostatic union, drawing the Creator and the created indivisibly together in the incarnation as an act of outpoured love. This act deeply affirms humanity and offers a new understanding of relationship between God and his creation, fulfilled in Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. Lastly, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, an unequal but reciprocal invitation and relationship is initiated where God as Creator chooses to dwell within his creation, and in a particular and significant way, in the church through faith and relationship with Christ. Thus, in an utterly asymmetric and mysterious way, human persons might participate in the life of God's communion.[17]

This perichoretic community of the triune God is beautifully and powerfully represented visually in the famous icon thought to have been painted by Andrei Rublev in Russia during the15th century CE. Depicting the three angelic visitors who stayed with Abraham by the oak of Mamre, it is usually read as a representation of the Godhead giving of themselves in coinherent love and communion, yet invitatory in their expression to humanity. The symbolic imagery offers much to encourage the conviction that the Trinity should be perceived as 'open' in some way. Of particular interest for the purpose of my research is the positioning of the three persons and the physical space left in

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[17] Adiprasetya, pp. 1, 112, 128.

the foreground of the painting, drawing the worshipper to notice the sacrificial chalice set on the table around which the three persons are seated. This certainly extends a sense of welcome, indicating an invitation to come, to know and to love, but also to experience or to participate in the communion of the Father, Son and Spirit as they are portrayed in their triune relational love and knowledge.

To focus upon the hospitality and agency of God to this extent is not to say that human beings take no active role or agency in a life of faith: as the Body of Christ, the aim of the life of the church can be said to be a movement towards the Father by choosing to participate in Christ, through allowing the Holy Spirit to work in its life.[18] Such a life, that of true personhood, comes with responsibilities; for example, LaCugna considers our responsibilities to be significant, as *theonomous* persons — those called to be founded in, and reflective of, a relationship with God to others.[19] Yet the foundation of this life is surely one of gracious gift, accepting the primary nature of God's invitation, hospitality and agency, to enable the Body of Christ to be just that.

This freedom to accept all as gift from God stands in stark contrast to some underlying beliefs that the Western church may not even be aware that it holds. For example, and especially pertinent to this research, Canlis has observed that Christians often struggle in the West to grasp the full meaning of *koinonia*, partly because the English translation of 'fellowship' is an inadequate one, but also because of our impoverished experience of relational life in

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[18] A. M. Allchin, *Participation in God: A Forgotten Strand in Anglican Tradition* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1988), pp. 3–4.

[19] Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (Chicago: Harper San Francisco, 1992), p. 347.

modern times.[20] This means that much energy and human agency is used in an effort to 'create' fellowship, rather than receiving it as a gift of God's love, hospitality and the status of true personhood that he has bestowed. In addition, a deeply entrenched juridical system might make it difficult for the church in the West to accept fully that individuals do not earn their way to an eternal life with God, Western Protestant theology latterly being so strongly influenced by the penal substitution theory of the cross.[21]

The sense and experience of individual human agency is very strong in society and the church in the West, which could be a disadvantage in understanding or receiving both God's supreme agency and his hospitality; it appears that little has disturbed this autonomous state for many, in recent history. Equally, any sense and experience of powerlessness is deeply problematic, and I believe plays a part in how God's agency and hospitality have been explicated by Tutu in his applied *ubuntu* theology. Hospitality, invitation or openness to the 'other' deriving from a desire to relate or be interdependent, seems to be an inherent quality of a communitarian society, as I have already observed. There is a natural flow in the logic between Tutu's development of an applied *ubuntu* theology based around the centrality of the *imago Dei,* and the social foundations of sub-Saharan cultures. What appears more complex to articulate is the loss of human agency through apartheid, Tutu's response to this, and how God's agency is represented as liberating.

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[20] Julie Canlis, *Calvin's Ladder: A Spiritual Theology of Ascent and Ascension* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 1, 2, 6–8, 13.

[21] Kharalambos Anstall, 'Juridicial Justification Theology and a Statement of the Orthodox Teaching', in *Stricken by God? Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ,* ed. by Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 482–504 (p. 499).

While an initial reading of Tutu's *ubuntu* theology seemed to imply a reliance upon human agency to resolve the tragedy of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa rather than acknowledging the primary agency of God, further study of liberation theology and its concepts such as loss of identity, power and autonomy —concepts foreign to many individuals in a Western church context — caused me to re-evaluate my understanding of Tutu's theological reflection. Tutu does indeed focus upon emancipation and affirmation of every human being to see themselves as fully persons once more, precisely because a sense of agency or identity had largely been destroyed for black South Africans through apartheid. Yet he also clearly embraces God's agency through the incarnate Christ as liberator, whose very being affirms the value of our humanity, confirms the outpouring love of God and enables a re-sourcing of human agency. To stand under, and act out of, the goodness and blessing of God as something *more* real than any systemic violence or evil requires a belief and experience of participation in the power of God, and I now believe this is what Tutu intended through his assertions of the centrality of *imago Dei.* A radical interdependence that calls for freedom for *all* others is an act of generosity, love and hospitality that I would suggest can only occur through true *koinonia*. It is a deeply challenging example that Tutu has offered, which I would like to examine further in my own context as I conclude.

The *koinonia* of the Spirit and the significance of participation

The concept of the 'open' Trinity has become key in my emerging understanding for what it might mean to experience the *koinonia* of the Spirit as expressed in Scripture for example, in Philippians 2. 1. If people are relational yet particular beings, if we are made *from* relationship and subsequently *for*

relationship, what might the doctrine of participation (the belief that persons can enter into communion with God as an act of grace) mean for the church and any experience of fellowship or community? How does the church, regardless of context, engender freedom for others in relatedness, through a dynamic expression of hospitality and action, both God's and its own? I believe that a renewed understanding of the relationship of the church with each Person of the Trinity, and with the Holy Trinity as a community, is significant.

Koinonia is usually rendered as having one of three corresponding meanings in the Christian Scriptures: that of fellowship, communion or contribution. These all reflect overtones of hospitality and agency as already observed, and are rooted in a vertical relationship established by Christ, from which a human fellowship flows.[22] The key once more appears to be the incarnation: 'the *koinonia* of Christ is the participation in the very being of the God-man, and it involves sharing his life. To partake of Christ is indeed to partake of his life'.[23] Paul alludes to this in 1 Corinthians 1. 9, and John pursues it further, claiming fellowship shared with the Father in 1 John 1. 3: *koinonia* is life shared by God with humanity, found within the Godhead, and flows out into humanity with each other as a result of the action of the Holy Spirit at work in each member of the Body of Christ.[24] This is the common life of *koinonia*, mediated out of love to believers through the Spirit, shared by fellow-partakers of an eschatological hope, rooted in the worshipping life of the church as an expression of that same love of God.[25]

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[22] J. G. Davies, *Members of One Another: Aspects of Koinonia* (London: AR Mowbray & Co, 1958), pp. 5–8.

[23] Ibid., p. 9.

[24] Ibid., pp. 9–15.

[25] Ibid., pp. 21–26.

A helpful metaphor relating *koinonia* to the church is that of the Body of Christ, a metaphor which I have used regularly in this work, implying, amongst other things, the participatory nature of belonging and believing in Jesus Christ and his kingdom, through his work of redemption. This can only be true, as I understand it, through the agency and enabling of the Holy Spirit, who facilitates the church as a community of faith to potentially realise full relational life, in God and with other human beings, both within the church and in wider society. According to LaCugna, this is *koinonia,* when the Holy Spirit by indwelling human persons makes them holy, incorporating them into the life of God in some mysterious way.[26] This can only happen to the church as a body, rather than to individuals: the triune community of God embraces the many — the community of believers — so that the essential nature of relatedness is upheld and made complete.[27] It should be noted that the Body of Christ is, and always has been, highly diverse. Practical demonstrations of *koinonia*, such as the sharing of wealth and other contributions to a life held in common, are an active sign of this Body belonging to Christ, contrasting significantly with kinship and patronage in the days of the early church.[28] This is equally valid now as a distinction to the communitarian bonds of *ubuntu* and to the individualism of the West, where in both cases but in different ways such diversity within a community might be treated with suspicion. Again, the trinitarian character of *koinonia* is reflected through the unity in diversity of the Body.[29]

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[26] LaCugna, pp. 296–98.

[27] Zizioulas, p. 148.

[28] Julio R. Sabones, 'Biblical Understanding of Community', in *Man in Community,* ed. by Egbert de Vries (New York: Association Press, 1966), pp. 171–72.

[29] Terry Brown, 'Personhood as a Tool to Reflect upon *Koinonia*', *Anglican Theological Review,* 88 (2006), 163–79 (p.167).

The church, then, is intimately related to the triune God: to the Father who seeks to bless and who creates humanity to bear God's own (triune) image; to the Son who is the perfect image of God, and restores blessing through the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection; and to the Spirit, who mediates blessing to the created world, constituting the people of God as the *imago Dei*. In the perfect *koinonia* of the Trinity, the church experiences the love of God in God's triune relatedness, expressed in hospitality/openness and agency/power, held in perfect tension. This is the church's primary relationship, and this can and should inform its relational life. As the church beholds God's glory, so it will be reflected in its own *koinonia,* in the time to come when it will be perfected as the Body of Christ. More controversially, I believe it is also something to be revealed in the contemporary reality of daily life.[30]

This incorporation of human persons into the life of God, through participating in holy *koinonia,* is an extraordinary aspiration. Many Protestant theologians have chosen to steer away from such dialogue, fearing the blasphemous concept of equality with God, as potentially implied in the doctrine of *theosis*, to be too closely aligned with such talk. Those theologians who accept more readily the doctrine of participation, for example, those from an Eastern Orthodox background, would usually suggest that such communion is eschatological in form, rather than lying at the heart of the church here and now.[31] My own Protestant heritage has meant that I too have found the doctrine difficult to contemplate, yet I am left with questions as to what precisely is meant by the *koinonia* of the Spirit if it is not alluding to some form of intimate

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[30] Ronald S. Dart, 'Divinisation, the Church and Prophetic Politics in our Post 9/11 World', in *Stricken by God? Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ,* ed. by Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 504–19 (pp. 504–09).

[31] LaCugna, p. 284.

contemporary connection with God as Trinity, through grace? My initial observation of my own response, and that of many Protestant theologians, to this doctrinal concept is that we have become so firmly grounded in a rational, individual and autonomous faith, it is challenging for us to recognise the liberty that is inherent in communion. Our sense of self is so well established, that we have lost sight of how utterly asymmetrical yet gracious our relationship with God is, and that we have perhaps imposed a 'one-to one' dimension upon it that was never appropriate or accurate. To repeat LaCugna's reflection, 'That God should be so intent on union with what is other than God is truly a mystery that defies explanation'.[32]

The functional interpretation of Genesis 1, where to bear *imago Dei* has largely been understood to mean that people act as God's representatives in the world, implies a highly correlative relationship with God in order to fulfil this role. If people are counterparts of God by bearing God's likeness, can participation be assumed? Can it also be assumed that elements of this blessing and responsibility should be evident in the contemporary church? I would suggest that the agency of the Spirit to create increasingly true *koinonia* in the church is dynamic and continuous, and that evidence of the Spirit's activity in developing such interdependence and relational life should be present in every age and context. Such evidence would specifically include a response of worship and praise, a natural and inevitable result of the Spirit's activity in the church, joining with the adoration, love and mutual honouring that exists within the Trinity itself. Worship is inherently relational, and forges a

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[32] Ibid., p. 234.

loving response which springs from fundamental relatedness and fellowship in the Spirit.[33]

What shape can *koinonia* take, undergirded by a life of praise and worship? What focus and responsibility should this authentic and meaningful relational life take in a context such as urban Britain? As I conclude my work, I seek to share an elevated ideal of such a community for consideration.

A vision for church life in inner-city Birmingham

> That the Church is God's creation does not mean it is any less human. The Church bears the marks of natural communities, yet it does so as a *graced* community.[34] (Italics added)

I must admit that my experience of church life over the last thirty years in a variety of contexts has often borne very little resemblance to the exploration of ideas and ideals I have embarked upon through my research. Many are the times I have joined the age-old debate as to whether the church transcendent is truly related in any way to the earthly contemporary experience.

Yet the above statement from Hauerwas seems to contain helpful elements of truth: the church is basically a human social construct, and yet must also be essentially, more truly, a creation of God, and continues to exist only by God's grace. With this in mind, I believe it is appropriate, as someone engaging with practical theology in the arena of relational life, to continue to offer a vision available for dialectic theological reflection. My vision is for an increasingly true

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[33] Alan J. Torrance, *Persons in Communion: An Essay in Trinitarian Description and Human Participation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), pp. 314–15.

[34] Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics,* 2nd edn (London: SCM Press, 2003), p. 103.

experience of *koinonia* in a Western church context such as urban Britain. The church should perhaps let the ideal in which grace flows freely continue to speak, for without God's grace, we are left with only the human shell of something that resembles the church of God's creation.

I continue to frame my conclusion around the dual themes of hospitality and agency, as I have found them rich in potential in relating the life of the 'open' Trinity to that of the church. I believe there are helpful insights to be gained by holding them in tension, as the triune God does so perfectly, which can then inform and shape the church's own sense of hospitality and agency. I will reflect on these themes as revealed in the church to explore elements of interdependence, accountability and worship as people in relationship with each other and God as Trinity.

a) Interdependence

To be interdependent, relational persons in the church in any context comes as a blessing, but one with a cost attached. The Godhead in perfect community and perfect love co-inhere and honour particularity amongst the Persons of the Trinity, but this is challenging for us in our humanity. How can the church be made up of truly interdependent persons and yet hold alterity within a highly diverse body?

Firstly, the church could reinstate a heightened sense of dependence upon a relational God, as relational beings: this is what we are made from, and what we are made for. The source of any sense of interdependence as created beings arises from our acknowledgement of our dependence. Flowing from this, the church is liberated to relate intentionally and appropriately to all those who bear God's image, the crux of Tutu's *ubuntu* theology as has already been

discussed, which acts as a prophetic and challenging witness to the Western church.

In order to illustrate this interdependence, the metaphor of *perichoresis* as an image of dance proves useful once more. I am reminded of the openness and agency at the root of dance forms such as the tango where space, or hospitality, is created for the partner to move into, developing interdependence in movement through empowerment of, and giving of freedom for, the 'other'. In this image, we catch a glimpse of the potential creativity of human partnership, where hospitality and agency must be held in tension to fulfil the purpose for which the two dance partners came together. There is something sacramental in the offering, something sacrificial but also deeply empowering and affirming in such a creative act of openness, and something sacred in humbly accepting the invitation or gift, which I believe echoes the experience for the church, should it choose to reflect more of the *koinonia* of the Trinity as *koinonia* in and for the kingdom.[35]

In practical terms, this could be demonstrated through specific acts of love representing invitation and hospitality, of choosing to identify with others, to extend belonging in real ways to all persons who form part of that worshipping community and beyond. This would entail a welcoming of all, a decision as a body that no roles and no persons are made subordinate or powerless. In this way, the church in every place both beholds and reflects more of God's glory, but only as a community formed out of love, as God is.

