A THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY TOWARDS
UNDERSTANDING THE ORIGIN OF AND NEED FOR COMMUNITY

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B.A. & B.S., Allegheny College, 2007

A THESIS

Submitted to the faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts in Religion
at Reformed Theological Seminary

Charlotte, North Carolina
July 2012
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ABSTRACT
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Humanity is created in the image of God—this fact carries numerous implications for the identity of man, the nature of his interpersonal relationships, the lens through which he views existence, and the foundation and mission of the church. Where a theologically accurate anthropology contributes to a healthy view of identity and community, a theologically inaccurate or culturally diluted anthropology contributes to both a poor sense of individual spirituality and an ineffectual church. Individuals today define themselves by what they do and not who they are, by virtue of their associations rather than by virtue of their origins. Tracing the anthropology of man shows his identity is rooted in being created in the image of God, and being created in the image of God includes being created to need and thrive in community. Examples from both the Old and New Testaments show what community is, how it should function, and why it is important. Pertinent will be a brief survey the history of the church, comparing the Sitz im Leben of the early church in Acts to the current state of the church, including any recent trends that exist in today’s church. Authentic Biblical community, regardless of what form it takes, is essential to and indicative of the true local church.
To my beautiful wife Elizabeth Ann—your courage, patience, and support have made this possible; you are and forever will be my superhero. Mom and Dad, your insatiable desire to love, to provide, and to guide have made all the difference in the world. Matthew and Michael, you will always be my Best Men. Samson, you are a moose
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Assumptions

“The question of origins is one of the most significant that a person ever faces: where we came from is crucial to understanding who we are and where we are going.”¹ In an attempt to understand the whence and the wither of man’s existence, one must first look to humanity’s origin—man is created in the image of God. What follows is a theological anthropology; an understanding of human experience that acknowledges all human experience is rooted in the light of God’s revelation:

The question, ‘What does it mean to say that humanity has been created in God’s image,’ is, at one and the same time, both theological and anthropological. It would be one-sided to say that it is primarily a theological question or to suggest that it is essentially an anthropological question. It is both—theological and anthropological. This is the question of theological anthropology.²

A theologically accurate understanding of man’s origins yields a healthy view of individual identity and corporate existence, while a theologically faulty understanding of man’s origins yields an incomplete and harmful view of individual identity and corporate

existence. Man must recognize his identity stems from his origin—rather than his associations in this ephemeral existence:

There is a real need for an anthropology, which adopts a distinctively theological point of view. Understanding human experience—this is not something which theologians can safely leave to others. It is vitally important for everyone. It concerns a better understanding of ourselves. We may write as Theologians, who, affirming their faith in God, must speak as those who have their feet upon this earth. ³

In the face of an individualistic society, it must further be noted that man is created to exist as a person-in-community. God is a triune God, and when God created man in His own image, it was His intention that man not be alone. “We learn in Genesis 2 that one part of creation was ‘not good.’ For a relatively brief span of time, the man Adam was alone. God said, ‘It is not good for man to be alone’ (Gen. 2:18).”⁴ Individuals desire to belong, and pursue various avenues towards that end. Martin Luther said, “God has created mankind for fellowship, and not for solitariness, which is clearly proved by this strong argument: God, in the creation of the world, created man and woman, to the end that the man in the woman should have a fellow.”⁵

These underpinnings—man is created in the image of God, God is a triune God and exists in community with Himself, man is created for community—form a comprehensive and holistic foundation for understanding who, why, and how man is.

3 Ibid., 53.


5 Martin Luther, Table Talk, Translated by William Hazlitt (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Available from http://www.ccel.org/ccel/luther/tabletalk.pdf; Internet; February 28, 2012.)
Goals

In their book *Total Church*, Tim Chester and Steve Timmis write that church is an identity, “Church is not another ball for me to juggle but that which defines who I am and gives Christlike shape to my life.”⁶ They expand on this further by noting that the Christian’s specific need for church is tied to humanity’s need for community in general, “Our identity as human beings is found in community. Our identity as Christians is found in Christ’s new community.”⁷ Understanding that man is created for community and his identity is deficient when he is separated from the church, the present project seeks to delve into these assumptions so as to render the nature of and need for community explicitly clear. It is hoped that communicating these concepts will facilitate the believer’s ability to be fully informed in regards to understanding his identity, his need for community, and the nature of the church.

Limitations

While man as an image bearer of God and his subsequent need for community are of prime importance, the conversation will naturally drift into the nature of the church, for the church is the central community an individual belongs to. The present project is not intended to serve as an authoritative treatise on the church. Rather, the author hopes to provide a resource beneficial in cultivating authentic Biblical among brothers and sisters in Christ.

In the course of the discussion, evaluations of the state of the contemporary American evangelical church are made—these are not intended to be comprehensive, but are made in

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⁷ Ibid., 50.
summary as the flow of the conversation requires. Accordingly, any mention of emerging
trends in ecclesiology is—while necessary for present purposes—not exhaustive.

**Proposition**

Mankind is created in the image of God, and accordingly is created to exist in an
authentic Biblical community that reflects the nature of God; this authentic community is
indicative of the local church. The present project seeks to place man’s identity as an image
bearer of God in its proper context of community, and then flesh out the appropriate
implications for man as well as the community he finds himself in.

**Literature Review**

The literature consulted in support of this project fell into two broad categories:
thetical works of a systematic or Biblical nature, and ecclesiological works concerned
with missiology. The former provided a theological foundation for understanding the nature
of man, and the latter provided the context in which the nature of man is expressed
corporately. Of help also were commentaries and linguistic aids. The most interesting and
pertinent are detailed below.

Systematic Theologies by Grudem, Berkhof, and Van Til all were consulted in the
explication of the Trinity. Care was given to understand the extent to which it may be said
God is a “communal” God, or that God “lives in community with Himself.” In addition to
these three works, Hoekema and Berkouwer provided a focused and in-depth study of man
insofar as he is created in the image of God. Daniel Milgore’s chapter “Communion of the
Triune God: Towards a Trinitarian Ecclesiology in Reformed Perspective” in *Reformed
Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity: Volume 1 was immensely helpful in tying together the importance of the Trinity with understanding what community is and how it serves as an expression of man being created in the image of God.

Beck and Demarest contains a psychologically accurate—and theologically orthodox—view of the human person. Their chapters on man as he is created in the image of God and man as he exists in an intricate web of relationships were illuminating and pertinent. Further, their ability to summarize various perspectives—along with each perspective’s strengths and weaknesses—were enlightening.

The discussion of community that reflects the nature of God surveys both Old and New Testament gatherings of His people; general commentaries were helpful in this pursuit, along with Stott’s The Spirit, the Church, and the World and Wright’s The Mission of God’s People. Stott provided a unique perspective on the early church in Acts 2 and Acts 4, and Wright detailed to what extent Scripture may be referred to as missional. Stetzer’s Breaking the Missional Code was also helpful in understanding the importance of incarnational/contextual ministry, and what trends in contemporary American ecclesiology gave rise to the emerging church movement that exists today. DeYoung and Gilbert were explicitly helpful in balancing out the missional conversation; DeYoung is widely known for Why We’re Not Emergent and Why We Love the Church.

Finally, Total Church by Tim Chester and Steve Timmis and Community: Taking Your Small Group off Life Support by Brad House were invaluable resources. Total Church encourages a re-centering of the church around the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and sees authentic Biblical as a necessary component to the expression and sharing of the Gospel. Community is a tremendous asset; it clearly sets forth the Biblical mandate for community before providing
resources for ensuring (community groups/small groups/life group/insert trendy title here) are life giving. *Total Church* casts a “big picture” vision of why authentic Biblical is important, and *Community* details the “small picture” details necessary for cultivating and facilitating authentic Biblical. More than aids in the writing of this paper, both resources would be useful in the creation, revitalization, or facilitation of a community group ministry in the local church.
CHAPTER 2
MAN CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

God is a triune God

A hallmark of the Christian belief system—a non-negotiable from which the Church has refused to move—is the doctrine of the Trinity. A discussion of the imago dei must necessarily include a discussion of the Trinity; while an entire project could itself be undertaken towards attempting to explicate the Trinity in some palatable fashion, a brief summary of the doctrine is helpful before proceeding. The word Trinity itself, meaning “tri-unity” or “three-in-oneness” is never used in the Bible, though the idea it carries—that God is one God in three persons—is taught in many places.\(^1\) We define the Trinity as follows, “God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God.”\(^2\) In stating this reality, we must recognize the three explicit truth claims inherent in the definition: 1) God is three persons; 2) Each person is fully God; and 3) There is one God.\(^3\)

Attempts to represent the Trinity in such a way as man can understand have proved ultimately unsatisfying, for man’s mind is incapable of fully comprehending such a majestic

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\(^2\) Ibid., 226.

\(^3\) Ibid., 231.
truth. Every analogy is fundamentally flawed and every illustration comes up short—there is simply no way a human mind can comprehend a being that is one, but three, and still one. While a given analogy may be helpful at an elemental level of understanding, it ultimately gives way to an inadequate or misleading portrayal of the Trinity. For this reason, the church “has never tried to explain the mystery of the Trinity, but only sought to formulate the doctrine of the Trinity in such a manner that the errors which endangered it were warded off.” Berkhof further notes:

The doctrine of the Trinity has always bristled with difficulties, and therefore it is no wonder that the Church in its attempt to formulate it was repeatedly tempted to rationalize it and give it a construction of it which failed to do justice to the Scriptural data.

Man is unable to fully grasp the doctrine of the Trinity because it is an entirely foreign concept to him—that a being can be one and three at the same time is devastatingly complex and beyond man’s ability to relate:

Experience teaches that where you have a person, you also have a distinct individual essence. Every person is a distinct and separate individual, in whom human nature is individualized. But in God there are no three individuals alongside of and separate from, one another, but only personal self-distinctions within the Divine essence, which is not only generically, but also numerically, one.

Man has no logical foundation of relatable knowledge—no base of experience from which to understand something that is both singular and plural at the same time. And yet that is precisely what the Trinity is, a “divine essence that is not divided among the three persons,

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4 Ibid., 240.
6 Ibid., 82.
7 Ibid., 87.
but is wholly with all its perfection in each one of the persons, so that they have a numerical unity of essence.”

Van Til summarizes the matter well when he says:

“We speak of the essence of God in contrast to the three persons of the Godhead. We speak of God as a person; yet we speak also of three persons in the Godhead. As we say that each of the attributes of God is to be identified with the being of God, while yet we are justified in making a distinction between them, so we say that each of the persons of the Trinity is exhaustive of divinity itself, while yet there is a genuine distinction between the persons. Unity and plurality are equally ultimate in the Godhead. The persons of the Godhead are mutually exhaustive of one another and therefore of the essence of the Godhead. God is a one-conscious being, and yet he is also a tri-conscious being.”

One of the more fundamental elements of the Trinitarian doctrine is perichoresis, or the mutual co-indwelling of the three persons of the Trinity whereby each person fully dwells within the other, but still manages to remain distinct. In this way, each member of the Trinity is fully God, has the whole fullness of God’s being in him, and individually shares in all the attributes of God. “Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are equally that one God, and that the indivisible divine essence and all divine perfections and prerogatives, belong to each in the same sense and degree.”

Despite the mutual co-indwelling, there is ontological order to the Trinity that does not imply priority or rank of dignity. Sometimes this ordering has been referred to as the “economy of the Trinity,” where “economy” refers to the “ordering of activities.” The distinction arises because when Scripture discusses God’s relation to the world—especially

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8 Ibid., 88.
10 Ibid., 348.
11 Grudem, 248 and 252.
12 Van Til, 351.
in creation and redemption—the persons of the Trinity are said to have different functions or primary activities. This ontological order recognizes God the Father as first, God the Son as second, and God the Holy Spirit as third. Further, certain actions are distinct to each person—generation to the Father, filiation to the Son, and procession to the Spirit—and are known as *opera ad intra* because they are personal operations occurring within the Trinity that are incommunicable to humanity. Other actions, *opera ad extra*, are manifest externally and are works of the Trinity as a whole rather than being ascribed to a certain person within the Godhead; creation, redemption, and sanctification, while ascribed primarily to individual members of the Trinity, are joint actions of the Godhead.

The concept of *perichoresis* tells us the members of the Godhead are mutually co-indwelling with each other, and the implications of that truth are far-reaching for the purpose of this project. The communicable attributes of God emphasize His personality because they reveal Him as a rational and moral being. Apart from the personality of God there can be no sense of personality in man; God is archetypal and man is ectypal, and the ultimate standard of personality rests with God—what exists imperfectly in man exists perfectly in God.

From this—the doctrine of the communicable attributes of God as they relate to His personality—we see the beginnings of a theology of community:

The argument from personality, to prove at least a plurality in God, can be put in some such form as this: Among men the ego awakens to consciousness only by contact with the non-ego. Personality does not develop nor exist in isolation, but only in association with other persons. Hence, it is equal persons in Him. His contact with His creatures would not account for His personality any more than man’s contact with the animals would explain his personality. In virtue of the tri-personal existence of

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13 Grudem, 248.
14 Berkhof, 88-89.
15 Ibid., 84.
God there is an infinite fulness [sic] of divine life in Him.  

That God has a personality means His mutual co-indwelling must include a communal interaction among the members of the Godhead. God has a personality, and the attribute of personality itself is communicated to man, who is derivative of and dependent upon God. However, God’s personality could not have developed in solitude, for personality needs contact and relationship outside itself to develop. Therefore, the communicable attribute of personality must have developed in such a way that reciprocity would have been established, and the only way for this to happen would be for God to commune with another God. As there is but one God in three persons, some sort of shared relationships within the Godhead are an unavoidable reality—we may anthropomorphically refer to these shared relationships as community.

It is not a stretch to say the Trinitarian doctrine provides the key to a theology of community, nor is it a stretch to say authentic human community has its foundation in the communion of the Trinity. “The wonders of God’s triune nature are not taught in Scripture simply for ivory-tower discussions. Scripture teaches us about God’s triunity so that we might know him and relate to him more fully in our everyday lives.” Present purposes seek to unpack the nature of this relationship—the extent to which human community is grounded in the Trinity. In advance of that discussion, a brief survey of Scriptural support for the Trinity will provide a larger context to work within. The main discussion itself will utilize Genesis 1, so the Scriptural survey will exclude that particular text from its scope.

16 Ibid., 85; emphasis original.


The Trinity throughout Scripture

It is true—the word *Trinity* is not mentioned in the Bible. But that does not mean it isn’t a prevalent theme or that it should not be considered. In understanding the evidence for the Trinity in the Bible, we will do well to avoid two extremes: One temptation is to assume a complete theology of the Trinity exists in the Old Testament, and that is a faulty assumption. However, the far opposite temptation is to conclude Scripture does not present a unified system of doctrine, and that is also a faulty assumption. Instead, it is best to affirm that the doctrine of the Trinity is indeed existent in the Old Testament, but is taught more explicitly in the New Testament.\textsuperscript{19} Or, put another way, one could say the Old Testament anticipates a fuller revelation of the Trinity in the New Testament.\textsuperscript{20}

In Genesis 16:7-13, Hagar addresses the angel of the Lord and says, “You are a God of seeing.” In a single scenario, the angel of the Lord is both distinguished from and identified with God. This contrast appears again in Exodus 23 and 30; in Exodus 23:20-21 the Lord identifies Himself with His Angel, “for my name is in him,” yet in Exodus 30 the Lord says He will send His Angel to go with Israel, but He Himself will not go—clearly distinguishing Himself from the Angel.

At times the Messiah—about whom prophecies abound in the Old Testament—is intertwined with both the Lord and His Spirit in such a way that the three are distinguished as distinct persons who exist in divinely orchestrated relationships. Isaiah 48:16 is one instance of this; the Messiah speaks about being sent—along with the Spirit—by the Lord: “‘Draw near to me, hear this: from the beginning I have not spoken in secret, from the time it came to

\textsuperscript{19} Van Til, 349.

\textsuperscript{20} Berkhof, 86.
be I have been there.’ And now the Lord God has sent me, and his Spirit.” Isaiah 61:1 is a
second example, its words are quoted by Jesus in Luke 4:16-30, “The Spirit of the Lord God
is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor…”21

Given that Jesus is referred to as the Word, “In the beginning was the Word, and the
Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1), personification of the Word of God
adds a further dimension when considering the existence of the Trinity from the Old and
New Testaments. Consider, for example, Psalm 33: 4, 6. “For the word of the Lord is upright,
and all his work is done in faithfulness . . . By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,
and by the breath of his mouth all their host.”

The Westminster Confession cites Matt 3:16-17; Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14; John 1:14,
18; and John 15:26 all as New Testament examples in which to find Scriptural support for the
Trinity. The texts from the Old and New Testament are in no way exhaustive, but indicate the
extent to which one may build a Scriptural argument for the existence of the Trinity.22 Were
an in-depth study undertaken, it would reveal that the separate persons of the Trinity are
shown to stand out clearly in the pages of Scripture as both unified and distinct.23

God’s triune nature in Genesis 1

As God is a triune God, all things He does emanate from His triune nature, and
nothing He does is independent from any one of the persons within the Godhead—this
includes creation. Given the present investigative scope, God’s triune nature as it is seen
through the act of creation in Genesis 1 is of particular interest. The persons of the Trinity

21 Ibid., 86.
22 Van Til, 350.
23 Berkhof, 86.
can be seen specifically at work in creation: God the Father spoke the words that brought creation into existence, God the Son was the divine agent responsible for carrying out the words spoken by the Father (Jn. 1:3; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2), and God the Holy Spirit was present and active “moving over the face of the waters,” (Genesis 1:2):24

Scripture teaches us that the triune God is the author of creation, Gen 1:1; Isa. 40:12; 44:24; 45:12…Though the Father is in the foreground in the work of creation, 1 Cor. 8:6, it is also clearly recognized as the work of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The Son’s participation in it is indicated in John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col 1:15-17, and the activity of the Spirit in it finds expression in Gen. 1:2; Job 26:13; 33:4; Ps. 104:30; Isa. 40: 12, 13. The second and third persons are not dependent powers or mere intermediaries, but independent authors together with the Father. The work was not divided among the three persons, but the whole, though from different aspects, is ascribed to each one of the persons. All things are at once out of the Father, through, the Son, and in the Holy Spirit.25

Genesis 1:1 reads, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,” and much is packed into those few words. God is emphasized as creator, though He is referred to with a plural noun in the Hebrew—Elohim. Despite referencing God in the plural, the verb “created” is in the singular—the break in grammar suggests fullness within the Godhead.26 God is not identified any further in v. 1, but the author appears confident the reader will not confuse this God with any other god; in 2:4 Elohim is identified with the LORD—Yahweh.27

When the author identifies Elohim as Yahweh, he makes it very clear that the context for understanding Elohim includes the book of Genesis as well as the entire Pentateuch. This ensures the God of Genesis 1:1 is not an arbitrary deity, but the very God who calls the

24 Grudem, 241.

25 Berkhof, 129.


Patriarchs into His land, redeems them from Egypt, and leads them to the borders of the Promised Land. In addition to being the Creator, He is also the great Redeemer and Shepherd. Far from being faceless or abstract, the God of Genesis 1:1 is the very same God encountered throughout the Pentateuch.\textsuperscript{28}

Further, the identification of \textit{Elohim} as \textit{Yahweh} reminds the reader that the Creator is a personal God:

\begin{quote}
Creation is an act of the personal God, not a process of nature, the development of which can be traced to the laws of birth and decay that prevail in the created world. But the work of God, as described in the creation of history, is in perfect harmony with the correct notions of divine omnipotence, wisdom, and goodness.\textsuperscript{29}
\end{quote}

As noted above, a personal God is only possible if He is a God who exists in community with Himself and develops a personality therein. That God creates personally has ramifications for creation itself. That God—as a God in community—creates man in His image has implications for the nature and identity of man. Before unpacking what it means for man to be created in the image of God, a brief textual analysis will further reveal the extent to which God’s communal nature is evident in Genesis 1.

Genesis 1:26 refers to God in the plural when it states, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness…’” At least four possible explanations exist when trying to understand the plural usage: 1) the plural is used in reference to the Trinity. This argument was used by the early church, but is regarded by some as largely dogmatic. 2) The plural is used to note God and His court of heavenly angels. Babylonian literary parallels

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 20.
\end{footnotes}
support this reading, but a heavenly court or angelic intermediary beings are not familiar concepts in Genesis. 3) The plural is used in an attempt to show that man cannot perfectly resemble God; the author of Genesis seems intent on preserving the uniqueness God. 4) The plural is an expression of God’s deliberation as He makes man. This argument has been abandoned of late as well since the plural majesty does not occur frequently (only in Ezra 4:18) in Hebrew.\textsuperscript{30} Even though option 1 is regarded as dogmatic, the immediate context of v. 26 does not seem to support any other option conclusively.

Verse 27 states twice that man was created (\textit{bara}) in God’s image and a third time that man was created (\textit{bara}) “male and female.” Mankind (\textit{adam}) is used generically as a collective singular consisting of the plurality “male and female.” The text leads the reader to see the divine plurality expressed in v. 26 as an anticipation of the human plurality of man and women. In this way, the human relationship between man and women is seen as reflecting God’s own personal relationship with Himself.\textsuperscript{31} Man created in the image of God and mankind created as male and female both point the reader back to the concept of God-in-community:

\begin{quote}
Could anything be more obvious than to conclude from this clear indication that the image and likeness of the being created by God signifies existence in confrontation, i.e., in this confrontation, in the juxtaposition and conjunction of man and man which is that of man and female, and then to go on to ask against this background in what the original and prototype of the divine existence of the creator consists?\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{31} Sailhamer, 38.

\textsuperscript{32} Karl Barth, \textit{Church Dogmatics}, vol. 3 (New York: Scribner, 1956), 195. Barth’s use of the word \textit{confrontation} can be confusing. By existence in confrontation he means an existence that comes face-to-face with another, that must consider another, that is not alone but is considered in relation to another.
God is not a singular Being, but is constantly confronted with Himself as He exists in community with Himself—He cannot help but encounter Himself in His own existence. In the same way, man is not intended to exist in isolation, but rather to exist as juxtaposed against another.

To say that man is created in the image of God and to see man created as male and female is to see God existing in community with Himself, a God who is triune in nature—that much is clear. The existential implications stemming from the fact that man is created in the image of a triune God are the desired result of the present discussion. However, the specific content of the image of God—what is meant when one states man is created in the image of God—is due consideration; while the precise content of the image of God is not essential to the present task, it is nonetheless significant and relevant.