Of central importance, I believe that the church should seek to reflect diversity in its being, honouring the particularity of the persons who belong. This

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[35] I am indebted to a fellow student (name unknown) at Regent College, Vancouver, for sharing elements of these ideas regarding the nature of tango and a developed theology of sacrament and shared space.

is a fundamental issue in every aspect of life in a super-diverse city like Birmingham, but I believe should be considered seriously by every church whatever its context in order to reflect a range of difference as far as possible — age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, family background, education, opinion, and so on. In the West, difference has often become something from which to create opposition, even in the church, but the reality is that difference is necessary to the forming of community, and 'otherness' is essential to our formation of self.[36] This aspect of alterity is well understood, at one level, within a communitarian society, where the 'other' is simply another member of the group, not as a separate or excluded entity in the way 'others' are potentially held in the West.[37] The challenge for the whole church is to take this inherent inclusion of 'other', and to frame it within a respect and honouring of the particularity of alterity in difference, a godly attribute rather than a communitarian attribute, where 'deviance' or dissonance are often intolerable in the face of consensus.

The church can learn much, therefore, from members of the Body who are embedded in a communitarian worldview in cultural terms, who can act as exemplars of interdependent life for others who may need to intentionally consider relational life in a different way. In my own context of inner-city Birmingham, the dominance of Eurocentric discourse is inappropriate and unhelpful, and much could be learned from looking to the leadership of Afro-Caribbean, South American, African and Asian members of the Western church to help the Body of Christ reconsider what relatedness and belonging might look like in this context.

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[36] Elaine Graham, *Making the Difference: Gender, Personhood and Theology* (London: Mowbray, 1995), p. 75. See also Alistair McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), p. 151.

[37] Brown, pp. 172–74.

Such a reframing would, in my opinion, go some way to addressing the imbalance favouring individualism that is often found deeply rooted in all aspects of Western church life, for example, in models and practice of leadership, mission, teaching, and church structures.[38] This will, of course, look very different from interdependence as found in a communitarian society, but the intention to act and respond to others in a way that reflects a Christian revelation of relatedness rather than a reflection of purely social structures would be refreshing, celebrating diversity in unity over autonomy, and over more suffocating aspects of consensus. The potential for vibrant, dialectic theological reflection and continual refinement is encouraging, in practical theological terms.

b) Accountability

In a Western context such as urban Britain, it appears that most lines of accountability and responsibility have either been severed, weakened or adapted for purpose to such an extent that for many individuals, their sense of autonomy has never been greater. A person, or more accurately, an individual, is free — free from others to be whatever or whoever they wish to be. Curiously, any increase in such personal freedom seems to have grown at the same exponential rate as the experience of loneliness and isolation in our society. As Hauerwas and Willimon observe, 'Where is there some "self" which has not been communally created? By cutting back our attachments and commitments, the "self" shrinks rather than grows'.[39]

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[38] Ibid., p. 178.

[39] Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), p. 65.

Accountability or responsibility to others is a primary aspect of communitarian life, as was clearly articulated in group interviews conducted regarding *ubuntu*, and seems a natural consequence to any sense of belonging to such a group or community, forming part of the communally created 'self' as indicated above. A Western translation of responsibility is also a sign of belonging (to the church, for example), but often expresses itself as something stifling, burdensome or exhausting, rather than as liberating or life-giving. Our sense of autonomy is limited by such accountability, rather than any benefit of belonging being enhanced by it. In the Western church, this is evidenced by the energy that might be given to pastoral care and enhancing our relatedness instead being drained away by maintaining hierarchical structures, and in an unhelpful elevation of ordained ministry into professionalism. This is 'inhospitable' accountability, founded upon structures of power rather than mutual and particular relationship through interdependence, as suggested earlier.

Might focussing upon freedom for others allow us to be free in ourselves in some way? By reformulating an intentional web of relationship that consciously chooses to hold all in an ecclesial communion for their own benefit as well as that of the community, the church may find itself able to transcend the normative behaviour of punitive measures and exclusion when one person 'falls'. I am reminded of 'William's' adage of 'the child is an axe' from my interviews, suggesting to me that there is something highly redemptive, although costly, in this alternative kind of accountability. To reflect the image of God is a corporate responsibility; therefore the church might benefit from finding creative ways to allow space to grow and develop in this, within the framework of relatedness. Such choices, again, reflect a dynamic tension between

hospitality and agency, and affirms the joint responsibility for reflecting and participating in the *koinonia* of the Spirit.

One way to implement such an intentional web of relatedness might be to adapt the *nyumba kumi* or '10 Houses' initiative from East Africa, as discussed in one interview. I propose that the power of accountability in exercising increasing knowledge and care for neighbours is an exciting potential model for pastoral care within a Western church context, where so often members are from diverse geographical locations, yet remain within the safety of friendship circles and individual relationships. Such mutual pastoral responsibilities for one another, framed with a higher degree of intentionality and accountability than is usually experienced in home groups or other structures, might lead to growing interdependence as a safe place to grow more like Christ through being part of his Body.[40]

c) Worship and praxis

In developing an applied *ubuntu* theology, Tutu looked for reconciliation and forgiveness to manifest as marks of transformed lives in recognition of all people bearing God's image. As I conclude my research I have considered what, ultimately, might be the marks of an emerging, increasingly true experience of the *koinonia* of the Spirit? I am in agreement with LaCugna that the fundamental mark of *koinonia* is the only possible response to such invitation from, and agency of, God: that of love, praise and worship.[41] The church joins with the Trinity's own love and adoration as a communal and social act that arises from gratitude and fulfilment of our selves as persons.

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[40] This concept has obvious parallels with Christian 'base' communities as found in South America.

[41] LaCugna, pp. 341–47.

To be a worshipping community is an ancient and established aspect of the church's identity, but I wish to reflect upon what this might mean in terms of hospitality and agency as part of the contemporary church's praxis in a particular context. I agree that the worshipping life of the church is elemental, the foundation of gratitude and relationship with God that undergirds and energises our actions, but how does this translate into the praxis and daily experience of the church? How does being a body of worshippers impact what we are and what we are becoming, through the agency of a holy and life-giving Spirit that directs us to Christ as the author and perfecter of Christian faith?

To develop the themes of hospitality and agency further, I believe that the invitation of the 'open' Trinity allows us to participate in some mysterious way in that *koinonia*, in order that members of the Body of Christ might hold out the same hospitality and agency to one another, and to the wider world. Such participation has elements of eschatological gift, undoubtedly, but should also inform and shape our contemporary life as the church. As God seeks to bless and to act, so we are called to bless and to act in his name, as an expression of worship. We might even, as LaCugna suggests, see ourselves as *theonomous* persons, founded in and created for reflecting relationship with God to others, acting in the role of an icon.[42] We cannot be the perfect and complete image of God, as only Christ fulfils that purpose, but as a Body we are, I believe, called to behold and reflect God's glory to those around us out of love for God and for all that he has made. This is radical interdependence founded upon the activity of the Holy Spirit, and from it should flow generous and loving action that potentially offers freedom for all within its midst. This might take all sorts of forms according to contextual need, but in scriptural terms, the mandate of the

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[42] Ibid., p. 347.

church has always been to focus upon the care for the poor and vulnerable in that context, and to meet holistic need as an act of love for God.

To discover that the love of God and his people is greater than systemic evil and injustice experienced by so many is a powerful revelation and a generous, albeit costly, act of God and of his people. For some individuals, such an offer of welcome, hospitality and loving action may be the first steps in overcoming powerlessness and a lack of agency in their own lives. The liberationist basis of this theology should not, I believe, be squandered in a place such as inner-city Birmingham or assumed to be irrelevant in our secular, often atheistic society, or indeed, within any part of the church. The desire to see God's kingdom come is not limited to the confines of the church, and again, Tutu's *ubuntu* theology offers a challenging message of the inclusive, all-embracing nature of the love of God as demonstrated through Jesus Christ and his kingdom that the church is part of.

Individuals acting as *theonomous* persons in their church and neighbourhoods would be a source of blessing. A whole, *theonomous* church community, rooted in a commitment to be 'persons' together, demonstrating the love of a relational God through their praxis and as an outpouring of worship to the triune God, might be breathtaking, and truly transformative.

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NB: It should be noted that, whilst this framework was used in both group interviews, it did indeed act only as a framework for questions. My intention to be involved reflexively as a researcher meant that I did follow the structure of the interview as anticipated, but not all questions were used as given.

Section A – Relational Life in Country of Origin

- Are you familiar with the word *ubuntu?* What word/s would you use to express something similar? Can you offer a definition?

- In your church context in country of origin, is the understanding of relatedness/*ubuntu* the same as in the wider community, or expressed differently? Is there a contrast between urban and rural contexts? Examples?

- What is good about this level of relatedness, and what is not so good/positive? Examples?

- When we consider the model of fellowship from the New Testament, e.g. Acts 2, how does this resonate (or not) with your own experience of church community life in your country of origin?

- In the wider community or church context, do you sense that anyone falls outside the model of relational life/*ubuntu* that you have just described? Can you say who, and why, or why not? What is the church's response?

- Does anyone therefore experience isolation or loneliness in your country of origin - why/why not?

Section B – Relational Life in Britain

- When considering relational/community life in Britain as you have experienced it, what words would you use to describe it?

- Is community experienced differently in the church context here, or not? Examples?

- What is good abut this level of relatedness, and what is not so good/positive? Examples?

- Have you seen or experienced isolation or loneliness here in UK?

- An example of a 'web of relationship' for a typical UK family is shown: can you express what your 'web of relationship' at home might be like?

Section C – Transference of *Ubuntu* in a UK church context

1. Is it possible for *ubuntu* to be practised here in the UK? Why/why not?

DD = researcher

HSt = tutor

C = 'Catherine'

W = 'William'

DD: Thank you very much for your time, (cough) I really appreciate it. So, Helen has explained a little bit –

C: (in background**)** Yeah.

DD: **-** about my... focus... and what I would like to do is to really learn from you about your experience, of, I call it relational life, so, how we connect in friendship and fellowship, in community –

C: (in background) Mmm, mm, Yeah.

DD: **-** in your home, country –

C and W: (in background) Yeah.

DD: - and your experience of that and the church context there. But I'm also interested about your experience here –

C: Mm.

DD: - of fellowship and community –

C: Ah.....ok.

DD: - and how you see the difference.

C: Mm.

DD: And lastly to think about what can we learn, err, from these...conversations (laugh).

C and W: OK.

 DD: Erm, because I'm going to be using the tapes –

C: Yeah.

DD: - to help me with my research, I just have some consent forms for you, I hope that's OK, it's just part ... of research -

C: OK.

DD: - ... er, protocol! (Laugh)

W: Right.

DD: - so if I can give those to you.

C: OK.

(Noise of papers being handed out).

DD: Sorry, it just explains... well, you can have a read of that, and if you're happy with it –

C: Yeah.

DD: - to please tick the boxes and we can sign it together.

(Noise of papers being used)

HSt: And it just means that Debbie can use... what she has recorded –

C: OK.

HSt: - and quote you in her dissertation! (Laugh)

W: Right, OK. (Laugh)

HSt: -But you will be familiar with this –

C and W: Yeah.

HSt: - because you're doing your own dissertations, so...

DD: (background) Mmm.

C: OK. (Reading consent form) Yes, we understand! (laugh)

(Consent forms signed and general background noise, arrangements for second copies given, general conversation about research procedure and consent, etc – 2 mins)

DD: Great.... let me leave those there.

C: OK.

DD: So... erm, I'm really focussing on this word *ubuntu* –

C: Mm hm.

DD: - which I'm sure ********* can tell me.... a lot more! (Laughter)

W: (Laugh) No... I am not so trained (Laughter and inaudible comment by W), yeah.

HSt: Maybe you two can meet later in the month as well, see where you have got to.

DD and W: (in background) Yeah, yeah.

DD: So first of all, this, this is a South African word, in origin, isn't it? ******, you're from...Kenya?

C: I'm from Kenya.

W: I'm from Zambia.

DD: Zambia, ok.

W: Yeah.

DD: So is the word *ubuntu* used also in Zambia, or a different word?

W: It's used, yes, we have that word.

DD: Use.. you use the same word?

W: Yeah.

DD: Yeah.

W: Its similar, because, I think, it's a Bantu language –

DD: Yes.

W: - Bantu, so that language is found in almost all the... 72 tribes in Zambia.

DD: Yes. **(5.00)**

W:Almost I'd say all have that word there because of the last words *ntu,* which is common.

DD: So what does *ntu* mean, a person, is that right?

W: Mmm, no –

DD: Can you define it?

W: The whole word of it *umuntu* means a person, *umuuntu (**CHECK)* means persons, yeah.

DD: So can you define *ubuntu* for me? How would you define it? (laugh)

W: Ayy... it's quite hard to define, but maybe... because you know each has been defined depending on an aspect being talked about, or the appropriate (?)... for example from the religious point of view, from a philosophical point of view, but maybe if I take it .... from the way... the Bantu people live, I would say... it is an expression...of, er, that human feeling, about the <u>other</u> person. In short, it is ...humanness, to have a kind, generous heart towards other people, so central to

that is the other person, and not you as a person, but the other pe[ople]... so there are some words, for example, in Tunbuka, my language, it means *muntu numuntu chifukwa chamanyake (***CHECK)* – a person is a person because of the other person –

DD: Yes.

W: - Yeah, which is similar to South Africa, it's the Zulu, it's also in Xhosa, and many other languages in Zimbabwe as well.

DD: (in background) Yes.

W: So...we have another Bemba word....*muntu muntu* meaning that a person <u>is</u> indeed a person. Yeah. So I think –

DD: Mmm, great, thank you. Yes.

W: - that's a short answer to that, yes.

DD: And ******, can I ask you... obviously, different language system –

C: Yes, yes.

DD: - but do you have something that means... something similar to what ******** has described?

C: OK, to us, we say *utu* –

DD: *Utu?*

C: Meaning ... person, the person.

DD: That's u-t-u?

C: T- u , yeah. U- t-u, yeah.

DD: Yeah.

C: And then we have, er, one, er, philosopher, I think, er, a theologian, John Mbiti, he says 'you <u>are</u> because I am'.

DD: Yes.

C: That is also the same, it means that... the person...I mean, you are a person because I am... a person too. So that... whatever you feel, I also feel. If you are in pain, I am also in pain, if you are in joy, I am also in joy; I am concerned about you, and you are concerned about me.

DD: Mmm.

C: It's not like I can pass you by, and just say... or it's a neighbour, not greet, I'm concerned about my neighbour because... I didn't hear his door open, so I'll go and find out – 'Are you in? Are you well?' Or if I find somebody, maybe, on the way,

and... I would have that feeling in me, 'Oh, let me find out... what's happening to this person.' -

DD: Mmm, mm.

C: - so because I feel for that person. So we say *utu*, meaning... you have something in you that...I also think is important, whatever it is, but I feel for you and you feel for me.

DD: Mm, so it's a connection?

C: A connection, yeah, or a relationship –

DD: One person –

C: Human beings, yeah–

DD: OK.

C: - like he was saying, about humanity. That I feel...I know you're in pain, and it's like I'm in your shoes [or].... The pain you're feeling is also what I'm feeling. Yeah, yeah. So that's how we feel it, yeah. Or you can say, carrying one another's burdens.

DD: Mm.

C: Yeah.

DD: Thank you.

C: Yeah, without any reservations (Laugh). Although – you can't say it is 100%, it is also sometimes, it depends on individuals. Of course there are some with a very clean heart, and there are some who will not have anything to do with you, even if they find you have just been knocked down by a car, they will just go. So it can also be part individuals, but if you take it to the relationship of the community, we talk about it as community life, that... even when a child is born, we say it is not your child, it is the community's baby.

DD: Mmm.

C: So everybody will want to be associated with that baby. So that's what we mean. Yeah.

DD: That's helpful. Thank you.

C: Yeah.

DD: I'd like to go back to that idea in a moment –

C: Yeah.

DD: - about the individual –

C: OK.

DD: - and...who may express *utu or ubuntu* –

C: Yeah.

DD: - erm... I also wanted to ask you to think about your church... context –

C: Mm hm. **(10.00)**

DD: - back in your home... country –

C: Yeah, yeah.

W: Mm.

DD: - and if you think *ubuntu* or *utu* – is this expressed in the church.. in the same way as the wider community?

C: OK.

DD: Is it the same, or is there a sense it's different in the church context? ....And can you tell us a little bit about your church context as well?

W: My church is the United Church of Zambia. It is an ecumenical church which brought many tribes, many [resident] (?) people from diverse backgrounds together, so.... I would say that is expressed, because whatever we do, we do as... collectively, I would say –

DD: Yes.

W: - we do collectively, because *ubuntu* is about community. Everything that you do is about ...the group, so, even when we are working, we work in groups. Er, when one achieves, everyone will achieve; when one fails, everyone fails.

DD: Mm.

W: So, that is the essence about *ubuntu.* I would say we discuss it, because it's key, you know the church, ah, is part of the community, so... certain things that are found in the community find themselves in the, er, church as well, so even when we meet, er, in the church meetings, we bring with us the values and the rituals that we... we experience in the community.

DD: Yes.

W: Yes.

DD: So... it's a natural part of church life because it's part of you...*ubuntu?*

W: Yes – it's a part of us, the community, it's part of the church.

DD: Mm.

W: Just as she said, er, it's possible that we may know, it's not everyone who may act with *ubuntu* –

DD: Mm.

W: - because of... characteristics and temperaments, but the key is the teachings of the community, what... what lies in their teachings, because, at the same time, if you were to give a critique, you realise that we have a lot of dictators back home, and sometimes, certain things that have happened are quite inhuman, but don't they practise *ubuntu* –

DD: Mm.

W: - because people, er, can act in any way, but I think as I said I was also trying to find out, to research about this, for...for, we seem to have been losing this, er, *ubuntu* concept, because of the.. globalisation and many years of colonialism and slavery; those have tainted the real concepts of, of *ubuntu* because that is... that was used to.. that was practised especially in the villages –

DD: Mmm.

W: - but now, everyone has moved into the urban. For example, me, I'm grown up as an urban...er, boy, so I don't know much about the village, so, I... do not think that I carry all the values of my own tribe or the community life, so that is how we've been losing, because of going to fetch for jobs –

DD: Yes,

W: - in the urban centres, in the urban towns, in the cities, that is where we find that the life there is, is different, so... partly, that could be globalisation, and... because of the economy, people have started to live [leave?] with their own nuclear families –

DD: Yes.

W: - meaning that we are now getting away from *ubuntu.*

DD: Mmm.

W: - Meaning that it is only me and my first family, meaning the nuclear family. But from the *ubuntu* concept, we are an extended family, meaning that we are a community, so if I am taking care of my children, I should also think about, er, my brothers', my sisters' children. Or my Mum or my Dad. If they are not OK, I should bring them into my home, and live with me –

DD: Mm.

W: - so that they also benefit ... from what others are benefitting from, their own, er, resources. Yeah. (Inaudible comment)

DD: Mm, thank you. I think this is key, the urbanisation of people, because suddenly you belong to several communities, do you think? **(15.00)**

W: Yeah.

C: Yeah...

DD: I don't know.

C: But maybe I would argue out and say if you... in the urban church, it is different from the rural. I will say like the *utu* in the rural is more felt than the urban church, because this is a village where they just feel people. So they are there more for one another than in the urban, where everybody's busy, running; and again another thing, the church we believe it has that kind of family life. There is one... challenge - if you are not a full member, if you're not registered, you don't appear anywhere –

DD: Mm.

C: You just like come to church and nobody knows about you there, and even if there is something that has gone wrong, the people will ask, 'Who is that? We don't know that person, and ...how can you just come into church today?' Personally, my own auntie passed away, and she had been coming in and out of church and she was not regular; so when she died, we went to the minister to ask that we have a service there. She just ...he just said, 'Is she a member here?' 'Yes, but not a regular member', 'Then how could we have a service here?'

DD: Mm.

C: She's an outsider, and I really felt it.

DD: Yes.

C: Being a minister in the <u>same </u>church, and I could not have anyway [a leeway] to bring my auntie for a service, just because she's been in and out of church. So even there are those challenges, where the *utu* is for the people maybe you care for, that in church, they can also sideline you.

DD: Right.

C: Yeah.

DD: That's very interesting(Laugh).

C: Where... some people have even had to leave the church, because they thought... like one friend of mine was in the choir, then when the mother died, nobody went to see her. She just left the church, she was so annoyed, because she's been doing this for everybody, how could they forget that it's my mother? So then some people were saying she doesn't attend other peoples', so why should you go to her?

DD: Mm.

C: Are you seeing?

DD: Yes.

C: So that even if you don't act with the *utu* people will also say why should we do this to you, and yet you don't care about us, it's like they are punishing you, challenging you to change.

DD: Mm.

C: Yeah.

DD: And that's... is that a new thing, a new development, this..?

C: That one has been there.

DD: It's always there!

C: Yeah, yeah, (laughter) you just want to come to church and you don't even... you're not concerned about people, when something happens to you they will like say, 'Why should we do it to this person who doesn't even feel for others?' Cos they think it is important to be there for one another, such that it is you and it is me, and when you're not there for me, why should I care? So sometimes it will affect you.

DD: Mmm. Yeah.

C: Yeah, because people really value that kind of life, where we care for one another.

DD: Yes.

C: Yeah. It's very important to be there for one another. Yeah.

DD: So when you read, perhaps, about the early church –

C: Yeah.

DD: - in Acts 2, does that... resonate for you, do you feel 'Yes, I'm... I understand that!' (Laugh) It sounds like –

C: Yeah.

DD: - *utu* to me, or *ubuntu*.

C: When they were all together...

DD: When they all together, they share what they had –

C: - they shared their meals...

DD: Does it feel... familiar to you, or different?

C: I should say the...in Jesus' ministry where he shared with everyone, I think it was such kind of a life. Yeah.

DD: Mm.

C: And even their movements together, and people wanted to be with him, these disciples wanted to move out together, and they were always, like, caring for one another, I can say, yeah.

DD: Mm.

C: Yeah.

W: Yeah, because I think just to add... if we read Acts 2 as you say, it's a very close... well I would say it's just an *ubuntu* which is now being found in the Bible, because... if we are mourning, I am mourning, then the whole community mourns.

DD: Yes.

W: Right now, I'm ministering in the rural. I've gone to funerals, funeral gatherings where I've never known that particular person, but just because I want to fulfil my obligation as part of the community, I should mourn with the people I know and if I don't know that particular person –

DD: Mmm.

W: - so in short, you share the joy, you share the sadness, you share the achievements, you share in everything. So if you meet, and again in such gatherings, when... we have again meals, which is communal, again, because they will cook for everyone and you will all sit all [around] (cough)... and the, the, the, meal will be right on the centre, and we all share, yeah, so we eat in gatherings , in big groups. And... I think we feel... belonging – **(20.00)**

DD: Yes.

 W: - to each other, that way. And... even other occasions, especially when they are some national celebrations, we eat together, we sing together, we celebrate together. So we share the joy. So, I think the, the Scripture in Acts 2 resonates <u>very</u> well with *ubuntu*.

DD: Mm.

W: Yes.

DD: Thank you. I just wanted to ask about... people who don't ...practise *ubuntu* or *utu?* You talked about them, they don't give back?

C: (Laugh) Yeah...

DD: Can I ask, erm, who those people are, you feel if they fall outside of this belonging, and, and why is that? What is it that makes them... outside? Is it their choice, they don't want to practise *ubuntu* or...? That's a difficult question.

C: I can maybe talk about the urban church, because –

DD: Mm hm.

C: - I think I've been there also, and I've been in the rural. Like in the urban I would say some of such kind of people are those that maybe are in business, or in a hurry to get out of church, so they don't... like after the service when you have tea, they will not come for tea, they will just walk away. And others, I will say again, it's like they think they don't fit into the group... especially if you have this church, you know people even in church have classes?

C and W: (Laugh)

C: I've had even people saying, 'That church of the rich', or 'that church of the... high and mighty' – so some people will be there but they feel like they don't <u>fit</u>, into that congregation, in whichever way they think, maybe they are –

DD: So they think they are above? Or below?

C: They think those are above, so they are below. Like the one I am talking about especially, so they will not want to be there with anybody. So they will just come in for the service and they go away. There are women's groups, there are men's fellowship, youth, they will not join any group at all, they will only come for the service and just disappear. So sometimes most of them will [just say] 'No I'm busy', 'How come you don't join the fellowship?' 'I don't fit into that group, I don't think I can... operate with them, I don't think I have that... you know, level, in which they are'...that's how they think. Personally, I have talked to some few people and that's what they have shared –

DD: Mm.

C: - that's why I can say it confidently, yeah, they just think they don't fit in, into the group.

W: Yeah... Let me talk (cough) [inaudible word] why some people don't act *ubuntu*, and what people in the community... do or react to that. I think she has said it well... partly, maybe if I begin with a... reaction from people from persons failing to act *ubuntu.* Er, measures are quite hard... because... people just sneak out from your life and leave you alone, because... there are times that, especially – let me refer to funeral again. Er, there was one man... who was quite rich, he had good status in the society because of a good job, but whenever there was a funeral, he would not be there in person, but he would send money. Yeah.

DD: Mm.

W: He would send money, he would continue doing that, he was good at sending money but he would never come to sit at the funeral house –

DD: Mm.

W: - or eat with the people there, no. But he... would send some money. So when it happened to him now, the funeral, was...er, in his family, people did not go there. They stayed away, so in short, they didn't, the people decided not to act *ubuntu* because they wanted to discipline that –

DD: OK.

C: Mm.

W: - and partly that other people should see, when one derails from the *ubuntu*, people should learn what happens to people (laugh) who do such acts, and they become very offensive on that one and they don't tolerate.

DD: Mm.

W: And they just, so for what happened, they also sent some money to him, but –

DD: Mm.

W: - he... couldn't now... mourn alone, he needed people to, to give a hand.

DD: Yes, yes. **(25.00)**

W: So, in short, but all the same, people warn; they'll call elders to sit you down and they warn you, 'What you're doing... is wrong', this is not what we call *ubuntu* because when you are not acting with, er, er a concept of *ubuntu* in my country they will call you *ichimuntu*, meaning a bad person.

DD: (Laugh)

W: *Ichimuntu*... but if you are a good person : u*muntu.* He's u*muntu,* he's acting *ubuntu,* but if he's not doing that, he is *ichimuntu* -

DD: (Laugh)

W: - because he is a bad person –

C and DD: Mm.

W: - so if we have those words – *ichimuntu* – among the people, then definitely within the community we also have good and bad people-

DD: Mm.

W: - who are *umuntu* and *ichimuntu* (Laughs) So... now to answer what you... again, another side of what you asked.. what was it again? [Sorry].

C: About the church.

DD: Who is outside? (Inaudible comment), Yeah.

W: Who is outside; so what makes people to be outside; it's some could be it's their natural character –

DD: Mm.

W: - some it's because of the status as she mentioned. I've been serving in the... congregation which is both high class and lower class, and er, I've experienced what she's... part of what she said, where some will not combine with others because of their statuses –

C: Yeah.

W: - so, some have superiority complex, some have inferiority complex –

C: Mm.

W: - so, some will not act *ubuntu* because of their status. Some will not act because they are too busy, other thing –

DD: Mm.

W: - so they develop that individualistic... kind of life, because they are carried on by their profession, because... right now, our professions seem to be taking more time than... the community that we live in –

DD: Yes.

W: - or to, than the family, so I think partly that's what I can say... what makes people not to act *ubuntu*. I don't think it could be an instigation from other people that, no, we should be bad, I don't think that, no, it's not, but it could be some professions that we have engaged in, maybe the status, which again is not good, er... maybe people are too busy with other things, or... possibly maybe one could have been offended by the same people, so you would rather be, and live on his or her own than being found among their community or their people that, part of their community, or *ubuntu*. Yes, I think that's what I can say.

DD: That's very helpful. I just have one last question about that –

W: OK.

DD: - before we look at the UK (laugh).

C: Mm.

DD: I just wonder if the church... would take a stand in these matters, if someone's behaviour... is *ichimuntu* –

W: Yes.

DD: - would the church say, 'This is wrong, but if you turn from this we'll forgive you, come back in'. Is that something familiar to you? Do you think the church can make that example?

C: My father says –

DD: Of pulling people in...

C: - there is *watu* and *viatu*. *Watu* is people, *viatu* is shoes.

DD: (Laugh)

C: You look at shoe, so the saying is *gunuwatu na viatu* (CHECK*) which means some people don't have any sense of anybody at all.

DD: Mm.

C: In the same aspect of that humanity – that's what he feels.

DD: Mm.

C: So he says *gunuwatu na viatu.*

W: (Laugh)

DD: Can you spell that for me please?

C: Get it down. V-I – that's Swahili –

HSt: Yes!

 C: – V-I-A-T-U, and then *watu.*

DD: Yep.

C: So *viatu* means shoes –

DD: Oh, that's shoes.

C: - shoes which you step –

DD: OK.

C: - and then *watu* are the people, the persons.

DD: Mm.

C: So there are these people who you can see this is somebody and he's reasonable... you know you can reason out with him, but there are some people you cannot do anything with them, because they're just like their shoes –

DD: Mm. **(30.00)**

C: - (Slaps legs) whatever you want to try to do for them, they will always be that dumb –

DD: Mm, yeah, mm.

C: - so that, when you even come to church, now, I don't think it will depend now again on the ministry... you know you have that passion and you think as a minister, or the leaders, you want to address such issues, which, I can't say, is 100% - it doesn't really happen that 'why doesn't this person', ok, they might say, 'some people try and talk to that person – why doesn't he relate to others, why are they just separated?' and some people will say, 'Ah! When they feel like they want to join, they will join.' There are others who will think, 'OK, let me go and try to talk to that person, 'cos we have in some cases in church where we think some members have disappeared, we look for them, and we send, like, their close friends -

DD: Yes.