**Man is created in the image of God**

Building off the Trinity at work in creation, the implications of God’s triune nature as they pertain to man being created in His image are of ultimate interest. The Old Testament itself does not say much about the image of God—it is only dealt with explicitly in three passages, all of which are found in the Book of Genesis. The first is the most obvious, Genesis 1:26-28, and it teaches the uniqueness of man. Much has been made of the extent to which man’s creation was unique—and rightfully so: No other element of creation originates out of divine counsel as does man’s creation.33 The creative act to make man, and in so doing

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make man in God’s image, is the high point of creation itself, the purpose in which the preceding verses in Genesis culminate.34

The creation of man does not take place through a word addressed by God to the earth, but as the result of the divine decree, ‘We will make man in Our image, after our likeness,’ which proclaims at the very outset the distinction and pre-eminence of man above all the other creatures of the earth.35

Of all the creatures God made, only one is said to be made in the image of God – man.36 It is obvious that he is unique, but determining the nature of his uniqueness proves much more difficult—of what does the likeness and resemblance consist?37 All of creation is dependent upon God, for it owes its very existence to God. And while man is a person and by nature independent to a certain extent—able to express freedom of volition—his independence is only relative to the fact that his basic existence is still grounded in God.38

This tension—the balance wherein man is both dependent upon God because he is a creature but also independent of Him because he is a person—provides context for the current discussion. “The image of God is something which concerns the whole man, his place in this world and his future, his likeness in his being a child of a Father, of this Father in heaven.”39

Genesis 1:26 is clear, God plans to make a creature similar to Himself—both the Hebrew word for “image” (tselem) and the Hebrew word for “likeness” (demut) refer to

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35 Keil and Delitzsch, 61-62.
36 Grudem, 442.
37 Keil and Delitzsch, 63.
38 Hoekema, 6.
39 Berkouwer, 117.
something similar but not identical to the thing it represents or is an image of.\textsuperscript{40} “Both terms, obviously, refer to a relation between man and his Creator; a ‘likeness’ between man and God, with no explanation given as to exactly what this likeness consists of or implies.”\textsuperscript{41}

\textit{Tselem} stems from a word meaning, “to carve,” indicating man is a representation of God; \textit{demuth} comes from the root word that means, “to be like.” Together these two words tell us man is a representation of God and is like Him in certain respects.\textsuperscript{42}

The second and third references in Genesis concerning the \textit{imago dei} do not contribute anything of substance to the present discussion, but do shed light on a relevant issue. Debate exists as to whether or not man lost the image of God as a result of the fall—these two passages dispel that notion.\textsuperscript{43} The second passage is Genesis 5:1-3:

\begin{quote}
This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created. When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth.
\end{quote}

Coming at a time after the fall, this passage still speaks of Adam as bearing the image of God.\textsuperscript{44} That Adam still bears the image of God but Seth is said to be in the likeness and image of Adam and not God may permit one to infer from this verse that Adam passed the sin-stained image to his son.\textsuperscript{45} More specifically, however, the passage seems intent on

\begin{itemize}
\item[40] Grudem, 442-443.
\item[41] Berkouwer, 69.
\item[42] Hoekema, 13.
\item[43] Ibid., 16.
\item[44] C.f. Berkouwer 119-193 for an expanded discussion.
\item[45] This is in no way meant to infer that Seth was not created in the image of God. Seth, and all of humanity after him, was created in the image of God, but by the actions of Adam that image was stained by sin.
\end{itemize}
casting God as father of Adam, as Father of Abraham and his seed, and as Father of all humanity.\(^{46}\)

The third passage concerning the image of God is found in Genesis 9:6, “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.” Again, one can infer evidence that fallen man still bears the image of God, however corrupted by sin the image may be.\(^{47}\) Both the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort suggest some remnant of the image of God is retained in man even though sin’s destructive corruption is pervasive. That is, man turned to sin and away from God, and in doing so put himself at enmity with God and remains alienated from Him. However, this does not alter the fact that man is created in the image of God—man cannot escape that fundamental relationship, nor can he erase the basic vestiges that accompany it.\(^{48}\) One could say that while the image is distorted, it is by no means lost.\(^{49}\)

And yet, what precisely is the image of God?\(^{50}\) To what does Genesis 1:26-27 refer when it says God created man in His “image” (tselem) and “likeness” (demut)? That man is created in the image of God means that man is entirely derivative of God and wholly dependent on Him—there is not an element of man that is self-sufficient, for all of man is

\(^{46}\) Sailhamer, 70. “Scripture even says that man’s nature after the Fall is still the “work and creature of God” (See Deut. 32:6; Isa. 45:11, 54:5, 64:8; Acts 17:25; Rev. 4:11; Job 10:8-12; Ps. 139:14-16),” Berkouwer, 133.

\(^{47}\) Hoekema, 17.

\(^{48}\) Berkouwer, 126-127.

\(^{49}\) Grudem, 444.

\(^{50}\) What follows is the briefest of discussions on man’s existence as it is dependent upon God. For a more thorough discussion of epistemology as it pertains to God, see: Greg L Bahnsen, Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings and Analysis (Phillipsburg: P and R Publishing, 1998), Chapter 4—The Epistemological Side of Apologetics and Van Til, Systematic Theology.
rooted in all of God. Calvin is right to say, “however the knowledge of God and of
ourselves may be mutually connected, the order of right teaching requires that we discuss the
former first, then proceed afterward to treat the latter.” The *Institutes*’ opening words point
to the reality that man’s ability to think, act, and exist are all founded in God:

In the first place, no one can look upon himself without immediately turning
his thoughts to the contemplation of God, in whom he ‘lives and moves’ [Acts 17:28].
For, quite clearly, the mighty gifts with which we are endowed are hardly from
ourselves; indeed, our very being is nothing but subsistence in the one God.

God is transcendent above man, but also immanent within him. By virtue of the
communicable and incommunicable attributes, man both bears analogy to God’s being at
every point and at no point; man is never like God because there can be no true commonality
between God and man, and yet man is always like God because he has resemblance to God
by virtue of being created in His image. God is the archetype and man is the ectype: All
that man is—metaphysically, intellectually, volitionally, emotionally, relationally, and
functionally—is derivative of God. “[I]t is certain that man never achieves a clear
knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God’s face, and then descends from
contemplating him to scrutinize himself.”

When it is said man is created in the image of God, it is the elements of man that
depend on God that are most commonly in view—elements through which man resembles

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51 Van Til, 157.
53 Ibid., 35.
54 Van Til, 369.
55 James R. Beck and Bruce Demarest, *The Human Person in Theology and Psychology: A Biblical
Anthropology for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2005), 150-151.
56 Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.1.2.
God by virtue of the communicable attributes. However, a distinction should be drawn between those elements an individual is capable of expressing in his own being—who he is and what he does in an of himself—and those elements man is only able to embody through a relationship with another. Beck and Demarest clarify the differences by establishing three categories: the functional, the relational, and the substantative. The functional focuses on what a man does; the relational emphasizes man is created in the image of God insofar as he is created to exist in relationship, both with God and in community with other individuals; the substantative identifies a human’s likeness to God in terms of his soul or spirit—who he is.

Berkouwer, while summarizing various approaches to the image of God, references Barth:

> The similarity, the analogy between man and God is here, not an *analogia entis* (analogy of being), but an *analogia relationis* (analogy of relation). The relation between ‘I’ and ‘Thou,’ which is already present in God (‘let us make God in our image’), finds its creaturely analogue in the relationship between man and woman. Just as there is an ‘I – Thou’ relationship in God, ‘a community of disposition and act in the divine essence,’ says Barth, so also is there in man an ‘I – Thou’ relation, a ‘face-to-face’ relation; and thus the pattern of human life is analogous to that of the divine life. This is the analogy, the *tertium comparationis*, we have been seeking, and this is God’s ‘image and likeness’ in man.

Most discussions of the *imago dei* concern themselves with what Barth terms the *analogia entis*, but it is the *analogia relationis* that is of specific interest at present. The

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57 Beck and Demarest, 141-145.

58 Berkouwer, 72.

59 For a nuanced treatment of this matter: see Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei and Theology for the Community of God*. Grenz’s work has not been discussed at length because of his contention that the image of God is a social construct rather than an anthropological certainty based on the revelation of God: “Stanley Grenz interprets the *imago dei* not as something that is given, but that which one becomes: ‘God desires that we be the image of God.’ Grenz adds, ‘Ultimately then, the image of God is a social reality. It refers to humans as beings-in-fellowship.” Beck and Demarest, *The Human Person in Theology and Psychology*, 145.
conversation often seems to take an “either/or” approach, one in which the *imago dei* can only pertain to man’s being or man’s relationships, but not both. Rather, the goal of the current project is to present a more holistic conception that considers both elements as equally important to the *imago dei*, and then elaborate on the communal, relational aspect. “The image will thus emerge as a rich, multi-faceted reality, comprising acts, relations, capacities, virtues, dispositions, and even emotions.”

Having dealt with the content of the image, attention now shifts to its implications for man’s relationships.

**Man is created to image God by existing in community**

If man is created in the image of God, then he resembles God and is like Him in certain respects. If God is a triune God, then He exists in community, and man should be able to give expression to that community in his own life. While man is obviously a unified person, he has the ability to image God by the way he endeavors to exist in community. The specific character of that community will be dealt with in the pages that follow, but for now it is sufficient to show how man is created for—and functions best in—community.

The theory of external relations states relationships are external to a person, and do not affect one’s personhood in any significant or essential way; relationships are non-essential factors that do not define one’s identity, and one’s identity exists independently of one’s relation to another. Conversely, the theory of internal relations follows the socio-relational model of becoming in which man is defined entirely by virtue of his relationships.

Relationships are essential rather than accidental, and man depends on relationships for his

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identity and nature.\textsuperscript{61} The socio-relational model is obviously influenced by Buber, whose \textit{I-Thou} contention states that an \textit{I} exists by relating to a \textit{Thou}. \textit{I} and \textit{Thou} existing in relationship constitute a person, for, “through the \textit{Thou} a man becomes \textit{I}.”\textsuperscript{62}

To a certain extent, Buber (and Barth after him) is correct: Relationships are essential rather than accidental. However, relationships are essential insofar as they are intended by God as a good and necessary thing; relationships are not an avenue of definition or identification, but rather a means of expressing the identity man has by virtue of being created in the image of a God who is triune. “This Trinitarian understanding of God has as its corollary a radical redefinition of personhood and community. By concrete participation in the self-giving love of the triune God, we learn that “persons” and “community” are mutually dependent realities.”\textsuperscript{63}

Man bears the image of God because he is dependent on God for all things. Rather than depending on a network of relationships to define him, man seeks a network of relationships to express the image of God accurately. Depending on others for his identity makes man amorphous in his own right, relative to and held captive by his surroundings and dependent upon the world. However, understanding that part of being created in the image of God includes a yearning for relationship allows man to seek authentic community as an expression of the \textit{imago dei}:

Although the humanity God intended is most fully realized as humans mature through significant relationships, the identity and value of the relating persons must be preserved. An authentic understanding of human persons, therefore, is not a matter

\textsuperscript{61} Beck and Demarest, 306-309.


\textsuperscript{63} Milgore, 147.
of either the classical ontology or postmodern relationally but of both.\textsuperscript{64}

Man’s relationship with God is the primary relationship of consequence, but it gives rise to his relationships with other individuals. Man cannot truly exist in relationship with other individuals unless he first exists in relationship with God, but a relationship with God inevitably gives rise to relationships with other individuals. Jesus stated as much in Luke 10 when asked how one inherited eternal life: “[Jesus] said to him, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your heart and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself’” (Luke 10:26-27).