C: - 'I think so and so, I've not seen this person in church for some time; can you find out where they are?' so there is also that still, that you feel... this person is separated from us, we've not seen this person for long –

DD: Mm.

C: - but... it is also about individuals. Some people will think we want to care, some will say... they will not even think about it –

DD: Yes.

C: - because they think that's your character. Yeah. It's just like he (H) says –

DD: Yes.

C: - Inferiority, superiority, so some would just take it as, ah- that's the way they are. So they will not care, so you cannot take it as a responsibility of the church, fully.

DD: Yes.

C: Yeah, yeah.

DD: That's helpful, thank you.

W: Maybe to add on what she says, er, the church [advice] that also exists in the community, so there are some sayings that we use in Bemba. And Bemba is a common language but... in Zambia, because that's the language I also speak, [it's a common language] er, there is a saying or proverb that says '*mwana ka sembe'*, *mwana* meaning a child is an axe. *Mwana ka sembe* – a child –

C: *Kasembe* is K-A-

W: K-A-S

DD: Yeah.

C: E-M-B-E.

DD: Mm hm.

C: *Ka sembe!* (Laugh)

DD: I speak about 10 words of Bemba, so...! (Laugh)

W: So...That literally mean... when a child er, misbehaves or misfires, you are the parent, you should still bring them closer to you, because you need him and you need to correct him, so, that also applies in the church. Those who do not act *ubuntu* – people still have that kind heart to say, 'Maybe they'll change, one day they will change, please bring them closer' –

C and DD: Mm.

W: - because, er, there have been many times, when I tried to follow the regulations, and then maybe my elders will tell me, 'No, reverend! ... *mwana ka sembe*' meaning that, even if he made a mistake, he is, he is one of your children, you don't have to throw him –

DD: Mm.

W: - bring him closer to you, yeah. So that way –

DD: Mm, mm.

W: - with those words you happen to soften your heart again –

DD: Mm.

W: - and find a way of helping that particular person. I think it's also a word that... comes back to *ubuntu* – even if one goes offline, you still have to go back and try to help. I know there have been delinquent child, children, who have completely, er, have nothing to do with that, but there are times when he... he takes a long way before they finally give up that [one], they have nothing to do with this person. Just as she said, if one is missing out 2 weeks from church, people would sit around, 'We have not seen this person, -

DD: Yes.

W: - 'is he or is she ok? We should... go and visit him.' Yeah, and maybe he will say, 'No, I was offended because you people, you did not visit me when I was sick' –

Hst and DD: (Laugh)

W: -'so I was offended, that's why I would never come to, to church'. Yeah! There are such people!

DD: Yes, yes.

W: But, er... It takes time for them to finally give up, they'll still go, 'Oh he was just angry', but they will still go back to him; erm, one of the members, my elders have been going, going to him, for the fifth time, they still feel they can still help –

DD: Mm.

W: - or he can still change heart, even, after 5 times of visiting him, so (Laugh). Yeah. (**35.00)**

DD: Yes. That's very good. Thank you. So, I wanted to look at life in UK. I'm thinking about your experience maybe in church here, the wider community, not just Queen's; erm, I wonder what words you would use to describe life here in UK, in terms, in these kind of terms, of community, fellowship....

C: I can talk about, at least I was attached in, er, Solihull, the Methodist church, and then on my own I have been going to Selly Oak, Christ Church –

DD: Mm hm.

C: - and at times I have gone to St John's Harborne.

DD: Mm.

C: And I must say for me I think I have found *ubuntu* in the churches. In fact, er, like, in Solihull, they have this slogan of...'You are welcome, feel at home', and I think they act on that slogan, very very well, in that every time you're there, even if we missed a week, they would say, 'You've stayed for so long!' and it's just been one week. Like I remember we had stayed for almost since, April, May, June - we went to say goodbye in June and everybody was, 'Oh! Nice to see you! We've missed you! We thought you had already gone back to Kenya!' And they were like, and they have been writing even some of them emails, just to see how we are going on, some have been calling, and I felt, that life of the church was... I mean that *ubuntu* sort of life, but I cannot say it is for everybody also (Laugh) –

DD: Mm.

C: - because there are some people, you might greet them this week, and the next week, they just, like, they have nothing to do with you at all –

DD: Mm.

C: - and you think, 'I thought we shared a story with this person last week, and today, I greeted the person, and it's like they've forgotten about me.' But maybe it's because you don't understand what they, they are going through at that particular time. In one thing –what did you talk about when I said it was... you were more... just when we began –

HSt: I can't remember...

C: - not more organised, which word did I use?

HSt: Can't remember.

W: (Laugh)

C: What did I say – that here people are more advanced –

HSt: Yeah, you did.

C: And you said not advanced but, ah–

HSt: More formal.

C: More formal, that's it.

HSt: (Laugh)

C: So I'm thinking about being advanced, and being formal maybe –

HSt: Yeah.

C: - in that, that kind of, erm, maybe you would look at it as an attitude, and you would, like, wonder... I know even sometimes in the corridors you would, like, see somebody, and like today they are not anywhere with you, and you would wonder, 'Is that Helen?' (Laugh)

DD: Mm.

C: But sometimes you realise maybe somebody is going through something, they are in a hurry to a place, and you, you are not, and what you expect from them is not what you have seen. But in general I must say I have really been blessed in these churches. And I have felt that I am part and parcel of these communities... I have learned so much from them. Yeah.

DD: Great... That's very encouraging (Laugh)

C: We went to, remember we went to Droitwich, a small congregation –

W: Mm.

C: - and they were, 'Oh you're from the Zambia! You know I went to Zambia', or 'You're from Kenya, I went to Kenya' – people are just, like, interested in you. Even I went far away in Scotland where they're like, 'Oh you're coming from Kenya, you know I went to Kenya one day, I wish I could come back again', you know you feel that, and they're taking (inaudible comment) –

DD: They want to connect.

A: Yeah, you know people are so nice, we wish we could go, meet again, we should come. So like you know even some groups in churches, we were with the Women's Fellowship; when I was saying goodbye to them, because I knew I was not going to go back on the last two Sundays, they said, 'Now we have a place to go for a retreat', so they are coming to Kenya. (Laugh)

HSt: (Laugh) Excellent.

C: 'Thank you for knowing you, ******, because now we have established a network, so we are going to plan, save our money and come to Kenya, and see the Women Fellowship there'. And some people have also said, 'Now we have a place to go for holiday, because we know we have a contact person in Kenya.'

DD: Mm.

C: So I think there is... it is being... yeah, it's being practised in churches here.

DD: How about wider British society? Could you ...express an opinion about that, do you think?

C: Yeah, I would think that also.... **(40.00)** some people don't, care about others (Laugh) like in the same way like I said in Kenya, but sometimes you would maybe feel it more at this end. One, in our kitchen... the three of us as Africans, we have that habit of, when we go to the kitchen, we like to clean it, leave everything and, if maybe Helen had her plate, and 'No no no, because I'm washing dishes, let me

wash them', and they say, 'No you are teaching us something new, because we are used to washing our own personal items, and we cannot wash somebody else's, now you have taught us something new.'

DD: Mm.

C: So sometimes if I work with my utensils, they say, 'No no, *****, I'll clean all of them today, because you have taught us how to share this thing', so I thought we impacted something on them and they thought – ah, this is good.

DD: Mm.

C: Because when you come and somebody's eating and they have used the saucepans and you say 'Oh no, I won't use this.' 'Don't clean it, I'll clean it, no no, continue eating, don't stand up because of me, I'll clean it' and they thought, 'wow, it was me, if it was me I wouldn't have done that', so we learned –

DD: Yeah.

C: - and we exchanged our life, and by the end of it we had learned from one another. Yeah, about that. And I can say also, maybe when you are... walking on the streets sometimes, someone will say 'Excuse me, you've dropped something, or 'Excuse me, is this yours?' so I think people also feel for one another... It also depends on the individuals.

DD: Yes, yeah.

C: it does, a lot.

DD: Yeah.

C: And even greetings, sometimes you just tell somebody 'Hello' and say yes, and some of... like, if you are lost on the way, somebody will tell you, 'No, no, no, no'....and we were there during Christmas, the carols –

W: No, I was not there -

C: You were not?

W: No, I had gone back home.

C: No! When we went for sub, [subversive]?

W: Oh, ok, yes.

C: Yes, and remember we were giving some pamphlets –

W: -Yes.

C: - and some people would not even want to touch them -

DD: Mm.

C: - and some people would say, 'Yes'; others, they don't even want you even to talk to them! (Laugh) Like, what have I done?! (Laugh)

DD: (Laugh)

C: So, it's all about... I think, I can say that... although there is a sense of individualistic life (cough) where everybody would want to be in their own corner... so much –

DD: Mm.

C: - also there is the other side, so I can't rule out, and say that it was a bad experience (cough) – I have enjoyed, yeah.

DD: (Laugh) Thank you.

C: Yeah. I have. Yeah. Maybe ********* has...

DD: Yeah, let's –

W: Yeah, it's a very hard question but –

(HSt leaves at this point, DD checks back up tape – 1 min)

W: - I wanted to say, the question, it's, it's difficult, er, in answering it, especially looking at the life here, because... we are [two bits?] two [inter]nations, maybe I have still not understood (laugh) what, how life is, because I've been here for a short while. And sometimes maybe the responses | may get, it would be because people want to learn, or know me more, more about me –

DD: Mm.

W: - but not really acting *ubuntu* –

DD: Yes.

W: Yeah, but maybe they just want to learn, and understand about, ah, me, and the place where I come from. But ah, at the same time I would say *ubuntu...* has got some elements that are universal. We... they may be more pron, more pronounced in the Southern Africa, but, er, some elements are universal. Universal in the sense that I say... love of, er, love of people - I think, that is universal, it's important to love other people. Hospitality –

DD: Mm.

W: - care, kindness, generosity – those things are found everywhere, in the world, though we... may embrace them as being more *ubuntu.* What is key in the *ubuntu* is about indiv... the denial of, individualistic kind of life, so looking at what you ask and in this context – those elements are what she said because they are universal –

DD: Yes.

W: Yes, and we act upon them as *ubuntu* because that's what we expect a human being to be.

DD: Yes. Mm.

W: Yeah. The individualistic kind of life...I wanted to talk about, it's where people seem to... to speak more about themselves. **(45.00)** If I look at one area, when we, when you are looking at things... for example, the, the human rights issues that we, are talked about mostly here, they are more individualistic.

DD: Yeah.

W: Yeah. It's about an individual –

DD: Mm.

W: - - that's why we, that's where we differ with the human rights as we look at them from Africa –

DD: Mm.

W: - because Africa, we are communal. Most of the personal rights are trampled upon because it's for the good of the community, but here, you don't care about what has happened with an individual. It's important to give space to an individual, so that he or she determines her own way of doing things, which is also good, but at the same time, it is also important because, if it's *ubuntu* a person must be given that freedom to act, er, in his or her own capacity.

DD: Mm.

W: But there are certain things that infringes on other peoples, because you are doing it as an individual, you forget about the community. And those are things that now... divide the community as part of the *ubuntu*. So maybe, that's what I can talk about, the individualistic and the er, collective, er, life that we have as *ubuntu.* When...I perform well, for example, let's take it in this academia –

DD: Yes.

W: - when I perform well, extremely well, it's not only me who will be said, 'Oh you've done well' – my lecturer, my classmates, will all be said they did <u>very </u>well, they will not say 'Oh ********* did it!' (Laugh)

DD: (Laugh)

W: - It's rare, because now this is happening –

DD: Yes.

W: At the same time, another thing is, when you are a leader, most of the biographies that I have been reading, they are about an individual. They did not achieve on their own!

DD: Mm.

W: They were in a team, so those are things that.....mmm, well they made me uncomfortable because I'm not, er, er, a westerner (Laugh). I come from where we, where we are in a team, whatever we do is teamwork. And there are some other things, like, not knowing your neighbour. You live because there are some fences, you may not even know what is <u>happening</u> with your neighbour.

DD and C: Mmhm.

W: - you continue with your life as long as you are OK. Those things are, are, are there. But I've found... two families that I've visited –

(Pause while DD checks on back up tape recording)

W: There have been two families that I've visited, who get on <u>very</u> well with their neighbours, which is community again –

DD: Mm.

W: - which is more, which is pronounced here –

C: Yeah.

W: - about *ubuntu,* meaning that we can also find it here. As she said, even at churches where I am serving, er, I feel part of the church because everyone is very cheerful to me, speaks to me, but at one time, something that I also observed because of that kind of individualistic.... when I am at the church, I speak to everyone, I need to interact with everyone, I have no problem, and I need to make friendships with everyone. So, one of the members was speaking to the other gentleman, he said, 'Can I speak to that man?' he said, 'Oh no, no ,no, if you go to him, he speaks to <u>everyone!</u> (Laugh)

DD and C: (Laugh) Oh...

W: - he speaks to everyone, so you can go to him, you have no problem, just speak to him! So that I picked it up that maybe I was doing it wrong, I was doing it in an African way –

DD: (Laugh)

W: - because of the community, so here, you have to stick to one person, and that is the person you need to know!

DD and C: (Laugh)

W: - about that, so! (Laugh) But maybe, I'm a communal person, I wanted to be free with everyone, and if I make friends, I make friends with all. Yeah, there are times that you land on one particular person on your own, but, er, in *ubuntu* you need to know and learn about other people and interact with them freely, I...

DD: Mm.

W: But here, you speak to one person whom you know, this is my friend, and others... don't step in, they may disturb the space between you and he, him, that is the difference that I saw.

DD: Mm. **(50.00)**

W: - that I realise, but, er, where hospitality is concerned, which is also part of *ubuntu,* <u>very </u>good, they are very hospitable, er, quite impressing, very cheerful, so those things are... *ubuntu*, so which are, some of which are universal. Yes.

DD: Mm, yes, that's... that's very helpful, **********, thank you.

W: (Laugh)

DD: So there are things that everyone around the world –

C: Yeah.

DD: - understands.

W: Yeah.

C: Mmhm, yeah.

DD: - here, at the top layer (raises hand) but underneath –

W: Yeah.

DD: - the foundation, of how you understand yourself, is different, isn't it?

C and W: Yeah.

DD: And the West, as you have expressed –

W: Yeah.

DD: - we see ourselves as one (showing one finger!) (Laugh) -

W: (Laugh)

DD: - we just do! And there are historical reasons for that –

W: - Yeah, yeah, yeah.

DD: But in many African countries, in South America as well, I think, you see yourself... in community (makes a circle).

W: As...Yeah.

DD: So it's this mindset, isn't it, where do you...

W: It's the mindset...

DD: - Where do you move from, and that changes your experience.

C: Yeah, yeah.

W: Mm.

DD: Yeah, thank you.....Erm.... I just wondered about an experience of isolation and loneliness? My feeling is that many people in the west... can feel lonely. I just wondered if you thought that was ever an experience in your home situation? Would you see that as possible? For someone to feel that –

C: Lonely.

DD: - cut off... from other people?

C: There's an incidence, I think (Laugh).... OK let me talk about this place first.