Man finds purpose and fulfillment in relationships because God has created him to do so. The early church father Lactantius wrote, “We image God in his inner oneness by our capacity to become one with another who is separate and different from us.”\textsuperscript{65} Having a capacity to become one with another is here taken to mean walking the tension whereby man does not lose himself in his relationship with others, but neither does he remain entirely separate from them. “[T]he human person is not an isolated being who is complete in himself or herself, but that he or she is a being who needs the fellowship of others, who is not complete apart from others.”\textsuperscript{66} For man to exist in authentic community he becomes party to something that is more than a lose grouping of individuals but less than a collection of persons dependent on one another for identity:

Whatever the prevailing cultural definitions of personhood, “persons” as defined theologically are not self-enclosed, autonomous individuals, and true “community” is something quite different from an aggregate of individuals. As

\textsuperscript{64} Beck and Demarest, 312-313.


\textsuperscript{66} Hoekema, 76.
created and redeemed by God, persons are constituted by communion with God and each other, and true communion respects and nurtures persons.  

Here, though, a marked distinction must be made: Man is created in the image of God, and a necessary consequence is to seek community; undoubtedly all men share the yearning to exist in authentic relation with another. But not all men understand the genesis for this drive as originating in the fact man is created in the image of God—he strives for authentic community, but does not understand this striving is as a result of being created in the image of God. Those who have responded to the primary relationship and exist in relationship with God recognize the character of their community is significant; those who live in rebellion—while still guilty—cannot be expected to give an answer for the type of community they should aspire to.

Those who refuse to acknowledge their obligation to image God rely on definitions of community that seek common and temporal good. Community is looked to as merely, “a group of people who are socially interdependent, who participate together in discussion and decision making, and who share certain practices . . . that both define the community and are nurtured by it.” Or, again:

Community is fundamentally an interdependent human system given form by the conversation it holds with itself. The history, buildings, economy, infrastructure, and culture are products of the conversations and social fabric of any community. The built and cultural environments are secondary gains of how we choose to be

67 Milgore, 147.

68 Refusing to acknowledge he is created in the image of God, “does not make man more innocent before God; on the contrary, it witnesses all the more to his guilt, since man, with all his endowments and with the surrounding light of nature, still clutches a totally apostate way of life, which stamps and defines fallen man in the total act of his whole life.” Berkouwer, Studies in Dogmatics: Man: The Image of God, 127.

While these insights are helpful and true, they belie the true motivation for and goal of community. Humans congregate together in community and the resulting projection is a totality of the gathered individuals. Those who are in relationship with God have a responsibility to ensure the community they gather in proclaims the truth of the God in whose image they are created. “[W]e must think through the meaning of communion as an anticipatory sign of and partial correspondence to the life of the triune God make known in the economy of salvation.”

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71 Milgore, 143.
CHAPTER 3
COMMUNITY THAT REFLECTS THE NATURE OF GOD

In the present context, community must not be thought of in the generic. Individuals cannot simply congregate together by way of shared ideas or common interests and give rise to the type of life-giving community intended for us by God. If man is created for community because he is created in the image of God, then it stands to reason the specific community he is created for must bear some relation to the image of God as well. Where a theological anthropology is necessary to fully understand man’s existence, a theological sociology as it were is necessary to rightly understand community. The doctrine of the Trinity provides the key to a proper theology of community\(^1\) in the same way a proper theology of man must begin with an understanding of his being created in the image of God.

Community that is

God is a relational being Who exists in constant and eternal relationship as the Godhead, and humans are therefore created as relational beings to represent Him in creation. The fact that community is rooted in the Trinity means that—more than man merely

functioning well in community—humanity is actually incomplete without community.\textsuperscript{2} “Humans are social beings created for interdependence in the form of relationships with other human beings. In relating with other humans, persons find identity, purpose, and fulfillment.”\textsuperscript{3} This isn’t to say man has an identity insofar as he exists in relation to others. Man exists because God created him, but the nature of that existence is most complete when it involves relationships with others.

Community—as God intends it—is therefore a lifestyle one willingly enters into; it requires the individual to see himself as a person-in-community who belongs to a unified people. Community is not merely a gathering of people, but a collection of individuals who love one another and sacrifice for one another.\textsuperscript{4} Unity and fellowship among believers is the opposite of independence, self-sufficiency, and self-reliance. By uniting together, those in community humbly affirm they are not well suited to live as independent individuals and are desperately in need of “each part [doing] its work (Eph 4:16).\textsuperscript{5} Each individual within community recognizes their need for another as well as another’s need for them (1 Cor 12:12-27):

Man’s relatedness to others means every human being should not view his or her gifts and talents as an avenue for personal aggrandizement, but as a means whereby he or

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\textsuperscript{3} James R. Beck and Bruce Demarest, \textit{The Human Person in Theology and Psychology: A Biblical Anthropology for the Twenty-first Century} (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2005), 314.

\textsuperscript{4} House, 93, 96.

\end{flushleft}
she can enrich the lives of others...man’s acceptance of and love for others is an essential aspect of his humanness.⁶

Community is not something a group of people *does*; community is something a group of people *is*. In the New Testament, the word *koinonia* is translated as “fellowship” and is often connected to the words “common,” “sharing,” and “participation.” Involvement in true *koinonia* fellowship means those in the Christian community belong to one another, are responsible for one another, and make decisions together. Sharing lives (1 Thess 2:8), sharing property (Acts 4:32), sharing the Gospel (Philippians 1:5; Philemon 1:6), and sharing in the suffering—and glory—of Christ (2 Cor 1:6-7; 1 Peter 4:13) are indicative elements of this shared life experienced in authentic Biblical community:⁷

... *koinonia* also represents an even deeper, more essential bond than the sharing of resources might indicate. Paul describes fellowship as a partnership in which two parties are ‘yoked together’ (2 Cor. 6:14). Such a relationship is a mutual participation in a common life that gives rise to shared enjoyment and responsibility.⁸

**Community that is redemptive**

Community is essential, and humanity images God by existing in community. But that community must look a certain way—it must have a certain nature to it. If the Trinity illuminates what community is and why humanity needs it, then the Trinity is crucial in other areas of community as well, not only when considering the impetus to seek community, but also the character of the community that is sought. If genuine human community has its ultimate basis in

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⁸ Hegg, 194.
the communion of the triune God, then the nature and character of that community should reflect the nature and character God. “When it pleased God to make mankind in his own image, he created us as social beings. We were created for relationship with God and to reflect his likeness not merely as individuals but in relationship with one another.” Just as the Gospel of Jesus Christ has implications for individuals, so also does it have implications for community:

> The truth of the gospel is not an esoteric truth to be concealed but a public faith to be joyfully shared. Faith in the gospel seeks public expression and communication with others. The confessional character of Christian faith is rooted in the nature of God and in the nature of humanity created in the image of God. Just as the triune God is eternally communicative rather than solitary and silent, so human beings created in the image of God are meant for communication and fellowship.

> The work of redemption is a triune work renewing humanity into right communion with God, and subsequently into right communion with one another. As such, the character of that community should be redemptive in nature—community should invite others into the stream of redemptive history by pointing to God and reflecting His nature and glory. This emphasis is seen explicitly in Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

> Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I

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9 Milgore, 140.


11 Milgore, 143.

12 Ryken and LeFebvre, 72.

13 “Redemptive history is, simply put, the history of redemption. It is God’s plan for history, which he decreed before the foundation of the world. It is what God has done in the past to redeem, what he is doing in now to redeem, and what he will do in the future to redeem. “To redeem what?” you might well ask. Well, most broadly speaking, to redeem creation; more narrowly, to redeem creation through the redemption of mankind; and more narrowly still, to redeem mankind through an elect remnant, and to redeem creation through that remnant. This redemption of mankind and creation is a historical process, and any given point in history represents a certain stage of that process.” McLaughlin, Ra. "Redemptive History, part one: Introduction to Redemptive History." *Reformed Perspectives Magazine* 7, no. 40 (2005): 1-8. Available from [http://thirdmill.org/newfiles/ra_mclaughlin/th_ra_mclaughlin.redhist.1.pdf](http://thirdmill.org/newfiles/ra_mclaughlin/th_ra_mclaughlin.redhist.1.pdf); Internet; accessed March 15, 2012.
command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.\textsuperscript{14}

In a discussion of community, it is necessary to note that the most basic and fundamental form is none other than the family.\textsuperscript{15} Equal parts prescriptive and descriptive, Deuteronomy 6 serves as an instruction manual, as it were, for the makeup of that most elemental manifestation of community. As directed in this passage, that community is to be steeped in worship of the Lord and the study of His Word such that successive generations are saturated with His majesty. Four hallmark signs of a community that is redemptive in nature may be posited based on Deuteronomy 6:4-9: True worship of the one true God; instruction that is didactic, interactive, and continual; consecration to the Lord; and proclamation of the atoning sacrifice of the paschal lamb—Jesus Christ.

Worship

The first expression of a redemptive community that points others toward God is true worship of the one true God, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” “The LORD our God is one,” here is obviously not taken as evidence against the Trinity, but rather stands as an assertion that this God is Israel’s God, the one and only true God, not to be syncretistically

\textsuperscript{15} The marriage relationship between husband and wife serves as the best and most obvious illustration of the unity/diversity dichotomy this temporal existence has to offer. Cf. Beck and Demarest, 316; Hoekema, 76-78.
identified with any other gods.\textsuperscript{16} This one true God is the context the author had in mind when he introduced Him as Creator in Genesis 1.\textsuperscript{17}

The author lists the heart, the soul, and the strength not to delineate the minute faculties involved in worshipping the Lord, but rather to indicate the extent to which the totality of one’s whole being was to be committed to a lifestyle of worship.\textsuperscript{18} That the totality of one’s being is in view speaks volumes when compared to modern conceptions of worship: rather than one hour on Sunday morning, worship is to involve the totality of one’s entire being, and to take place without ceasing. Worship is not an act, but a lifestyle; worshipping the Lord with one’s heart, one’s soul, and one’s strength all support the notion that worship involves one’s whole being. The fact that this command is to be on one’s heart (v. 6) further exemplifies that worship is no peripheral matter, but emanates from and involves the totality of one’s being.

Instruction

After true worship, instruction is the next hallmark sign of a redemptive community, “You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” More than exhibiting a lifestyle of worship, a redemptive community takes care to pass those attitudes to


\textsuperscript{17} Other possible options for this text include: A reminder that Yahweh the God of Abraham, Yahweh the God of Isaac, and Yahweh the God of Jacob all are the same God; a polemical declaration combating the potential of polytheism or henotheism; a declaration of the integrity of Yahweh by asserting His internal consistency and fidelity – His moral and spiritual unity. Daniel I. Block, "How many is God? An investigation into the meaning of Deuteronomy 6:4-5." \textit{Journal Of The Evangelical Theological Society} 47, no. 2 (June 1, 2004): 193-212, 198.

\textsuperscript{18} Kalland, 64.
successive generations. Further, a redemptive community takes care to ensure those principles take root in fertile soil and grow up to bear fruit in the hearts, minds, and lives of those who are instructed.

“Teach” here comes from the root word *shanan*, meaning sharpen, whet, or teach,\(^{19}\) and “talk” comes from the word *dabar*, meaning to speak or converse.\(^{20}\) Teach gives the impression it is the parent’s responsibility to impress upon their children the fullness of what it means to worship the Lord, and talk leaves room for interactive conversation; first the parents’ whet the theological appetite of their children, and then engage them in conversation to ensure the heart is challenged as well as the intellect.