W: Mm.

C: One time we were in the.... there was a baby who was born, and people were invited to go and, was it, to celebrate that the baby was born –

W: A christening, yeah.

C: - and, er, we just, I think that day I was with *********, we just decided let's go to the Common Room and when we went there, there was a gathering and people had been invited, and we didn't know, so we had to leave -

DD: Oh!

C: - because we were not invited, and we really felt like outsiders.

DD: Mm.

C: I said, 'Oh, they didn't invite us', then someone said, 'Oh, sorry, but you can still stay', and then we felt , 'No, we can't fit in any more'-

W: Mmm(Laugh).

C: - because we were not invited!

W: (Laugh)

C: The same also happens in our churches. Sometimes you think people have invited one another and you are left out, and then you... 'How come I am hearing these such and such?' 'Oh, you didn't get an invitation? We are sorry'. So it also happens to us –

DD: OK.

C: - and you feel like.... 'Why didn't they invite me?' Like, I was in London to see my sister, and in their church, it's a Pentecostal church, mostly... it's Africans going to that church, a few white people; so the pastor, the main pastor, the son was getting

married, and the daughter-in-law wanted a private wedding, so they decided and planned and didn't invite anyone. So their pastor thought, 'This is not African', because they are Nigerians, and he said 'This is wrong' and he went and talked to him and then they invited everyone, so when people were talking and I was there, they said, 'Oh, they had not invited us, suddenly today they are giving everybody cards – where is this coming from?' So they felt, they didn't appreciate it. They felt left out. -

DD: Yes.

C: - and suddenly why are they inviting us now? It's only 2 weeks to the wedding, and they had already invited others, and they said it was a private wedding so we also feel cut out, and it's like... ok, sometimes you might say some news, communication, doesn't go to everyone; at times, you can say it's about communication. Maybe somebody forgot when they were inviting, because you have to put a list down and remember who, what, who will come –

DD: Yes. (Laugh)

C: - who will come, who else and you see you can leave somebody by mistake. But this person won't take it positively –

DD: Mm.

C: - they will just say 'they just left me out, so... no more.' Even if you invite them, they will say 'No, no, no, no, no, you had forgotten me in the first place, what has made you change your mind?' They will not even take it simple, they will just say 'No, I can't go'. Or a last minute invitation, some people will never accept it -

DD: Yes. **(55.00)**

C: - they will say 'you are not , I was not in your mind, you just remembered, and I'm not coming'. But again it will depend on the *utu!* (Laugh)

DD and W: Yes! (Laugh)

C: So, if you have the *utu* in you, you say however –

W: Yeah.

C: - Let me come, because you will feel it, let me go, even if they've forgotten and it's a last [minute], or you hear about something and you're not invited and you think it's important to go, you will go and ask 'And why didn't you invite me? I'm here anyway', and they would apologise, so it is... in, on, I mean, it's a one-on –one that it happens.

DD: Yes. Mmm. Yes..... I have a picture here of –

C: Yeah (Laugh)

DD: - (Laugh) I was trying to draw how I saw my network –

C: Mm.

W: Yeah.

DD: - my communities. I just find it very interesting how we <u>see</u> our life, so for me straight away I draw, myself and my family (Laugh) -

C: Inside, yeah!

W: Oh.

DD: - yeah, then my wider family –

C: Yeah.

DD: - this is my neighbourhood (Laugh) -

C and W: Mm.

DD: - and then there are other communities, I haven't put them all –

C: OK.

DD: - but things I belong to –

C and W: Mm.

DD: erm...and I also drew this one - I think this is very typical in the UK.

W: Mm.

DD: People have this small, centre of family –

C: Mm, yeah.

DD: (Laugh) – and maybe their work. They don't have church, they don't have a wider sense of belonging.

C and W: Mm. Yeah, it's true.

DD: I just wondered - you're very welcome to draw if you would like to – but if I asked you to draw....your network –

C: Yeah.

DD: - what would it look like for you? Maybe how would you draw that?

C: Family first.

DD: Yeah?

C: Then friends –

DD: Mm hm.

C: - and neighbours. But the family in most cases always comes first, because it's... we talk about me, myself and I (Laugh) -

DD and W: (Laugh)

C: - one of our [adages?] is 'this one is a me, myself and I' – everything is about yourself, which is what we say, that is not good, 'Me myself and I', everything is just about you –

DD: Yes, yes.

W: Mm. Yeah.

C: - but we have that... kind of thing that we say it will be my family first, like I can give an example now, that maybe when I was thinking of going back to Kenya, I would not say that, I would think of giving gifts to [all] everybody, because I can't. Whom would I think of first? It's my family –

W: Mm.

DD: Yes.

C: - then the rest I would say, now I don't want to lie to people, because I can't give all of them gifts –

W: Mm, mm.

A: - then I would say, you know, we'll just go and have a... general celebration for all of us, because if I gave ********* and I don't give ****, or ******, they will say, 'Oh she only brought it for....'

DD: Mm.

C: It will be like a... fight, so the only solution is to keep quiet (claps hands), just go back and tell them I was a student, I was not working, I could not do this. Then you will be safer.

DD: And that's OK? Yes.

C: So the first thing you think of is your family, and then of course immediate close family friends –

DD: Mm.

C: - then you go to the extended family, just like that.

DD: OK. Mmm.

C: That's how it goes. And then to the friends and neighbours, yeah. Like now, we are having Ramadan, for the Muslims, just, I think when on, er, Saturday or Sunday you will see they will share –

DD: Yeah, yes.

C: - with all their neighbours. They must make sure on that day they have knocked in their neighbourhood, and they will also go and give to the... those alms giving, because they do that, so they have to make sure that they go and distribute food –

DD: Yes, yes.

C: - see what they can do, where they can take gifts, because it is time to give. And they will really, like in Mombasa they will really do it. And during that time you feel it, and then with us, when it's Christmas, we will also go to our Muslim neighbours, 'It is Christmas –

DD: Mm, mm.

C: - OK, here, some food to share, please let's share together because we are celebrating.' When we have a birthday, we will not say, like, 'We don't want Muslim children in this birthday, we will call all of them in the neighbourhood, and if it is in school, the cake will be shared to all, and if it is Sunday school, it will be brought to all of them, because we feel... we are part and parcel. Yeah.

DD: Mm. Thank you.

W: And you know when we talk about like in my case when we say it's the family, it's an extended family; my Mum, my Dad, my own children –

DD: Yes, yes.

W: Yeah. Because sometime you may be taking care of a, a niece, er, maybe...**(60.00)** you have, er, a sister-in-law or a brother-in-law and they are all within your house under your [care]? So it's more of an extended family, so that's when it spreads.

DD: Mm.

W: But for me as a minister now I've realised that the congregation members are now my family –

DD: Yes!

W: - yeah, so when I'm being greeted, they will say, 'How is your family? And how is your larger family?' (Laugh)

DD: (Laugh)

C: Yeah.

W: Meaning now, the congregation, they are my members. So they are always put as well into the greeting, so, 'Well, I'm OK, together with my members.' (Laugh) So they are also, so it's... we start from that family and then we go out, extended family...

DD: Mm.

W: Yeah. We have family friends, whom we regard to be family, part of the family, yeah.

DD: (Laugh) Your responsibility has got very big now!

W: Yeah.

C: Mm.

DD: I just have one more question for you – thank you for your time.

C and W: Mm, yeah.

DD: I'm very interested – ********* I think you said this very well, that there are elements of *ubuntu* everywhere in the world –

C and W: Mm.

DD: - but we talked about... the foundation place; in the west we just don't have that sense, really, of community –

C: Yeah, yeah. Mm.

DD: - as strongly. We're very, we are individual, er... I'm very interested in challenging the western church. Yes, of course we hold who we are (Laugh) –

C: Yeah.

DD: - we are from the west, but we are people of Jesus as well –

C: Mm.

DD: - people of the Bible.

C: Yeah.

DD: So is there a way you think that we can learn in the church to be more community-minded? More real in how we feel for one another, as you said, ******, the *utu*, you feel when someone is hurt –

C: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

W: Mm.

DD: - you share, you take responsibility. Is there a way, do you feel, we can really learn this and practise this in the west? Is it possible?

C: For me, I might say it might not be, because maybe it has been practised since before we were born, and if you look... I will talk about weddings, I'll talk about baptisms and I'll talk about funerals. That you'll have a funeral for only 20 people; you'll have a wedding just for the invited.

DD: Yes.

C: When it's baptism, like, I've seen some, except for one where they invited everybody to share what they had for the baptism, this other one, in fact in the same hall, we were having tea, they went to the corner with the family –

DD: Oh!

C: - and shared alone, and I thought, 'Wow! How can these people do this?' and fortunately it was just a week , I had been to another church, and seen how they shared what they had for the christening, with everyone –

DD: Yes.

C: - but in this other place, it was only... And then when we went to one funeral, the reverend said, 'OK I will explain to them, that you're students, because you're not part of this family' –

DD: OK...

C: - are you seeing? 'So I have to tell them, not to worry that you are here.'

DD and W: (Laugh)

C: - Making like we are an outsider...

DD: Have a big label....

W: (Laugh) Yeah.

C: We were just there, and we were like... we sat at the back, you know, so scared because –

DD: Mm.

C: - we were in the wrong place, because they have only their family, and less than even 20 people, who were only there and after that they went for a drink, just the family, in fact we didn't even go with them, because we were not invited. So – if there are such things going on, unless now they integrate, they have an outsider with them, who will teach them how to move out, like... for us, people came from the west to Kenya, and they would teach us some of what they do – we learn from them, so it's a process –

DD: Mm.

C: of learning from one another. If you don't have such people how will you learn? How will you change?

DD: Yes.

C: - and you don't have somebody who practises *ubuntu* there, so it's difficult I can say.

DD: Mm.

C: - because you practise it and there is no-one from outside who is coming to be with you, so that you can have these changes. You can't change (Laugh) – that's what I think. Yeah.

DD: Right. Mm.

W: Yeah, to add on what she says, it's quite an uphill battle –

DD: Mm. **(65.00)**

W: - for me... er... the first thing that should be worked on, is on the individual rights, and that is critical. And it's very hard to break that! Because you have deep and high respect for individuals. Why she, why the minister was saying I need to speak to them it's because, they did not want [me] to interfere with their space –

DD: Mm. Yes.

W: - <u>high</u> regard for that –

DD: Mm, mm.

W: - so it is <u>that </u>thing that should break, in order for communal... er, kind of life to be promoted.

DD: Mm.

W: Er... Jesus, as we said earlier on, was a community person. He spoke about other people, he spoke about the rights of other peoples, at the same time he always found himself eating with all kinds of people, combining even with those people who were literally... said to be misfits –

DD: Mm, mm.

W: - mis... misfits for the society. Maybe if we take a leaf on that angle, of trying to interpret the Bible, to be a community kind of... er, that it promotes community in short, I think it can also change, but it, it, it ... may take time, it may take time.

DD: Mm.

W: But, er, that can also help. And another thing, er... promoting things. Many of the things to me should be done in groups, yeah. It should start with the, the, the leadership. In my research, as I said, earlier on... because I'm focussing upon the leaders and *ubuntu*, why our leaders have been failing in Africa, it's because, they used to practise traditional leadership –

DD: Mm.

W: - but during the colonial period they inherited the western kind of leadership –

DD: Yeah.

W: - trying to combine those two things, they got confused –

DD: Mm.

W: - so, they [act] practised what was not western, and what was not even African!

DD: Yes.

W: Yeah. So, as a result, we have now that kind of life, now, this... almost 50 years from the time we started getting, most of those African countries got their independence, we have seen ourselves that we have really... derailed from what we were, the real concepts that we needed to embrace; as a result, we are now more coloured! (Laugh)

DD: (Laugh) Mm.

C: Mm.

W: We are in between the whites, and we are... we are African -

DD: Yes.

W: - but in between. So those are the problems that we are, we are facing.

DD: Mm.

W: So now what can we do? I thought now the solutions are, is to get back, what was it that we practised some time ago?

DD: Yeah.

W: - because I... we, I attended the one church, church group, we call the... the groups within the Methodist church, [inaudible comment] there was one speaker who was talking about 'back to back'. Yeah – 'back to back' means some things that happened years ago, because there is a commune there, some buildings, which are called, they are called back to backs –

DD: Yes, that's right, yes.

W: Yes. So that made us, the whole of us to start talking and participating about the kind of life which was there, many years ago, for example, in the 40s and 50s. So, I realised that, at that time, the western people were practising [comm] a kind of community, right –

DD: Mm.

W: - so, where has it gone now? Because one of them said, 'You know, is...', she was asking me, 'is this happening, a person can just come at any time without ...making an appointment or maybe sending, er, a request , er, that I'll come, to your family, spend time with you for at least 2 days?' Then she was confessing, 'We used to have this kind of life, many years ago' –

DD: Yes.

W: - 'My uncle would just come, "I've come to stay", but nowadays... that thing cannot happen' –

DD: Mm. **(70.00)**

W: - you have to send a request, 'Can I come?' –

DD: Mm.

W: - 'No', and they will say 'No!'-

DD: (Laugh)

C: Mm.

W: - 'Don't come! We don't have enough to keep you here' , yeah –

DD: Mm.

W: - So, those things could... those things are more African, that is more African I think because, I'm still seeing that one, but we are also, moving away (laugh) from that. So, in short, it's possible the western kind of life ... it can go back to something that was there –

C: Mm.

DD:Mm.

W: - this has just come in, maybe, because of promotion of some of... er, like, work, maybe work, because of kind of work that you people do. Again, human rights, which came in in 194...7 –

DD: Mm.

W: - yes, human rights have also... contributed, yeah, so it's possible to go back to that communal... I know it could be an uphill, but it's possible; and she also indicated learning from one another. We have not yet lost everything (laugh) completely...

C: No.

W: - but we still have some, some things that we can, we can still share, and we can also learn from, from the west –

DD: Yes.

W: - some things that we are missing out as well. On the way I was saying the *ubuntu* can be embraced everywhere –

C: Mm.

W: - because the key elements are, more of universal, the key elements are universal, so it can embraced in the west and in the... east. I was reading somewhere, where Bill Clinton was addressing the Labour Party, here in UK –

DD: - yeah.

W: - and he said, 'It's important that we should practise *ubuntu*!'

DD: (Laugh) Yes.

W: - (Laugh) Yeah.

DD: He's stolen that word from...

C and W: (Laugh)

W: - Yeah, so it's possible we have the things. What we need to put the institutions that can help to practise the *ubuntu*-

DD: Mm.

W: - because the elements are there; what you only need is what... what institutions do we need to, to help practise that kind of communal –

DD: Mm.

W: -er, being belonging to each other, because what is more pronounced is... you belong to me and I belong to you –

DD: Mm.

W: - so, I'm accountable to you, whatever I'm doing I'm accountable. I shouldn't to... take my rights to decrease where it affects you, no. It's important that I'm accountable, so in short, we are accountable to the community and for each other, yeah.

DD: Mm.

W: So, I think that's how we have now these dictators who started thinking about themselves –

DD: Yes.