While the content of the instruction is significant, so is the context in which it is to take place: sitting, walking, sleeping, and waking. Essentially, all of life is rendered a teachable moment by which parents are called to instruct and shepherd their children. The didactic format (*shanan*) ensures proper and orthodox instruction while the interactive discussion (*dabar*) ensures what is communicated is understood and takes root.\(^{21}\)


\(^{21}\) Too frequently, parents abdicate the moral instruction of their children to the school system and the religious instruction of their children to the Church. These are specifically the responsibility of parents.
Consecration

The next verse would have stirred strong memories for the Israelites, “You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes,” (Deuteronomy 6:8). The word for frontlets, t(w)tpt, is also used in Exodus 13:16 and Deuteronomy 11:18; all three are passages in which something is to be bound as a sign on the hand and as a t(w)tpt between the eyes. Possible interpretations for t(w)tpt vary, ranging from headbands to jewels to phylacteries.\(^{22}\) The usage of t(w)tpt in Exodus 13:9-16 is within the context of consecrating\(^ {23}\) the firstborn son, which was said to be, “a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the L\(\text{ORD}\) may be in your mouth,” (v. 9).

In Exodus 13, the external ritual of consecrating the firstborn to the Lord was therefore tied to the memorial of internalizing the Word of the Lord to activate the totality of one’s being—the totality of one’s being that according to Deuteronomy 6:5 should be involved in worshipping the Lord.\(^ {24}\) And the inclusion of the memorial reference in Deuteronomy 6:8 would have tied these significant events together for the Israelites. In other words, the third hallmark sign of a redemptive community is that of full consecration to the Lord—an awareness that one’s


\(^{23}\) God adopted Israel as His “firstborn” and delivered them from Egypt. The first offspring is considered as belonging to the Lord, and therefore set apart (qadas) from common usage for holy purposes. Walter C. Kaiser, The Expositors Bible Commentary: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 382.

\(^{24}\) “The nation of Israel was to be holy and to serve the world by being separate. That holiness was provided for with the giving of the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20, together with the Covenant Code “that is, the case law) of chapters 21-23, which presuppose the covenant relationship and provide the contours for it.” Andreas J. Kostenberger and Peter T. O'Brien, Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission (Downer's Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 36.
entire life is dedicated to the Lord, and the totality of one’s being is committed to worshipping and serving Him. Israel was:

“to be a ‘holy nation.’ This mean they were to be ‘wholly’ the Lord’s. It is a shame that we divided the words in English and made ‘holy’ a religious term and ‘wholly’ a secular term. The truth is that the Old Testament word ‘holy’ meant ‘set apart wholly for God’s use.’ This nation was to be set apart not only in their lives, but also in their service.”

Proclamation

The fourth hallmark sign of a redemptive community would have also reminded the Israelites of their heritage; Deuteronomy 6:9 reads, “You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” As Israel was instructed celebrate the Passover in memoriam of what the Lord had done to save Israel and in proclamation of His mercy, so too is the redemptive community to proclaim the person and work of Jesus Christ, the true and ultimate paschal lamb.

Far from being independent, each of the four hallmark signs of a redemptive community intertwine, build on one another, and feed off each other. Individuals within the community are to worship the Lord with the totality of their being, which includes one’s being entirely committed and consecrated to the Lord. Instruction is necessary to communicate the depth of the consecration and its implications, and proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ must include content conveyed by instruction and interaction.


To say that community should be redemptive and should be marked by these four signs is a helpful distinction to make, but it also casts a wide umbrella under which that redemptive nature can be expressed. Each of the four hallmark signs plays a specific role in inviting others into the story of redemption, but those invitations can manifest themselves in a variety of forms or contexts. Further delineation of community-based expression of the redemptive nature can be traced through the pages of Scripture; each theme will be considered using the language and models of contemporary ecclesiology.

**Community that is attractional**

An attractional community is one that seeks to attract nonbelievers to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. “God’s people are to live in such a way that they become attractors—not attractors to themselves, but to the God they worship.”  

Today, attractional churches have established buildings, large staffs, gather at prescheduled times, promote programs, and function as institutionalized organizations. Referred to today as the “traditional” church, attractional church models have recently experienced backlash from individuals who think the traditional attractional church is out-dated or ineffective. However, such backlash is not necessarily founded, or at least, not necessarily founded for the reasons given. The attractional church—a redemptive community that exists as an established institution to which others are attracted—has

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29 Chapter four features an extended discussion of the emerging/Emergent reaction to traditional church models.
its origins in the Old Testament and in God’s purposes for Israel.30 “I will make you as a light for
the nations, that my salvation may reach the end of the earth,” (Isaiah 49:6).31

After God delivered Israel from Egypt He administered the Mosaic covenant, effectively
externalizing His will for Israel. Space does not allow for an in-depth discussion of the Mosaic
covenant, but it is helpful to note three distinct aspects: The Mosaic covenant is related
organically to the totality of God’s redemptive purposes, the Mosaic covenant is related
progressively to the totality of God’s redemptive purposes, and the Mosaic covenant is
consummated in the revelation of Jesus Christ.32 The Mosaic covenant was the foundation for all
cultic life in Israel, the ground from which all mannerisms of life and worship sprung up. And if
the covenant was the ground, the presence of the Lord residing in the temple was the center.
Between these two fundamental elements, all Israelite activity was religious in nature and
pointed in one direction: God.

Deuteronomy 4:5-8

Israel was to keep the Lord central to their identity and their actions, and obedience to the
Mosaic covenant was the main avenue for that emphasis. Israel knew covenant faithfulness

30 “God would proclaim his own name among the Gentiles even if the Israelites were not outgoing in their
witness…The election of Israel, far from meaning the rejection of other nations of the world, was the very
means of salvation of the nations. Election was not a call to privilege, but a choosing for service.” Kaiser,
Mission in the Old Testament. 21-22. “Israel’s calling in Exodus 19:5 had the whole world in view. The
nation was to be holy and to serve the world by being separate. Her life was to give clear evidence of
Yahweh’s rule over her, and thus to be a model of his lordship over the whole world.” Kostenberger and
O’Brien. 34.

31 While the Gospel is foolish and a stumbling block to those who do not believe (1 Cor 18:31), the Holy
Spirit is essential—through the conviction of sin and prior work in an individual’s heart—in bringing
nonbelievers to a saving knowledge of Christ. An attractional community must live the Gospel faithfully
and trust the Holy Spirit.

would result in life—those who worshipped Baal of Peor were killed while those who faithfully worshipped the Lord were given life (Num 25:1-9).33 And when Israel worshipped the Lord faithfully others would take notice; foreign nations would see Israel’s devotion to the Lord and His greatness, and would subsequently be drawn to Him.34 That is the main thrust of Deuteronomy 4:5-8:

See, I have taught you statutes and rules as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statues and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today.

In the context of Deuteronomy 4, Israel is told the ethical quality of their lives—obedience to the law—would attract the nations to the living God. If Israel would live as God intended them to, the nations would notice—the content and quality of the Israelites’ lives would attract the nations to Israel because of its nearness to the living God.35 The issue is not necessarily the “selling” of God, as it were, but rather realizing that a life lived in worship of and devotion to God—by its very nature—attracts others to observe, learn, and even understand. An attractional community is one that obeys faithfully, lives faithfully, worship unceasingly, and relies on “missional magnetism”36 to attract others to the Gospel.

33 Keil and Delitzsch, The Pentateuch. 309.
34 Wright, 129.
35 Wright, 130-131.
36 Ibid., 128.
Isaiah 2:2-3

In the Old Testament God condescended in a special way that—by the very nature of the condescension—demanded people look upon Him. As the center of cultic life, the temple was more than merely a religious building; the temple was the holy palace in which the Lord resided as He dwelt among His people. And in the same way that the quality of Israel’s life would attract the nations in, so too would the nature of their worship. This image is portrayed in Isaiah 2:2-3:

> It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills, and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways, and that we may walk in his paths.’ For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

A prophecy given during King Uzziah’s reign, Isaiah is describing God’s future kingdom and His ultimate plans for Zion. While chapters 2-12 juxtapose the Kingdom of God with the kingdom of man to show the tension that exists between the two, vv. 2-3 of chapter two paint a clear picture of what will happen when the Kingdom of God ultimately triumphs. Specifically, God will transform the world through His presence in Zion, His teaching of those who are humble, and His judgment of those who dare war with Him.

“It shall come to pass in the latter days,” is an eschatological expression for a time when God’s purposes will find ultimate fulfillment, but the forward-thinking scope of the prophecy is

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38 Ibid., 291.

not intended to undermine the message being communicated: The Lord desires those who do not know Him to run towards Him in peace to learn. While God’s presence is sufficient to draw the nations unto Him, the confluence of His presence and His peoples’ worship—all centered in the temple—attracts others.

Even though Isaiah’s vision was for a time at some point in the future, the presence of the Lord still attracted attention and interest when the temple was first built. In 1 Kings 10, the Queen of Sheba, “heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD,” (1 Kings 10:1). After observing Solomon’s wisdom and the greatness of temple, she exclaimed, “Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel. Because of the LORD loved Israel forever, he has made you king, that you may execute justice and righteousness,” (1 Kings 10:9).

Community that is incarnational

In the Old Testament, the Lord condescended to dwell among Israel at the temple. In the New Testament, the Lord also condescended to dwell among men, but in a drastically different form. John 1:14 reads, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Or, as Eugene Peterson famously wrote in *The Message*, “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.” John 1 connects the Lord’s Old Testament presence in the temple with His New Testament presence.

Testament presence in Jesus Christ by using a word, *skayno’o*, which is taken in Scripture to mean, “the dwelling of God among men.”\(^{41}\)

In other words, while Isaiah’s prophecy of the nations streaming to the temple to worship God was certainly directed towards the future, the now-but-not-yet motif of the Kingdom of God allows for a reading that sees Isaiah’s’ vision partially fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ:

The incarnation of God in Christ brings two new factors into our theology of mission: the inaugurated presence of the kingdom of God and the incarnational model and principle itself. In Jesus, the reign of God entered human history in a way not previously experienced – though the expectation of it and the ethical implications of it are thoroughly rooted in the Old Testament. The dynamic action of the kingdom of God in the words and deed of Jesus and the mission of his disciples changed lives, values, and priorities, and presented a radical challenge to the fallen structures of power in society.\(^{42}\)

To say that a redemptive community is incarnational is, in ecclesiological terminology, to say it is a community that redefines itself in order to identify with a certain people group for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.\(^{43}\) “The incarnation must inform the way we engage the complex multicultural world around us . . . Incarnational ministry essentially means taking the church to the people, rather than bringing people to the church.”\(^{44}\)

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\(^{42}\) Wright, 42.

\(^{43}\) The same Gospel is for all people groups (Rev 7:9; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11; 1 Cor 12:13); however, as Paul became all things to all people (1 Cor 9:19-23), so too must individual redemptive communities contextualize themselves to specific people groups in different ways at different times. Cf. Don Carson’s discussion of being a “world Christian,” in D. A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry: Leadership Lessons from 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 115-137.

\(^{44}\) Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 135. Hirsch lists several examples of different people groups who would not traditionally attend church – bikers, artists, musicians, etc – that have been reached through the efforts of believers who organically brought the Gospel to these groups in a cultural language they were familiar with. An older example is Patrick of Ireland. Patrick, originally from Britain, was so overcome with love for the Irish people and a desire to share Jesus that he chose to live as an Irishman for the sake of the Gospel. Cf.,
The incarnation framed Jesus’ life on earth with certain characteristics: Presence (John 1:1-15; Col 2:9), Proximity (Mark 1:15; Luke 19:10), Powerlessness (Phil 2:6ff; Luke 22:25-27), and Proclamation (Matt 4:17). To say that a redemptive community is incarnational is to say it is informed and transformed by the incarnation of Jesus—God very God who stepped out of heaven and identified with those He came to save (Heb 2:14-18; 4:14-16). Accordingly, the incarnational redemptive community is called to embody these characteristics (John 20:21) as it exhibits authentic identification with and affinity for a given people group in need of the Gospel.\textsuperscript{45}

It is important to note that the event of Jesus’ coming into the world was a unique, unrepeatable, and incomparable event. Rather than imitating Jesus’ incarnation precisely (an impossible task), the incarnational redemptive community must seek to model the nature of Jesus’ relationship with God the Father—a relationship of obedience and dependence—as it is sent to identify with, have an affinity for, and ultimately preach the Gospel to a given people group. The terms contextualization or inculturation perhaps more clearly define the role of a redemptive community that seeks to dwell among a people group for the sake of the Gospel.\textsuperscript{46} In the same way that man is created in the image of God and is therefore ectypal of Him, so too can it be said that both the Christian’s means of and goal in mission are ectypal of Jesus, Whose means and goal are archetypal.