W: - they forgot about the *ubuntu* being in service to the people – they started thinking about themselves –

DD: Mm.

W: - they lost it. So we can still go back and start practising where, I am accountable to the people –

DD: Mm.

W: - and people are accountable to me as well. It's two way.

DD: Maybe the western church is in that same place –

W: Yes. (Laugh) Yeah.

DD: - that we are saying, 'we are this, we want this', but we are surrounded by –

C: Yeah.

DD: - another way of living (Laugh)

W: Yeah.

DD: - and we get the mixture wrong –

W: Yes. (Laugh)

DD: - like you say, we are not black or white, we are coloured in the middle! (Laugh) But we are called to be strangers –

C and W: Yeah, mm.

DD: - aren't we, in the land, in a way, so we should be different, maybe, the church -

W: Yeah. I –

DD: - is the institution that can help people practise... –

W: Yeah.

DD: - I don't know. (Laugh) Oh, thank you very much, both of you, it's very helpful, thank you.

W: Yeah.

C: Yeah, thank you, it's helpful -

W: I have appreciated –

C: We also appreciate , yeah.

W: We learned as well. We appreciate, it was helping us also what we are missing –

DD: Yes, yes.

W: - and what we can do as well, so it has been helpful to us as well, thank you so much.

DD: Is there anything else you want to say before I turn the tapes off?

C: We just, I want to say that it's a learning process, we are there to learn every time, and it's good also to interpret –

DD: Yes.

C: - and experiencing other peoples' contexts has taught us a lot -

DD: Yes.

AC - but I'm not in Africa, I'm in Britain, so some things that work for Kenya don't work for Britain, and there are things that are in Britain that don't work for Kenya -

DD: Mm.

 A: - so it is a process of learning and learning to tolerate one another, then you shall exist peacefully, yeah. **(75.00)**

DD: Mm.

C: Yeah, just accept one another and just learn – this is the way of life, this is my way of life, but, at least, how can we be people together, yeah.

W: Mm.

DD: Mm. Good things from each place –

W: Yeah, yeah.

C: Exactly.

DD: There are good things about individualism –

C: Yes, yes.

DD: - there are good things about communal life, yeah.

C: It's true.

W: It's about sharing the load –

C: Yeah.

W: The good I can learn and... the bad things should be discarded.

DD: Yes.

W: Yeah, so that... we all live in peace and promote the values of... that we have in our communities –

DD: Mm.

W: - the value that promote... human, humanity as well... and, as she says, trying to learn from each other, help –

DD: Mm.

W: - and, our being here in the west has taught us a lot as well, trying to brainstorm and to see where we get it wrong, get it wrong and what can we do to do it right. So – it's that of, exchanging notes and learning from each other –

DD: Mm.

W: - it's a learning process, continue learning, yeah. Thank you.

DD: Mm. Thank you.

C: Thank you.

DD = researcher
M = 'Mary'
T = 'Toby'
H = 'Helen'

DD: Thank you so much for helping me with this research, and I'm so sorry it's taken us a while to…(laugh).. to meet together. Erm, so I hope you… are happy with what I'm trying to do, this is part of my… research, that I'm exploring *ubuntu.* I'm looking at a theological… concept of *ubuntu,* and I'm interested in how this… can help us, <u>whether </u>it can help us, here in the Western contemporary church, somewhere like urban Britain. So, I'd be very, glad if we can just talk together, about your experience in your country of origin,,. if you can tell me a bit about your experience, and thoughts, about… relational life, at home, and also your experience of that here, in the UK, **(1.00)** and then we'll close with whether you think *ubuntu* can help us here in the Western church.
So, ********, can, I start with you? Could you just say where you're from originally?

M: I'm an… Zimbabwean, and I have, lived here for, about 25 years, I came here when I was about… 22 ish? Erm… And… there's a… real difference, living here, and… being at home. I find that, generally, in general terms, because I haven't been to every part of… the United Kingdom, neither have I been to every part of the Western world, but where I have experienced life, mainly in London, my experience has been, it's very… individualistic? And I find that difficult…

DD: Mm.

M: … sometimes. **(2.00)** Erm… there are times it's useful, because… I find, I come from, our background is very, community… based, and [you know] we have these large extended families, so our life doesn't just revolve around our nuclear families, neither does it… just revolve around, our blood families, but, it's much wider, er, in the community, so…

DD: Can I ask you, do you have the word *ubuntu* in Zimbabwe, or is there a different word?

M: Yes, we call that… *hunhu.*

DD: *Hunhu?*

M: *Hunhu.* H-U-N-U…

DD: OK.

M: Erm… and I think that translates to, to the same things. And we very much, believe that… *hunhu…* is a result, or a manifestation, of the community, where you come from. **(3.00)** So

you were made who you are, by the people who surround you.That is why in… er, bringing children up… it's a very community thing…

DD: Mm.

M: …so, it's not just my mother's responsibility or my father's responsibil[ity], but everybody, mm. So we kind of come together, really, in most key…things in life, as a community, where I found in this life really difficult, when I've had my own child, and I found it difficult when I had to go to work sometimes and, I can't trust the next person to leave them with my daughter, neither would they like too, because they too are trying to… desperately meet their own challenges, and it is, for me it isn't been really easy to, I've always been surrounded by people who work -

DD: Mm.

M: - so, our challenges were, kind of similar. But for those who have family around, it's likely easier; for me, it, life has been very expensive -

DD: Mm.

M: - because I almost have to pay for everything -

DD: Mm. **(4.00)**

M: - and at home, I wouldn't have to do that, and, when I haven't been very well, it's really been usually the responsibility of my husband, to, to look after me and… make the family carry on. At home it would have been different, cos, the church, and everybody else, in the community, would want to contribute to that, erm, and in a sense… I am a member of the…Methodist church…. Zimbabwe fellowship, and that helps, cos then it keeps that anchoring of the community, of belonging -

DD: Mm, yeah, OK.

M: - and I think, part of *hunhu,* is a sense of belonging -

DD: Mm.

M: - to a community, which I've found difficult -

DD: Mm.

M: - to, yeah. I don't think I belong, although I've been here for 25 years, I don't really think I belong here, unfortunately -

DD: Mm?

M: - I don't really [feel] I belong, feel I belong to the Zimbabweans -

DD: Mm.**(5.00)**

M: - entirely, now…

DD: Yeah. Thank you.

M: ……either, as I said, that's a difficult place to be…. Does that answer your question?

DD: Yes, yes…Thank you - well that answers lots of questions! (Laughs)

M: Goodness me!

DD: Erm, thank you. *******, you're from Zambia?

T: Yes please, I'm from Zambia. Mm hm.

DD: Could you define *ubuntu* for me? I know that word's used in Zambia… is it?

T: The word is used in Zambia, yes -

DD: Mm.

T: - ok, I will start by just reading from this book, er… it's defining, er, B*antu,* which is, er, one of our language, the [Tem?] *bwantu,* very first were a group of tribes, spread across the sub-Saharan, Africa, they formed a most fundamental conception about reality of the being. They expressed this reality in the, root word, *ntu…*

DD: Mm.**(6.00)**

T: …er, the prefix to this word defines and differentiates being, and it keeps on going there (referring to the book). This is, er, one of the concepts, which is, as she has explained, in the… the north of African countries, and more especially unknown (?) for the northerner, the [bay - unclear] part of Africa, but for the South, the southern Africa, it is there.

DD: Mm.

T: It's a concept which, er, it was being used, and erm, which er, meant people to be one, and doing things together, er, working together, when it comes even to certain, er, manual work, people come together as a team, as a family, and so, I think about supporting each other, but, erm, as much as, er, this has been with us, for, quite a while, er, currently, what we are seeing, yes, erm, the concept may be there **(7.00)** but , er, what is happening on the ground -

DD: Mm.

T: - is different, because I think of, erm, there are so many changes, we are post-experienced(?), we are may be talking about, er, the extended family, which in reality today, is diminishing. People are almost like, er, of nuclear family, very few, are doing or supporting, as it used to be, but er, all in all, er, the… *ubuntu* concept, er, in, in <u>us</u> in Zambia, it is still there, it is working, and, er, we still see people in some… certain areas, working together, coming together, er, solving issues together, supporting each other, because that is part of <u>us</u>.

DD: Thank you. I'd like to come back to this point -

T: Mm hm.

DD: - of it changing -

T: Yeah.

H: Mm.

DD: - later on, thank you. ******, you're from Kenya?

H: Yeah, I come from Kenya, from Mehru community **(8.00)** which is part of Bantu, and so we share the same root word, er, (*a)ntu* -

DD: (A)ntu? Mm hm.

H: Yeah, to mean, a person, I mean, *muntu,* to mean a person. M-U-N-T-U -

DD: Yes.

H: - and, and we have a saying, in my dialect, we say '*muntu nyantu'.(?)*

DD: Mm. Can you say what that means for me, in English?

H: A person is other persons…

DD: Yes.

H: Like, erm… the, the, the, you, you cannot live alone in a community, you, you have, to get support of other people, in the community. And, there, there are certain ex-expectations, of you, of me being a person, being *-ntu,* that, if I lack that, then I'm considered an animal, for example. **(9.00)** If… I kill, then that, er, *-ntu,* has left me -

DD: Mm.

H: - so I'm no longer a person, I've become an animal, and like, there, there are certain things, that are not expected to be done… by, a person, or *muntu*. So that shows that, erm… the community lives together, supporting each other, and, er, there are certain expectations, yeah, there are the do's and don'ts…. of, the set-up, and like, er, ******** is saying, there are changes… that, that is lacking. Well, I wouldn't say it's, it's, it's lacking any bad, it's because of the change that has come with modernisation, but that, that great support from the larger community is now going down, such that now, **(10.00)** we, we, we do things in smaller communities, like…the nuclear family -

DD: Yes.

H: - acting, we get concerns from neighbours. For example, if I get an attack, or my house gets on fire, my immediate neighbour and other people will just come to help me put out the fire. That is *ntu,* you know? Like now, I'm here with my studies, my husband is taking care of my daughter, but, he is not doing it alone -

DD: Mm.

H: - the other people, neighbours, like, whenever he goes to work, he leaves, the girl with the neighbour, in the, in the neighbourhood, in the circuit he is, working, so there's that concern still, there's still some connections about… *umu, umuntu.* So that's - yeah.

DD: Yes. Thank you. Is it possible then, to be a, a human being **(11.00)** an individual, but not a person? Are you saying, there's a person… there's, someone with *ntu,* so you can just be a human being, you don't have that…

T: No, no, the definitions, yes, it's it's er, to be a person. I think that er, we are defining, this person -

DD: Mm.

T: - in the way he or she is relating (getting?) with others, in the way he or she is responding, to issues that are affecting people, and, er, if you are doing it that, er, in a positive way, then you qualify, in the way we define, *ubuntu.*

DD: Yes.

T: But if you start to do things contrary, like happened in South Africa, where people are killing each other -

DD: Yes, yes.

T: - then people start to say, 'This is not *ubuntu.* It is contrary because, of what we believe in.'

DD: Thank you.

M: So we would say *ubuntu* is being human **(12.00)** so, human beings… don't kill each other. You can be a person -

DD: Mm.

H: Mm.

M: - because you breathe, you do…you do all the other things, but because you behave like an animal… you are not human. So, our humanity, we have expectations, which are <u>not</u> different really, from any other, culture, but we place the responsibility, not <u>just</u> on the individual… but on the whole community, so if somebody fails, it's because their family failed them, they didn't train them enough, when they were young, the community failed them. Where were they when they/he was doing this thing? -

DD: Mm.

M: -These things, they didn't just start now, they should have been looking out for those things and they should have done something, so it's not just the individual, although it's the person that will go to prison, but it's a shame on the whole community -

T: Mm.

M: - that you've brought up or made (?), that's how we would say.

DD: So to be truly human, is to practise *ubuntu,* or *hunu?* **(13.00)**

T and M: Mm.

DD: Yeah. Can I ask, erm, in your churches, if you could say very briefly, er, your church background? And can you say is *ubuntu,* or *hunhu*, is it expressed in the same way in the church, as in the wider community? Or is there something special or different about church… community life?

T: I think for, for me my church, it's not different from what is happening in the wider community, 'cos the church is made up of the same people -

DD: Yes.

T: - so the understanding of, erm, *ubuntu* …even if these people become, to be Christians, they still come from the same, understanding -

DD: Mm hm.

T: - and so I can say, when we have, erm, maybe like a member who is bereaved, the same, the way people assemble to that is the way they support that person, it's because of the

same, background. **(14.00)** These people will leave their homes, to go and spend nights, where that person is mourning -

DD: Yes.

T: - if they take two, three, four days they be with that person, because of the same background they are coming from.

DD: Mm.

T: And so, in many other ways also, the churches, erm, er is doing the same, as things have been done, outside the church, it's because of the same understanding, of *ubuntu* concept.

DD: Mm. Thank you.

M: It's an extension of our being… and it enhances what we already do, and it's the added, addition of the knowledge of Christ, er… but we bring, it from, the community into the church -

DD: Mm.

M: - the expectations, are no different.

DD: Mm, yep.

H: Probably, I will add to that and say, although, it is an extension of, er, the wider society in the church, er, there are extreme cases. **(15.00)** For example, where I come from, my people like take Jesus Christ as their personal saviour, they have Jesus they have everything, so "| don't need my neighbour, I have Jesus."

DD: OK: mm!

H: But - those are extreme cases. Although they are there in our churches.

DD: Mm.

H: This person rarely mixes with other people because of that aspect of, you know, you have Jesus they have everything. But… again I'd say, those are extreme cases, but within the church are supporting all aspects including marriage, they will support young people to get married, do weddings, and, and mission(?), the churches support that, because, as ******** said, it's an extension -

DD: Yes.

H: - of society to the church, they're the same people, yeah.

T: But again, in those, erm, it will, again they, we may have two types of churches. **(16.00)** There's a church that is, er maybe, in a rural set-up - for them they will seriously, abide by what we are discussing, but when we go into urban -

DD: Mm.

T: - where maybe this church is, with people highly educated, er -

DD: Mm, mm.

T: - who have been exposed, to this world, the wider world, then this time their understanding of, erm, maybe *ubuntu* concept in the way they are applying it, it may relate that with what is happening here, because of maybe, they're, they are now becoming self-centred, er, they, they are distancing themselves from, erm, what we believe in as Africa[n], because of maybe money, education, their exposure they have been -

DD: Mm, mm.

T: - they have experienced in this world, so I can(?) say, having such a true picture, in one, this church in a rural set-up, and a church which is… in a town centre.

DD: Mm. So you see -

H: Probably, probably to add, to add to that in, in urban centre, **(17.00)** you have people from other communities, speaking other languages, that could be one of the contributing factors, er, like, er… probably I may not be right, but this is what I've seen, here… you go to, for example, Selly Oak Methodist church, er, yes I'll worship, but thereafter I will see a group of, say, Zimbabweans. I'm, I'm black, I'm African, but normal rule (?), because I'm a stranger to them, so I will not fit in, as, as fast as probably, if I knew, one of them, then I can probably be there, and that's what happens in the urban set-ups back home, where probably if it's a Kikuyu, a, a group of Kikuyus, they socialise at that, level in their language, in their local dialect and if it is a Mehru **(18.00),** then, so you find -

DD: Mm, OK.