Community that is missional

For an incarnational approach to preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ, a wholesale sea change has to have taken place. “The missionary work of the first Christians cannot be explained with prototypes in the Old Testament or with models of an early Jewish mission.”47 If the Old Testament modus operandi of God’s people was attractional in nature—centripetal—than the New Testament paradigm is centrifugal—God’s people are sent into the world to worship as opposed to calling the world to the worship at one location. As God sent the Son into the world, so too are redemptive communities sent; at their very core redemptive communities are sent people—missionary people.48

In its traditional and most basic usage mission, “presupposes a sender, a person or persons sent by the sender, those to whom one is sent, and an assignment.”49 Mission points to the central action of being sent to carry out the will of the one who sends.50 While the term missional was initially a dirty word, it now carries with it nearly a decade of use, overuse, misuse, and abuse. For all the baggage that comes with it, the term missional still provides helpful insight in discussing the nature, focus, and goal of redemptive communities. A reference to embodying a missional emphasis is useful insofar as it communicates that believers, as a result of their worship of God in Spirit and truth, experience a desire to go, proclaim the Gospel, and make disciples.51

47 Ibid., 173.
48 Hirsch, 129.
51 An in-depth discussion of the missional concept may be found at http://www.missionalmanifesto.net/
The Great Commission

Mission in this sense—God’s people being sent out to other people-groups with a task to accomplish—is a New Testament concept. And while the entire Bible can be considered a missional book, grounding mission in the explicit commands of Scripture is—for obvious reasons—preferred. To that end, the Great Commission texts in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 28:16; Mark 13:10; 14:9; Luke 24:44-49) provide a foundation for the discussion of mission.

The Great Commission texts found in the New Testament are much more than a collection of Jesus’ final words before He ascended into Heaven. Rather, they contain specific directives for how the disciples were to go out into the world with the Gospel. Matthew’s version of the Great Commission has the disciples acting on the authority of Jesus (v. 18) and going to all people groups (ta ethne) to baptize and teach (vv. 19-20); the disciples are to be disciples who make disciples. Mark 13:10 and 14:9 not only predict the Gospel will be proclaimed, but direct that it must. Luke’s account is complementary to Matthew’s, adding the caveat that the disciples are empowered by the Spirit to be Jesus’ witnesses (24:48).

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53 Debate exists as to whether or not Genesis 12:1-3 should be included in a discussion of Great Commission texts, or as to whether or not Genesis 12:1-3 can itself be considered a “Great Commission text of the Old Testament.” Cf. Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament*, 15-21; Wright, 63-81; Kostenberger and O’Brien, 28-32; and DeYoung and Gilbert, 30-34. Essentially, some see the text as a moral command to go out and bless, others see the text as the promise of blessing through the mediation of Abraham and his descendents, and still others see a combination of both.

54 DeYoung and Gilbert, 45-48.
Acts 1:8

Luke continues the theme of seeing the disciples as Spirit-empowered witnesses in Acts, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth,” (Acts 1:8). With this distinctive progression the disciples are given a clear progression of ministry: After preaching the Gospel at home in Jerusalem, they were to take it to the Judean and Samarian countryside, and then to the imperial capital of Rome. From Rome, roads extended in every direction and would permit the disciples to literally be Jesus’ witnesses to the end of the earth (Isa. 5:26).55

While prescriptive in nature—v. 8 was a guide for the disciples to follow—Acts 1:8 is also descriptive; v. 8 is a microcosm that summarizes the theme of Acts and traces the progression of the Gospel.56 In addition to recording the mandate for the Gospel to go out, Acts also records the results. “And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith,” (Acts 6:7). Luke repeatedly makes it clear that the point of Acts is to show the mission of Jesus being fulfilled as the Word of God increases and multiplies (Acts 12:24).57

Mission-Shaped Church

One last item must be noted: God’s people are indeed sent into the world, and in being sent can be considered *missional* or *on mission*. However, it must be recognized that the church’s

56 Ibid., 53.
57 DeYoung and Gilbert, 50-51.
mission flows from God’s mission—God did not make a mission for His church, God made a church for His mission. “Mission arises from the heart of God himself, and is communicated from his heart to ours. Mission is the global outreach of the global people of a global God.”

The very being of the church is constituted in and through its participation in God’s mission in the world. The church is not an end in itself and mission is not optional.

It would be inaccurate to say the church must become missional. Rather, the church—when expressing its true identity—is considered a missional manifestation of God’s redemptive work in and through creation. Mission is not to be primarily understood in functional terms, for mission cannot be defined by the number of “missions” activities. Rather, mission must be understood as the fundamental nature and being of church—when rightly considered, the missional church is an authentic expression of the church’s true identity. Emil Brunner famously stated, “The church exists by mission as fire exists by burning.” Mission cannot be simply be reduced to strategies or viewed solely as the responsibility of the institutional church:

The missional church is not just another phase of church life but a full expression of who the church is and what it is called to be and do. The missional church builds upon the ideas of church growth and church health but brings the lessons learned from each into a full-blown missions focus – within their local mission field as well as the ends of the earth. To be missional means to move beyond our church preferences and make missional decisions locally as well as globally.

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58 Wright, 24.


61 Duraisingh, 10.

Community is. It is not something humanity does; community is something humanity is marked by, complete in, and incomplete without. Community that is authentic and redemptive is rooted in the Trinity and images God by reflecting His nature. Such community is indicative of the church—a community of believers built on the cornerstone of Jesus Christ:

That he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (Eph 1:5b-22).

Community is crucial for the church, and so too is the church crucial for community: the church provides the space for community to properly express its redemptive nature, and the relationships formed in community bind the members of the church together through the cross and the Gospel. Given the inherent connection and mutual dependence between the church and community, a discussion of the church is pertinent.
CHAPTER 4

CHURCH AS AN EXPRESSION OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

The “formal” church

In a certain sense, “church” and “community of believers” are analogous terms. “The church is the body of Christ. Believers are the members of that body. They are controlled by one Head.”¹ When one employs the term “church,” one may either mean, “the informal gathering together of believers” or, “the traditional, institutional, and formal structure on which religion finds its foundation.” Further complicating the matter, the terms can often blur together, thereby preventing specific bifurcation. Broadly speaking, the preceding chapter concentrated on the informal manifestation of the church and the present chapter will concentrate on the formal.

What is the church?

When describing the church, the best—and most obvious—place to turn for a definition is Scripture itself. The church is the building of God and Jesus Christ is its foundation (1 Cor 3); Jesus Christ loves the church, and gave Himself for her (Eph 5:23); the

church is the body of Christ, and He is its head (Eph 1:22-23); Jesus Christ builds the church (Matt 16:18; Acts 2:47); the church is a golden lamp stand (Rev 2:1); the church is marked by fellowship (Acts 2:42). “The Christian church is glorious in its very nature . . . the church is where the truth is.”²

A brief review of literature reveals a litany of definitions differing in no large degree.

Calvin:

But all the elect are so united in Christ [cf. Eph. 1-22-23] that as they are dependent on one Head, they also grow together into one body, being joined and knit together (cf. Eph. 4:16) as are the limbs of a body [Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 10:17; 12:12, 27]. They are made truly one since they live together in one faith, hope, and love, and in the same Spirit of God. For they have been called not only into the same inheritance of eternal life but also to participate in one God and Christ [Eph. 5:30].³

Dever, “The church is the body of people called by God’s grace through faith in Christ to glorify him together by serving him in his world.”⁴ Berkhof, “[Church] in its most comprehensive meaning signifies the whole body of the faithful, whether in heaven or on earth, who have been or shall be spiritually united to Christ as their Saviour.”⁵ Grudem, “The church is the community of all true believers for all time.”⁶ Driscoll:

The local church is a community of regenerated believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord. In obedience to Scripture they organize under qualified leadership, gather regularly for preaching and worship, observe the Biblical sacraments of baptism and Communion, are unified by the Spirit, are disciplined for holiness, and

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² Ibid., 13, 14; emphasis original.
³ Calvin, Institutes, 4.1.2.
scatter to fulfill the Great Commandment and the Great Commission as missionaries to the world for God’s glory and their joy.\(^7\)

And DeYoung, “I mean the local church that meets—wherever you want it to meet—but exults in the cross of Christ; sings songs to a holy and loving God; has church officers, good preaching, celebrates the sacraments, exercises discipline; and takes an offering.”\(^8\) In short, the Church consists of God’s people, belongs to God, is led by God, and exists to bring God glory.

The word “church” used today when describing a people gathered together for the purpose of worshiping God is not itself specifically used in Scripture. The word used in the New Testament for church, \textit{ekklesia}, can mean “assembly,” “meeting,” or “gathering.” For the early Christians, \textit{ekklesia} came to mean “a body (or whole body) of believers in Christ.” The term “church” itself comes from a Greek adjective \textit{kuriakos}, meaning, “belonging to the Lord.”\(^9\)

\textit{Ekklesia} is used in the Septuagint to translate its Hebrew equivalent, \textit{qahal}; both mean gathering or assembly. The New Testament gathering of believers can be tied to God’s people in the Old Testament—the church consists of the “cloud of witnesses” in Hebrews 12:1 as well as those in the New Testament assembly.\(^{10}\) While inherently tied together, one must recognize the church did not realize full maturity as in the same way it does today until the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost; the Old Testament gathering walked in the

\(^7\) Mark Driscoll and Gary Breshears. \textit{Vintage Church: Timeless Truths and Timely Methods} (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 38.


\(^{10}\) Grudem, 854.
shadow of things to come, and the New Testament gathering walks in the full light provided by the coming of the Son.\textsuperscript{11} “The relation of the two is like that of the bud and the flower. The entire flower is present in the bud, but the content of the bud does not come fully to view until the full-blown flower appears.”\textsuperscript{12}

While Israel and the church are not identical, they are closely related; God has always had a plan to glorify His name through specific groups of people He has chosen as His own.\textsuperscript{13} His revelation to the people He called as His own progressed over time, and so too did their understanding of His revelation. “The church of God as depicted in both the Old Testament and the New was progressive. Significantly, its progressiveness was not so much a matter of its own choice as of God’s making. God caused the church to progress by giving it progressive revelation.”\textsuperscript{14}

Given that the church today is more closely related to the early church in Acts—by virtue of the cross—than to the Old Testament gatherings, Acts is the next logical step in the present discussion. The sections that follow will analyze prototypical early church passages—Acts 2:42-47; Acts 4:32-37—and highlight the indicative elements therein. Subsequently, contemporary ecclesiological forms will be evaluated. Such a historical review

\textsuperscript{11} Kuiper, 22. More than anything, the Son brings light to the Church because it is in the Son the Church is united: “Fellowship among believers is the fruit of fellowship with Christ. To produce the first, you must fertilize the second. What elevates true fellowship far above what the world would call friendship and belonging is simply this: Our relationship with fellow believers is a demonstration of our union with Christ, and the dynamics of this fellowship are dictated and defined by the fact that we are new creatures—loved, chosen, redeemed, forgiven, justified, and adopted into the family of God by God Himself through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Hegg, “All Things in Common: The Pastoral Role in Building Real Fellowship.” 188, emphasis original.