H: - groups, groups, but again, they separate each other from where they come from.

DD: Mm.

M: And in Zimbabwe it would be very different, because the stranger is our best friend, so when people see somebody they don't know, they want to rally round them, make sure they're comfortable, they've eaten, we try and teach them, a few words of our language, we want to know more about them, and we don't want them to be alone… and the impact of, er, movement across the globe -

DD: Mm.

M: - is that people are learning new cultures, they, they are making a bit more money, they are a bit more, educated perhaps, and they, er, are beginning to adopt different ways of living… and… that has resulted in some of them being, described as not being…*vanu.*

DD: Mm.

M: So we say *hasi munu-* is not a person -

DD: Mm.

M: - because they don't attend funerals any more, they don't come and spend the night - **(19.00)**

DD: *Hasi munu?*

M: Yeah, *hasi munu.* Because they don't do the things that we expect them to do, and they can't do those things because they've got other commitments as well, and their world view has changed -
DD: Mm.

M: - so it has become difficult for them to -

T: Mm… to fit in.

M: - to fit in.

DD: So, this is…much more common in the urban, setting, you feel? Because of the reasons that ******* has described? Or, and -

M: - Yeah -

DD: - and more traditional still in rural… areas? Is it split like that, do you feel? No?

M: I think in Zimbabwe, as long as somebody has stopped behaving, in the traditional way, they may, they may be described as, not… a person -

DD: Mm.

M: - so they may be isolated -

DD: Yes.

M: - because they are not… **(20.00)** living the way that the, we expect people to live, so we expect when you go home, erm, if I visit Zimbabwe, when people are eating, I should sit down with them, I should use my own hands, but when I start telling them, me, that I want to

use a fork… that is not, good. Because I am putting myself, a level above everybody else. We very much promote equality -

DD: Oh, ok.

M: - we are the same.

T: The other factor, in the rural set-up, which is also contributing to the same -

DD: Mm.

T: - being maintained, it's because of our… traditional leaders. Because, erm -

M: Mm hm.

T: - er, in the urban set-up, we have no such leaders -

DD: Mm.

T: - and so people can do whatever things they want, but when you go into rural set-up, you are, monitored, by your head men or women, and so if there is anything in the village that has happened, everyone has to attend because there, those people are, **(21.00)** the head men or head women, and their *ndunas (?)*, er, those assistants, they will make sure that, er, everyone has to be there, because if if you are not participating, in whatever is happening, that, er, community set-up, then in case of anything happens to you, you will not also see people coming to support you -

M: Mm.

T: - because they will say, you don't support us.

DD: Yes.

T: And again at the same time, you may be be summoned -

H: Mm.

T: - by the village head person, why you are not participating -

DD: Mm.

T: - in the other things that concerns other people there, same community -

M: Mm.

T: - and so, I can say, because of that in the village set-up, people, want to, get involved, er, in whatever is happening, and again it's a small, it's a small community, where people know each other, rather than the urban set-up -

DD: Yes, yes, yeah.

T: - where it is, so many people, and you are going to go about in the urban. Mm.

M: Mm, it's true.

DD: So, are there positive things, about, being so accountable? **(22.00)** And are there negative things about that?

T: Well, the positive things for me, like, erm, if people are community-wide thinking, in terms of [unclear word], which they provide, which they for one another which is very kind/hard (?) , you know. We had, er, I was reading from, one one case which happened, er, er two weeks ago in Zambia, where this pastor, er, killed his wife -

DD: Hm!

H: Mm.

T: - beating his wife, er, during the night, and the wife was shouting, and shouting, and neighbours because it's in urban, neighbours couldn't couldn't go and assist, until in the morning, this woman, er, had died when was taken to the hospital -

DD: Mm.

T: - the nurse, the following day, when now they knew that the lady died, that's when now they went to the relatives to say, 'Actually, we heard, er, your family member, er, shouting, yester night, and we were [surprised/ sure?] the husband was beating her, **(23.00)** so just take this case to the the police' -

DD: Oh, ok.

T: - 'It's it's the beatings that have killed your person,' but they couldn't come out, when they were hearing the beatings -

DD: Yes.

T: - and so but that thing, it's because of again the same, same things which are happening,in in a , er, urban set-up where people are fearing, to offer support, to each other, because maybe they may end up being victims of that. But in the rural set-up, it's not I think people want to support each other, that's the, er, such a such a case they quickly want to go out and see how best they can support -

DD: Yes.

T: - so that is part of the positive aspect, yeah, mm.

DD: Mm. Thank you.

H: Yeah, and and for Kenya, er, the Government is trying to, introduce, what they are calling '*Nyumba kumi'* initiative. *Nyumba kumi,* that's in the urban set-up. *Nyumba kumi* - N-Y-U-M-B-A. K- that's another word -

DD: Yeah.

H: K-U-M-I. **(24.00)** *Nyumba kumi* initiative is, er, in urban set-ups, say where we are living in, er, urban, er in this estate in urban, and they will count 10 houses, and from those 10 houses you are supposed to know each other, where one comes from, and then you live as one community, and a stranger, because this is for security reasons -

DD: Mm, mm.

H: - especially in relation to what is happening in the country about terrorism, whereas a stranger comes and rents a house, and before you know it -
DD: Mm.

H: - bombs and other explosives are planted, tested, so to to cut that, they say *nyumba kumi* initiative. To me that promotes *ubuntu* -

DD: Yes.

H: - because you care, and no stranger will come without, this - like ********** was saying, a head man, for that *nyumba kumi* initiative. *Nyumba* is house, *kumi* is 10. **(25.00)**

DD: Thank you (laughs) That sounds very interesting. Mm.

H: Ten houses. Yeah, so to me that promotes *ubuntu* and it is reducing, security risks in, estates in urban set-ups where, er, people are living from different communities without knowing each other -

DD: Yes.

H: - you don't know who is your neighbour, but now that one is sort of, to me, if it works - it has worked in Nairobi the capital city some some estates, and it has been adopted to other counties in certain, in urban set-ups, so, it is a promotion of *ubuntu,* I would say.

DD: That's very interesting.

M: And I think the thing about being accountable is that, there are certain things… I can't do, because I know ********* is watching, what is he going to think?

DD: (Laughs) What were you going to do, ********? (All laugh) Mm.

M: Exactly! And that's the point - before I do anything, **(26.00)** I think about what ********* is going to think, and how it's going to affect him, and, if I decide I want to wear a very short dress, I need to make sure that ********** is not there, because if he's there, I will be called to account by ******, because I am exposing myself to all sorts of things, <u>rape</u> for example, this is how you end up, people say, 'You brought it upon yourself' -

DD: Mm.

M: - and we think that the community that has let you down, they should have brought you to account and know that this is not good. So, whereas… my experience here is, you get about your own business, you're not accountable to anybody, so people could actually, observe someone doing something that is, unsafe, to the person themselves, to the people around them, but…. feel powerless to challenge, them, and I think that isolation, that individualistic thing, has its advantages perhaps… **(27.00)** but I find this more damaging, and it goes back to the thing where you think, oh, but I saw it happening, and I <u>could</u> have , and I didn't -

DD: Mm.

M: - and I think, and in terms of, bringing up children… I am very passionate about young girls in particular -

DD: Mm.

M: - because they belong to a community, there are certain behaviours, that are placed upon them and, they are accountable to any one of the mothers in the community, not just me, so they can't have little boys running around them, all the things, erm, because Mummy's not at home -

DD: Yes.

M: - because we know that the next Mummy's there, so they can't do that -

DD; Yes.

M: - and although there's limits to how that can control children, at least it is in place to try and, bring up a well-rounded child, and I think it's hard to bring a child on your own -

DD: Mm.

M: - er, because there are certain things you may not notice or may not know. The disadvantage to *ubuntu* **(28.00)** is that it can really impinge on privacy…. there's been (?) the

boundaries on what is secret, what is private, and what is public, it can be really difficult to then define, and if people are, invading each others' space, so much, they then begin to blur into each other, and I I find that -

DD: Mm, OK.

M: - hard, whereas I find it very easy, here, if I want to be private -

DD: Yes, yes.

M: - and if I want to grieve on my own, I can say… 'I just need to be on my own,' and it's OK, whereas in the community I come from, I can't say I want to grieve on my own… immediately I'm looked at, as, I am putting myself above everybody else, and it, it causes all sorts of problems -

DD: Mm.

M: - so, while its positive to be supported it's not every time, one wants support in that sort of… form.

DD: Do you feel, erm, … **(29.00)** when I read Acts 2, about the early church, do you feel this is, resonates with you? Erm, that they ate together -

H and M: Mm.

DD: -that they shared their, what they had…Does this feel… similar to *ubuntu,* to you?

T: Yeah for me it's er, it is because, erm, although we have challenges today, which may be hindering us to do, as the Scripture is saying, but erm, where things are OK, we are seeing er, such things happening, that's why in many instances, like, er, weddings, when I am come home, having my son or my daughter who is marrying, it's not my only responsibility -

D: Mm.

T: - to do that, the community will come in, the church will come in, they will constitute the committees, they will raise money they will do blah blah all sorts of things, it's because of the same, issue we are discussing here, **(30.00)** and so, yes, we may have challenges, but they've, erm, made us to, maybe to say (?) we are not doing very well in as far as want (?) is concerned, but at the same time, we are trying, to, come together, to share, the little we may have, again again it may differ(?) in individual families, there are some families who are very good, who try by all means to support -

M: - each other.

T: - each other, but again there are some people, the little they may have plenty, for them, they'll still not share, even as it was also, as the the early church, it's not all the people, it's only two -

DD: Mm, that's right, yeah.

T: [inaudible comment], yes.

DD: So, if somebody in the church, was not practising *ubuntu,* and that sharing… you've already said, there may be different reasons why people… don't practise, this common life **(31.00)** …but would the church respond to that?

H: Yeah.

DD: Like the headman that you talked about, ******** -

T: Mm.

DD: - would somebody in the church, in leadership? -

H: One, one of the encounters I've had in my ministry is when, like we have home to home fellowships, for example the women fellowship… and this takes place, say, we call them cell groups, whereby like we identify certain people are coming from, this area, and they come to this church, so we visit, but but they may choose to visit each other. Now if you've not been visiting others… when the day of your visit, other women ladies are visiting you, the number goes down…. so I've been challenging women, I mean to to stop those differences -

DD: Mm.

H: - and like to tell those who don't attend fellowships, to also improve, because the results are, **(32.00)** if you don't -

M: fellowship.

H: - visit other peoples, homes, during the cell groups, fellowships, then they will not come to you. And some instances it has been very bad and this person has cooked, waited for them, but because she has not been attending other cell groups, they don't come to her house, so, she comes to me complaining that 'I waited for these people, they didn't come,' so I ask, what is your relation with other ladies? Have you attended a number of them, and then I will seek to know what could be the underlying factors, but <u>mainly</u> it is because this person has not been attending, so it's like, 'Scratch my back, I scratch yours.'

DD: Mm.

M: To add onto what you have just said, you have said something important for us Zimbabweans. We say *ubuntu mantu (?)* - it's tied with food.

DD: Ok, yeah. (Laughs) **(33.00)**

H: Mm.

M: So we share food, when we visit each other, it is very important that there is food available… but in the church we have what we call, *rajl keres (?)* so the role of *rajl keres* if somebody… I hate to use the word backslide, but a backslider or somebody who has stepped out of… -

DD: Fellowship, mm.

M: Right - the peoples' responsibility is to <u>visit</u> the person, try and talk to them to find out, whether there may be a problem. And if there's a problem, whether there's anything that can be done to, help them, or they could still be coming to church…. <u>but</u> their behaviour is really unacceptable. There's an an encouragement for these *raja keres* or elders to go, and take this person privately, and have a word with them, and **(34.00)** if somebody's gone for a very long time and they have not yet married, and we think, 'Ah!' they've gone past their sell-by date, it is the role of the elders to go and have a chat about what's happening, whether they're not finding, a suitable person, and if not, (laugh) can we help, and we, and because we believe, marriage is very important -

DD: Mm.

M: - as well, so, the churches are really an important role in speaking into… the difficult situations, in different -

DD: Mmm, mm. Thank you. Do you think anyone experiences loneliness… in, your, home situation?

M: (Pause) Yes. Yes, people do, I I think that…. our needs as human beings are the same, but how we meet, those needs is what may differ, **(35.00)** so loneliness when it has been identified where I come from, people quickly rally there, around the person, to try and, support them and help them, and I think it's easily identified, because you are part of this community, where you have, you are in relationships with people, so when people stop seeing you, doing the things that you would normally do, it sends alarm bells, so they can pick it up quicker. And I think living here, in isolation, it can take a very long time -

H: Yes, yes.

M: - before people can pick it up, erm, and there are many reasons why people can get… lonely… erm, bereavement being one of them, it doesn't matter how much community is around them, it's an experience you have to go through, OK you have got all this support to help you, come, through the other end, whereas I find <u>here</u>… the alternative is to go to a counsellor, **(36.00)** and I'm not sure that counselling is always culturally sensitive, to help <u>me</u> -

DD: Mm, mm.

M: erm, so I still feel, isolated, I don't, I just, my experience of counselling here for example has been you've got to cry! And I don't want to cry in front of strangers, it's not the thing I want to cry with my family, and people I know, and that can cause its own problems, er, but it will be, wrong to suggest there's no loneliness, er but we deal with it very differently.

DD: Mm.

T: Ah it is there, as she has just said, er, it's in the church… in the community, also in the small family, we have such experiences, and from the church point of view, we have been receiving complaints from people some time have been saying, 'Us… who have no money, the church does not come to us' **(37.00)** and so such people, they have such a pain in them, because of lacking certain things and so I can say, even when they've, a very serious problem, because of their situation, the church will not respond in the way, that they would respond to someone who is maybe his status is very -

M: high -

H: Mm.

T: - high, and so the same thing in the family, set-up, there are people whom the family, people always run to, because of certain things they have, they have acquired in this world, but there are also such family members who are not counted (?), not considered, er, for them, it is one of those things, and so such people, they have stories also to share -

DD: Mm.

T: - in regard to, the issue of loneliness.

DD: Yes.

T: - so it is yes with us, yes we can talk about *ubuntu* concept but, we still have also, individuals here and there who are not called, **(38.00)** not taken care of -

DD; Mm. OK.

T: - as the the concept is saying.

H: And also probably the the, people who have committed certain abominations in the community, certainly in the rural set-up, may experience loneliness due to isolation, because no-one would want to mix with this person who has done this. Er, some extreme cases this person is purely (?) isolated from the society - if it is going to fetch water, this person would fetch water from the well alone. Mm.

DD: So because they have broken, that faith with the community? Yeah.

H: Yeah.