\textsuperscript{12} Kuiper, 80.

\textsuperscript{13} Dever, “The Church,” 768.

\textsuperscript{14} Kuiper, 79.
will provide context for the current discussion by tracing the flow of the church from its earliest manifestation until today.

**The early church: Acts 2:42-47**

And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved (Acts 2:42-47).

It was noted in the previous chapter that Acts 1:8 served as both prescriptive and descriptive—the passage was a guide for the apostles to follow in spreading the Gospel as well as a microcosm for the theme of Acts—the progression of the Gospel. Acts 1:1–2:4 relates events foundational for establishing Christian mission while 2:42–6:7 describe the earliest days of the Jerusalem church. 3:1–6:7 is a series of illustrations and representative vignettes designed to expand on 2:42-47—a passage many consider to be a thesis paragraph.\(^{15}\) There are four activities listed in v. 42 of the thesis paragraph, activities that can be viewed as four separate events, but which also are taken to be normative patterns of interaction for a gathering of the early church. The four activities are: teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer.\(^{16}\)


The apostolic teaching was authoritative in nature—it was the teaching of the Lord communicated through the apostles.\(^\text{17}\) In addition to the teaching that happened—the apostles taught new believers by oral instruction at public worship services—it must be noted what was taught: The Good News of all Jesus said and did, and the implications therein.\(^\text{18}\) “What was it that brought those ‘three thousand souls’ into close fellowship with themselves, and with the external body of Christ’s disciples? What was the magnet that drew together and centralised [sic] into a loving unity these souls, which a few hours before were so discordant and antagonistic?” The Word of Christ taught by the apostles, authenticated by miracles, and received with joy by those who were present and thereafter baptized.\(^\text{19}\)

A correlative of the early church being marked by teaching, it can also be said the early church was marked by learning. The members of the early church were devoted to the apostles’ teaching and were led by the Spirit to submit to its authoritative nature.\(^\text{20}\) Fervent and dedicated, the early converts steadfastly turned to the Apostles for instruction in the Gospel and its ramifications.\(^\text{21}\)

In addition to teaching and learning, fellowship was indicative of the early church as well. The word *koinonia* is here taken to mean, “community: the living together as one

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\(^{21}\) Kistemaker, 110.
family and having things in common.”  

That koinonia is translated here as te koinonia—“the fellowship”—indicates there was something unique and distinctive in the gatherings of early believers; they were not merely a sect of Judaism, but held dearly to the centrality of Jesus, His redemptive purposes, and the proclamation of His name as Israel’s promised Messiah. In practice, the unity and love of the early church was evident—the believers viewed their individual goods as at the disposal of others whenever a need arose and demonstrated their common, loving bond in various avenues of life:

They were one in spirit, they were together in soul. What one felt, all felt. They wept with those that wept; they rejoiced with those that rejoiced . . . Here is generosity. Selfishness has no place in this new community. The new commandment is supreme. The benevolence which inspired them was a benevolence that made sacrifices . . . The love of property in them gave way to the love of man. The law of social Christianity enjoins the strong to bear the infirmities of the weak, the rich to help the poor, and all to bear each other’s burden, and so fulfil [sic] the law of Christ.

In addition to realizing that the early church was marked by koinonia fellowship, note must be taken of what precisely the believers held in common. Beyond material possessions and meals, the believers shared in the fellowship of the triune Godhead (1 Jn 1:3; 2 Cor 13:14). “Thus koinonia is a Trinitarian experience; it is our common share in God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

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23 Longenecker, 289.
24 Marshall, 84.
25 Kistemaker, 110-111.
26 Thomas, 45.
27 Stott, 83.
other believers springs, and it is the reality of fellowship with God in Christ Jesus that illuminates the implications of koinonia fellowship.28

After teaching and fellowship, the third indicative element of the early church was the breaking of bread. As with fellowship, the definite article “the” is used before “bread,” suggesting the broken bread was just any bread, but indeed the bread of the Lord’s Supper celebration.29 It is likely that, while originally a celebration of the Jewish haburah meal, as the church’s early theology came into focus the meal came to take on more meaning connected to Christ’s passion.30 In any event, the meal Luke has in view is a specific meal with specific connotations rather than an ordinary meal; the implications of this fact will be seen shortly.

The fourth element—prayer—follows suit with the previous two elements; referred to are “the prayers” (tas proseuchais), indicating specific prayers offered in formal times of worship as opposed to informal or spontaneous prayers.31 Although what is in view is a public prayer service or meeting as opposed to a time of private prayer,32 one must not assume the early church abstained from private prayer altogether.33 The believers would have


29 Kistemaker, 111.

30 Longenecker, 290.

31 Kistemaker, 111.

32 Stott, 85.

33 Alford, 30.
relied on extant Jewish forms of prayer as well as creating new vehicles to express the newly revealed content of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{34}

The progression given is specific—teaching, fellowship and unity exhibited through the Lord’s Supper, and prayer all experienced in direct succession. While indicating elements indicative of the early church, this listing of activities may also suggest an early liturgy.\textsuperscript{35} The early church was marked by corporate and sacramental worship, both in the temple courts as well as in their homes.\textsuperscript{36}

This is not so much a particular in description as a pregnant summary of the whole (sic). As if the historian had said, ‘in all they praised God; whether they ate or drank, whatsoever they did, they did all to His glory.’ Worship is not a particular service, but a spirit that inspires all services.\textsuperscript{37}

Given the study, the fellowship, and the worship of the early Jerusalem church, what happened next? Verse 47b clearly notes it was the Lord who added daily to the number of believers those who were being saved. As the early believers devoted themselves to one another and to the Lord, it was the Lord who added to their number. “The Lord is the agent in the work of saving his people,” and it is His prerogative to extend salvation.\textsuperscript{38} United together in Christ, the early believers adhered to orthodox teaching and genuine love and concern for one another; as a result, prayer, praise, and worship spilled out of their hearts, and the Lord added to their number daily.

\textsuperscript{34} Bruce, 79-90; 290.

\textsuperscript{35} Kistemaker, 111.

\textsuperscript{36} Stott, 85.

\textsuperscript{37} Thomas, 45.

\textsuperscript{38} Kistemaker, 114.
The early church: Acts 4:32-37

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet (Acts 4:32-37).

It was noted that Acts 2:42-47 was a thesis paragraph citing distinguishing marks of the early church, and what followed from 3:1 through 6:7 was a series of vignettes depicting those distinguishing characteristics. Acts 4:32-37 revisits one of the thematic elements—unity—and then relates a particular story to expand on the nature and extent of that unity. For the early Christians, being filled with the Spirit included not only a lifestyle of proclaiming the Word of God to the world, but also a lifestyle embracing the unity of the church because of its oneness in Christ.³⁹

The community numbered about 5,000 converts (v. 4) and was united in every sense of the word. The text reads plethos ton pisteusanton (“the multitude of believers”) and refers to the whole congregation.⁴⁰ Plethos carried connotations of a civic community in Greek culture and a religious community in Jewish and Christian cultures.⁴¹ The community was unified in every sense of the word—Luke uses a common Hebrew idiom “of one heart and soul” to express the unity; the phrase is literally kardia kai psyche mia, one in heart and

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³⁹ Longenecker, 309.
⁴⁰ Ibid., 310.
⁴¹ Bruce, 108.
soul.  

The believers maintained such radical unity, “because of the presence of the Holy Sprit in their midst, the preaching of the Word of God, and the readiness to share each other’s goods. Even though we are able to explain the unity of the Christian community, we acknowledge that in such a large group of people it is indeed unique.”

Luke does not stop with commenting on the unity of the early Christian community, but goes on to explain how the church recognized its implications. The church considered it a part of their testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ to live in unity, and sought to manifest that testimony in word and deed. As one tangible activity—one piece of evidence to demonstrate the unity of the early church—Luke notes the solidarity of the early church was expressed in the attitude each took regarding his or her own possessions. While each believer still physically possessed his property, each also realized the other members of the community could lay claim to it should they need it; the phrase in the NIV is “no-one claimed” and leads to the conclusion that, while in law the believers continued to own their own goods, in heart and mind they cultivated an attitude of sharing and mutual possession.

And as a result:

we must understand the ‘great power’ that accompanied the apostle’s witness ‘to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus’ was not just as rhetorical, homiletical, or even miraculous power but as the power of a new life in the believing community – a new life manifest in sharing possessions to meet the needs of others. It was this kind of power Jesus had in mind when he said, ‘All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another’ (John 13:35). In view of such a combination of social concern and proclamation of the Word, it is no wonder that Luke goes on to say, ‘And much grace was upon them all’ (cf. Luke 2:40).

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42 Longenecker, 310.
43 Kistemaker, 173.
44 Stott, 106-107.
45 Longenecker, 311.
As a result of the radical unity displayed by the early church, none in their community were in need. Further illustrating the extent of love and unity in the early church, Luke goes on to tell a specific story of an individual who owned land, but sold it for the apostles to dispense the proceeds as they saw fit. This individual—Joseph called Barnabas—is the very same individual met later in Acts and in Paul’s epistles. Barnabas means “Son of Encouragement” and the name certainly seems to describe his character appropriately.\textsuperscript{46}

In briefly surveying the history of the early church through the window of these passages, two things come to the forefront: First, it is obvious the early Christian church was a radical community bound together in selfless love and unity; they realized their existence depended upon one another and expressed that realization in thought and deed. And second, that love and unity was rooted in Jesus Christ.

Worship, Word, and sacrament—uniquely Christian activities present in the church because of its foundational faith in the Gospel—are experienced in the context of an authentic Biblical community marked by love and unity. The church is not dependent on external forms or artificial structures imposed on it to generate community. Rather, authentic Biblical community arises (super)naturally and is an indicative element of the local church:

Faith is the inner and essential bond of union in the church. The Communion of Saints is such by faith alone. Mere outward connection with a church body does not constitute true membership although it may lead to that. This is a spiritual state in the soul and not a matter of outward arrangement.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{46} Kistemaker, 176.

Recent trends in contemporary American ecclesiology

The two Acts passages also appear to reveal a tension within the book of Acts: The Holy Spirit is a missionary Spirit who created a missionary church, and the dominant motif in Acts is the expansion of the Gospel; however, also on display is the internal devotion of the church to one another and the Lord.\textsuperscript{48} Rightly understood there is no tension at all—each element is intertwined with the other and depends on the other to faithfully express love for the fellow believer that is rooted in love for God. The early church was a unified core of believers, and the nature of that community lent itself to being evangelistic in nature; in addition to acts of evangelism, the community itself exuded what was earlier termed “missional magnetism.” “Would that there were one spot of this earth a circle, however small, where it was perfectly and fully unfolded. Who would not admire it—what heart would not feel its attractions!”\textsuperscript{49}

It is no small detail that the early church was evangelistic in nature. Acts portrays the early church as faithfully engaging in worship, Word, and sacrament, and as a result of their actions the Lord added to their number. Acts 2:42-47 gives no sense that the early believers engaged in specifically evangelistic activities; it only mentions the foundational elements of worship, Word, and sacrament. One gathers that, while the church did not gravitate towards organized evangelistic activities, the nature and quality of their life was inherently evangelistic.