T: Or if, we had the one one minister who left aside (?) last year, in our church, because, of him (pregnanting?)a member, and, er, from that, although the church did not condemn him **(39.00)** but from within their family, between himself and the wife, there was such a difference, and so, doing that now this issue got to the church and the next thing, it gets that you will have to follow me, so before, even when meetings were held by the church, the next few year/fear (?), this minister has done this, because in him, er, what he had done, is not expected of a minister, it is not expected of, *ubuntu -*

DD: Yes.

T: - that was something, contrary, as per his calling. Mm.

DD: OK. Mm… thank you. I just - sorry -

M: Much as we may want the West to learn from *ubuntu -*

DD: Mm.

M: - the *ubuntu,* origins need to re-adopt it, and re-embrace it, and re-introduce it as well, **(40.00)** 'cos there's so much left in people doing things as individuals -

DD: Mm.

M: - we've lost a lot, that we had, when we were doing things, together.

H: And probably, to say, that it takes a lot of time, to practise *ubuntu -*

DD: Yes, yes.

M: - to imagine the cost (?)

H: - so, er, for the West I don't know, it's quite a challenge, where people are busy busy, tension using (?) when do you have time now for this, like eating together and all that so probably, time is one thing that probably needs to be, looked at, for it to change, to work, say in the West, and probably these are now developments that are catching up with us there, when people start working, and they may lack time, or even space to like attend funerals and all that, so I will send my money, but again we say money doesn't represent you, yes we, you have sorted us financially but we need your presence, **(41.00)** but, time doesn't allow me because my books doesn't understand understand our system so, burial and all that where we have to mourn like a whole week, so time, for me -

DD: Yes, mm, mm.

H: - is a very, vital problem when you are talking about *ubuntu.*

M: So we really need to renegotiate how we manifest that, er, from what, we did before, before the changes.

T: One thing which has, which I've also noted, in the four months I have been here, is the difference between the, the white, people who have been to Africa, and those who have never been, to Africa.

DD: Mm.

T: Those who have been to Africa, in the way they approach issues, in the way they, the way they deal with issues is different with those who have never been to Africa, and so, I think, er, for those who have been to Africa, they understand, although they might be very, in this context, **(42.00)** where people are very busy, but I think for me, with the few I've been in touch with, they have got, er, the spirit of accommodating, others -

DD: Mm.

 T: - because I think of their, learning, maybe they may have acquired from, wherever, in whichever country they were, in Africa -

DD: Mm.

T: - but for those who have never been, to Africa, it's a very big challenge, and so unless otherwise to… er, import that into this context, I know it may be a very big challenge with the way things are.

DD: Something dropped, in our hearts (laughs), when we were there. (M and DD laugh) Can we talk about the UK now, before we finish? Er, you've already said some very helpful things, thank you. Have you experienced, *ubuntu,* in any kind of way, here in the UK? **(43.00)** I'm thinking of, possibly, within Queen's, but just in daily life in the UK, and… in your link church here for example.

M: I have experienced <u>immense</u> *ubuntu/umuntu?,* in the UK, er… and whether it's er because of where I was and what I was doing, I've been I've lived homeless, on the streets, and I was, taken off the streets, er, in the UK, by people who were not Zimbabweans, who were not black, erm, and they rallied around me and found me, er, places to stay, helped me back, erm, to life, and, I am who I am today in the UK because of that support… Albeit it has been individual, or whether because I am a professional, and I happened to then meet, **(44.00)** other professionals -

DD: Mm.

M: - and had close supervision and mentoring, and all of that, I've become myself, I'm sure that had a lot, to do with it, but I've been <u>immensely</u> supported in the church as well, so it manifests differently, erm, but I can't… understate the impact of the individualistic approach that people have, to each other. They were good to <u>me</u>, but not the same to each other.

DD: So there are some… universal qualities -

H and M: Yeah, mm.

DD: - because we're all human, but, is there something about our world view, that you see differently?

H: Probably, erm, like when I, I came here it was <u>very </u>cold for me, and for like two three weeks I stayed in my cold room -

DD: I'm sorry! (Laughs) **(45.00)**

H: - and, I think it well, I would tell ******* and ********* and ********* 'My room is really cold, I don't want to go there;' the minute I opened up to -

M: -others -

H: - others, like one, one time, we were from Chapel, and one white lady asked me, 'Are you fine?' I said 'No, my room is cold', that very day she brought me a heater that I'm still using -

M: Mm, mm.

H: - so, if kind of you open up, people are willing, to come in and assist, and, that's what I, I would say, and we've been invited, like as a group, not only by black people, even the whites, they want to share a meal with us, they have done so severally, so, I would say when like you strike a conversation, you can go farther, people can step in -

M: Mm, mm.

H: - in, in a big way, unless when, unlike when you call yourself, and you're like, I'm not so sure **(46.00) of** what they will think, people still can help and there's so many people can help. Yeah.

DD: Mm.

T: As our daughter (?) say, it has been done, what is important is, er, like for us, is to take a step… er, approach, individuals -

DD: Mm.

T: -and those who have been approaching, they have been very helpful…. from our coming, like, our class, many of, many people have opened their homes, they have supported us, in terms of feeding us, taking care of us, finding from us how we are doing at Queen's, they have been, er, always trying to speak to us 'How are you doing? Scholars, how are you doing how are you doing?' and so, in their own, their own way, I think they have been supporting. Not only that, even when it comes to assignments, this is not, we are writing assignments in the, Queen's language, people are very much, willing to give their time, er, to go through the, er, whatever you've written **(47.00)** to make corrections here and there, and that is part of *ubuntu* -

DD: Mm, mm.

T: - which they are rendering to us, er, on the expense of their time -

H: Mm, mm.

T: - so,erm, you cannot say it is not happening here, it is happening in its own way, in its own style -

DD: Mm, mm.

T: - It's a matter of just understanding, and er, maybe relating whatever, we are receiving in that we, are waiting for, how it has been done in our context. However, it is not a matter of saying it is not happening, it is happening, but in a different way.

DD and M: Mm, mm.

M: And if the issue was to be restated, perhaps, is to, er… for them to be a bit more coming forth, because unless you go and approach -

T: Mm, mm.

M: - then nothing comes -

DD: Mm.

M: - and I think that's where the big difference is?

DD: Mm.

M: But not everybody's confident, to approach and open up, erm, but once that happens, **(48.00)** *ubuntu* is there. Our fears are the same, our anxieties are the same, we like the same things, but it's to <u>initiate</u> that, manifestation, of *umuntu(?)* on both sides is the key thing, I think.

T: When we came, I think the first day, was it a Monday, when the principal lost his father? That was our, that was our concern, we were saying 'Ah, the principal had lost his father' and we were, we didn't know, although an announcement was made, we thought, because we were thinking in an African way, of doing things, but, er, when it was explained, to us by our, our tutor, he said 'No - yes, service is done, but it is done in this way; people will mourn with the principal, either by sending a card, signed and put their signature, and that is part of, how we do things here.' So, when it was explained, we came to understand as, er, the class, that we are thinking, **(49.00)** in a different way, when it is done, in this way, and so… it has been -

M: We wanted to rally round the principal -

T: Mm, mm. (Laughs)

M: - and pray with him, and show our solidarity because that's what we do -

DD: So it felt strange for you - yeah.

T, H and M: Yeah, mm.

H: Very strange, and, how can he lose his mother, and continue being in college?

DD and T: Mm.

M: Mm, yeah, we thought that was wrong.

T: Yeah, in our context, it's wrong, because -

DD: - he should have been? -

T: - then people will say he's not, he's not cultured -

H and M: Mm.

T: - for sure, those the following day you are working, but here, it's quite normal, and we should have appreciated those - mm.

H: But again I shouldn't say that there is, there are limits, to the way people socialise here… For ex[ample], I don't know exactly, in Youtube, its called, 'Dead giveaway', about this American, who was, who had abducted two girls **(50.00)** for 15 years, and their relatives thought that they're dead. But he, the immediate door neighbour, they eat together, and when you listen to it you hear when he says, because he is giving a testimony to the, to the police that, 'We eat together, we [do] trips together we eat the McDonalds together (laughs) and, I didn't know he had kept these two girls,' until one girl has given birth to a child of 7 years, they have been living in this house and the next door neighbour would <u>not</u> know -

DD: They didn't know, mm.

H: - about them so there are limits of how we relate to our, people, to other people -

T: Mm.

H: - here and in the US, no matter how close as in proximity, yeah, but still there, there are limits.

DD: Mm.

H: That, that could be probably limiting, to, now, the sense of *ubuntu,* that we have all agreed that, it's being practised here but, to some extent. **(51.00)**

M: The making a phone call to say I am coming and making an appointment, is not something in our culture, our culture is… ****** I just go to her room, when I go there I expect her to give me food, so -

DD: Mm.

M: - there is no forewarning, if I am sick and I tell her that I am not feeling well, I expect her to come with paracetamol to my room, I don't expect her to come and look at me like a flower, because -

DD: (Laughs) Like a flower!

M: - I expect action -

H: Yeah.

M: - and I don't necessarily expect that, from people here -

DD: Mm.

M: - 'cos they're kind of really, I think they, they go by what you want, whereas ours is -

DD: Mm.

M: - no we know what you want, and they're the [opposite].

DD: I think we see, erm, community, in a very functional, way. We, we see each other, we see only as one person, we don't see -

H and M: Mm.

DD: - ourselves, and that's the Western world view, yeah, it's just… **(52.00)** Do, so you think, is it possible for us to change that worldview?

M: Yes.

DD: - in the church, can we change that?

H: Mm.

M: Yes. I I think, it's, expensive, to do -

DD: Mm.

M: - because it requires, quite some investing, investment on both sides, erm, a willingness of what you give up… time -

H and DD: Mm.

M: - being one of the resources people have to give up on, on each side, and because it's that expensive that might be, the biggest, barrier, but I think it's possible, it just calls for a lot more conversation… and I like the, er… for a Government to have to take that step, to build the community -

D: Mm.

M: - I think, it's a good initiative, and these communities could be, enforced in a place like Queen's, erm, it should be helpful, to start; people have to learn **(53.00)** to do that, unfortunately -

DD: We need to learn, mm.

M: - erm, it's not just something that can happen, erm, from -

H: And -

M: - and it's learning together and implementing it together, erm, I think.

H: And probably, er, the church can… it can probably happen through the church in this sense; while I'm, I attended a memorial service, one of the Anglican priests, when he lost a sister, back in, Zimbabwe… and, the church supported, there are a couple of white[s] people who are a member of this congregation, they came, not all but a few came, and I had an opportunity of talking to one, white lady who was there, and she was like, 'This is amazing, I mean, it is so beau[tiful]' because the turn-up from, Zimbabwe was just so overwhelming and I was saying 'This is, this is good **(54.00)** we need to support each other', I mean so if, since the churches are mixed groups not necessarily white congregations, purely white congregations -

DD: Mm.

H: - and if that is where it's a mixed group, then it's easy to learn, and if people are open, to learn, and ready to learn then *ubuntu* can be learned through the churches, that (word unclear).

DD: But we need someone to model it, for us, to show?

H: Yeah, mm, and since there is already a group that, practises that it becomes easy then to learn -

DD: Mm.

H: - about *ubuntu.*

DD: Mm.

T: Er, [I can say] it's possible at the same time it's, er, very challenging, er, because, erm, I think, er, at some point, even here, the ones we are talking about, the nuclear family the extended family, we are talking about is something that has been done here. I remember when I was here in 2002 **(55.00)** the reverend I was working with talked about that even in UK, in years back -

DD: Mm.

T: - this is how things were -

DD: Yeah, mm.

T: - we are so mindful for our extended family members… now, because of the economic, er, hardships, we find ourselves in where we are now today, and so he was telling me that even you in Africa, today we might be so proud of the *ubuntu,* the extended family, which you are, taking care of, involved in, but, er, at some point, things may change, you may even end up reducing the number of children because of the, way things may be at that time, which for me, er, comparing 2002 and today what is happening in Zambia, I think, er, we are almost going to the same thing.

DD: Mm.

T: We are almost going there, because of, **(56.00)** the economic hardships, people are fearing to marry, because how/ what am I going to be giving this person?

DD: Mm.

T: In case I have children, what am I, going to give, to be giving my children? And so it's become so difficult, in many ways, and so, unless otherwise, erm, in certain in certain areas yes, we may, be talking about maybe academics, this is very important, but on the <u>ground</u>, what is happening on the ground, is another thing, to to look at, and so even when we are saying we bring it here, people in the UK to to, maybe, do the same, it's not something which is very easy, it's very complex and very expensive, on the part of, the people, in the way people now today are understanding this issue and the way they, we are in this global, global village -

DD: Mm.

T: - which has, so many issues, so many challenges.

DD: Yes.

M: But it's not insurmountable -

H and T: Mm.

M: **(57.00)** - it can still happen -

DD: Mm.

M: - and even if other communities, other people may not do it, but if the <u>principle</u> is there, and it's kept alive, it might find its own way -

DD: Mm.

M: - its manifestation again, I think what will be really, er, a a loss, would be to forget about it completely.

DD: And the church maybe, that is their part to play, against the culture! (Laughs)

M: Yes.

T: The church is doing fine, well it's trying… the Zimbabwean fellowship they are doing very well at Selly Oak, but what about, er… the indigenous people?

DD: Yes.

T: What is happening, in the let's say, members of the church?

DD: Mm.

T: For us who have come, we are, because of <u>that</u> thing which is in <u>us</u>, even when we are here, we are still maintaining <u>that,</u> it is helping us to be <u>one</u> -

M: Mm.

T: - and to participate in the affairs of, my sister, without any problem -

M: Mm.

T: - but for, for the indigenous people, er, they because **(58.00)** you are expecting to have a card, if you have not been invited with a card, even if even if it is, mourning, a funeral, when you have no card -

DD: Yes.

T: - then how will you go there? So maybe it's as we are saying, yes it is possible, but the people have to commit their time, to that.

DD: Mm, mm.

M: And I think your idea about the role of the church, is really significant, 'cos even with a small fellowship groups in the country, they work well, where the minister, has embraced the fellowship. And, then they are the bridge between the new culture, and the indigenous culture, and try to bring them together, so we are going to need our ministers, to be the bridge, the the cousins, that bring people -

DD: Mm.

M: - and… cultures, all those important things together, as long as we know they're there, and work out a way **(59.00)** in which they can be learned -

DD: Mm, mm.

M: - and the learning that has led to the, individualism, that we now see, is important, to feed back so… we don't lose it in Africa -

DD: Mm.

M: - 'cos I would hate for that to happen.

DD: So we can learn together.

M: We can learn together.

DD: Something! (Laughs)

M: Avoid seeing that, because this is what will happen, try not to support consumerism -

DD: Mm.

M: - speak very vehemently against it -

DD: Mm.

M: - resist that and resist that, and, and I think that's the role of the church, to speak against those things -

DD: Mm.

M: - that are <u>counter</u>, humanity.

DD: Thank you so much, all of you, it's been really interesting and very helpful for me. Is there anything else you want to say before we finish, that we've not covered, or..? (Laughs)

M: Good luck.

DD: Thank you.

T: Yeh, thank you.

DD: Thank you.