The lifestyle of a church should be soaked in evangelism, permeating even the most minute conversations and prayers, such that no explicit program is needed. Church members

\textsuperscript{48} Stott, 86.

\textsuperscript{49} Thomas, 74.
do not need programs to facilitate their evangelizing, they need times of preparation and equipping so they can exude evangelism in their ordinary, everyday lives. A community of believers itself is one of the chief evangelistic tools a church has; a church need not have seeker-sensitive services if its members live seeker-sensitive lives.\(^{50}\)

In the same way the early church was marked by evangelism—evangelism was an indicative element of the church rather than an element being planned for or artificially instituted—so too was the early church marked by community. The relationships found in authentic Biblical community were an indicative element of the early church. And just as the church today cannot expect to “program” for evangelism, so too can it not expect to “program” for community.

While numerous “programs” and “ministries” aim to facilitate authentic Biblical community within the church today, such artificial creations are unlikely to provide the locus in which community germinates. A small group is not analogous to authentic Biblical community, and neither is a men’s ministry, a women’s small group, a mother’s support group, a Sunday school class, or a newlywed Bible study. That is not to say that authentic Biblical community cannot, does not, or will not take place through these venues; it is only to say one should not assume a program-drive opportunity will automatically generate authentic Biblical community. Authentic Biblical community isn’t created. Authentic Biblical community merely is:

Authentic isn’t a look you put on in the morning, or a new and snappy way to bathe the sanctuary in ‘mystery’ through the strategic arrangement of candles and projected images. Authentic is bearing one another’s burdens. Authentic is people

coming to a funeral in their work clothes—Carhartts, hospital scrubs, etc. —on a Friday morning. 51

And yet, many in the church today rely on form-driven elements to create community. Acts is clear: orthodox teaching, radical community, and prayerful worship are the heartbeat of the church; they form the nonnegotiable function from which no church should deviate. There is no secret program a church can institute that will magically bring these elements into reality—they are indicative of the local church and not created in its pursuit of doing church better. To understand why one might assume a more efficient program translates into a more authentic church, it is helpful to review the recent history of American ecclesiology.

In the 1960s Donald McGavran began what developed into the church growth movement as a philosophy of foreign mission. Peter Wagner popularized the movement in America through his work at Fuller Seminary in the 1970s and the movement exploded into evangelical circles in the 1980s. As with all fads, the church growth movement died off and another took its place; soon, pastors looked to other pastors for counsel instead of academic institutions, and these pastors focused on church health rather than church growth. Accordingly, the 1990’s saw the rise of “seeker-sensitive” mega churches like Willow Creek and Saddleback. 52

This generation of churches took an attractional approach, seeking to attract members by offering the most excellent services and programs available. The more efficiently run a program was, the more attractive it was to those outside the church. The more attractive a

51 Kevin DeYoung, and Ted Kluck, Why We're Not Emergent (by two guys who should be) (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 135.

program was, the more people came and the larger the church grew. A direct correlation between program success and attendance numbers would have intimated to other pastors that a program’s success was consistently replicable.

The Busters—individuals born between 1965 and 1983—dominated society in the 1980s and 1990s, and so church was designed to reach their demographic. As those born between 1984 and 2002—Mosaics—have come to be the dominant demographic of society, church has followed suit. In accordance with the dominance of the Mosaics, the “postmodern turn” of the 2000’s saw another shift in ecclesiological thought as many young evangelicals—older Mosaics and younger Busters—turned their backs on “traditional” church in favor of more “updated” forms. Here, incarnational and missional models of church became popular, favoring “organic” engagement with the culture and community over the traditional institutionalized model. Over time, the so-called emerging church became synonymous with these updated forms of church.

The emerging church, no longer the novel concept it once was, has seen the initial disdain for its efforts fade as distinctions within its ranks became more apparent. While the

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54 “Why ‘emerging’? Because the ideas and practices are nowhere near fully-formed, it is imprecise (allowing room for experimentation and avoiding the restrictions of tight definitions, and because ‘emerging church’ ideas and experiments have sprung up or ‘emerged’ in a variety of different contexts, more-or-less spontaneously and simultaneously,” Richard Tiplady 2008. "Emerging Church? New thinking about the church in Europe in the 21st century." Evangel 26, no. 2: i-iii.

Emergent church has come under (appropriate) fire for its rehashing of Liberalism,\textsuperscript{56} the emerging church is largely seen as healthy effort to communicate the Gospel in a faithful, relevant, and appropriate fashion through contextualization, defined as:

The attempt to communicate the message of the person, works, Word, and will of God in a way that is faithful to God’s revelation, especially as put forth in the teaching of Holy Scripture, and that is meaningful to respondents in their respective cultural and existential contexts.\textsuperscript{57}

To a certain extent, these shifts have been necessary developments—as dominant demographics changed, so did strategies:

In the past generation or two there has been a significant in the prevailing worldview from modernism, which led to rationalism, skepticism, and atheism, to postmodernism, which has led to experientialism, pluralism, and spiritism. The ministry methods that succeeded in evangelizing people during the modern age simply are no longer working because the average lost person is different than he or she was a few generations ago.\textsuperscript{58}

Understanding that worship, Word, and sacrament all are foundational to church, a variety of forms are permissible provided the foundational elements remain consistent. Changing the content of the church is a heretical departure from orthodoxy; adapting the delivery and manifestation of the church—provided it does not distract from the function of the church itself—is healthy. Further, relying on the forms to create the foundational is erroneous and dangerous; assuming a program will necessarily be conducive to the presence of a foundational element of church is a mistaken assumption.

\textsuperscript{56} “The emergent church is the latest version of liberalism. The only difference is that the old liberalism accommodated modernity and the new liberalism accommodates postmodernity.” Mark Driscoll, \textit{Confessions of a Reformission Rev.: Hard Lessons from an Emerging Missional Church} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 26.


\textsuperscript{58} Available from \url{http://www.equip.org/articles/navigating-the-emerging-church-highway}; Internet; March 28, 2012.
The emerging church has been described as a movement founded on protesting traditional evangelicalism, modernism, and seeker-sensitive megachurches. What was initially a protest that sought to swing the pendulum in the extreme opposite direction has no returned to the center. While the emerging church raised questions of how and why about church, early on some thought they were only attacking the form of church. However, the questions they originally asked have sparked healthy conversations about what the church is, why it is important, and how it can be cultivated in today’s culture.

The church is the body of Christ, and He is its head (Eph 1:22-23). Jesus says He will build His church (Matthew 16:18). Orthodox teaching, radical community, and prayerful worship are indicative elements of the church. Pastors, under-shepherds of God’s flock (1 Peter 5:1-4), can’t plan programs for these elements or rely on the institution of the Church to formulate them. It is the people who are the church—the people who gather and are united together by their faith in Jesus Christ. The people, bound together in a redeemed community because they are created in the image of God and need community that reflects the nature of God, are the church. “God’s eternal plan has always been to display his glory not just through individuals but through a corporate body.”

_Ecclesia reformata semper est reformanda_

The present project has sought to elucidate the need for and nature of authentic Biblical community. Having seen the indicative elements of the early church—orthodox teaching, radical community, and prayerful worship—a discerning and informed eye is now

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59 D. A. Carson, _Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church_ (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 11-44.

60 Dever, “The Church.” 768.
turned back to the contemporary church. Understanding cultural expressions are different, the church as it exists today has much to learn from the church as it is presented in the book of Acts.

In one sense, contemporary American churches that are healthy and orthodox will resemble the early church very closely. In another sense, contemporary American churches that are healthy and orthodox will not resemble the early church in the slightest sense. And to a certain extent, that is okay. Regarding its foundational and essential elements the church must rely on Scripture as its authoritative norm. However, regarding its specific cultural expression, the church must be faithful but progressive in its understanding of Scripture and how Scripture is applied in a given context:

It might seem that, when the Bible was completed, the church would cease to progress. However, that was by no means the case. Special revelation is indeed complete in Holy Scripture, but the progress of the church has not thus come to an end. In a most important respect the church of every age needs to progress; namely, in its understanding of the Scriptures. As a matter of history the Spirit of truth has throughout the centuries led the church into an ever better and deeper understanding of the Word of God.61

An orthodox foundation will (hopefully) yield a healthy and effective specific manifestation of the church appropriate for a given cultural context. “When culture changes, adjust your methods or you will lose your effectiveness…but never change your message or your principles!”62 In other words, while Scripture may present the normative foundations for what church is—its function—Scripture will not necessarily present the normative

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61 Kuiper, 81.

foundations for how church specifically operates within a given cultural context—its form.\textsuperscript{63}

An exaggerated emphasis on form coupled with an understated emphasis on function leads to, “the rapid erosion of our faith in the sufficiency of Scripture for our effectiveness in ministry.”\textsuperscript{64}

These concepts are at the heart of a reforming church that is always reforming: A church that is grounded in orthodox doctrine, but is prepared to faithfully apply Scripture in a variety of contexts, and in so doing avoid irrelevancy. Men of the Word should—rather than reacting to trends or looking for new ways to do church—rest on the foundation of the church, the revealed Word of God. To do so is, “to be deliberate about treating the biblical Gospel as that which feeds the church’s growth, drives its progress, and governs every aspect of the church’s corporate life and leadership.”\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{63} Cf. chapter 7, “Contextualization” in Stetzer, 89-107; and chapter 6, “Understanding the Regulative Principle” in Mark Dever and Paul Alexander The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005.), 77-79.

\textsuperscript{64} Dever and Alexander, The Deliberate Church, 21.

\textsuperscript{65} Dever and Alexander, The Deliberate Church, 21.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

The current project, a theological anthropology, aimed to understand man’s existence in truthful and complete fashion; this was a task only possible in light of the fullness of God’s revelation:

Human life remains unfulfilled apart from God. Our understanding of what it means to be human remains incomplete without the perspective offered by the description, ‘created in the image of God.’ Seeking a ‘true self-knowledge’, we must also ‘contemplate the face of God.’

Accordingly, three tenets were proposed: 1) man, as he is created in the image of God, needs community; 2) the community that man needs must reflect the nature of God—the church is that community; and 3) the church must embrace the mission of God and express it faithfully. These elements cannot be programmed for or artificially imposed on the local church—they are indicative of the church and gain expression as organic and (super)natural consequences.

Chapter two sought to understand the extent to which man’s creation in the image of God predisposes him to need community. The fundamental truth of the Trinity—God is three persons, each person is fully God, and there is only one God—means that if man is created

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2 Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 231.
in the image of God, he must have the ability to express that plurality of personality as well. While man is a unified personality, authentic relationships with other individuals provide the avenue by which man exists as a person-in-community. Man is not defined by his relationships, but is able to bear witness to his creation in the image of a God who exists in community with Himself. “We image God in his inner oneness by our capacity to become one with another who is separate and different from us.”

Chapter three built upon man’s need for community by giving definition to what that community must specifically look like—what character that community should take on. If man is intended to image God by existing in community, the nature of that community must image God as well. “When it pleased God to make mankind in his own image, he created us as social beings. We were created for relationship with God and to reflect his likeness not merely as individuals but in relationship with one another.” Community is to be redemptive—it should invite others to the stream of redemptive history by pointing to God and reflecting His nature and glory. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 provides an example of redemptive living within community when it instructs the family to prioritize worship, instruction, consecration, and proclamation.

The Old Testament depicts Israel inviting nonbelievers to redemption through its unique attractional lifestyle. “Israel’s calling in Exodus 19:5 had the whole world in view. The nation was to be holy and to serve the world by being separate. Her life was to give clear evidence of Yahweh’s rule over her, and thus to be a model of his lordship over the whole

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world.”\(^5\) Deuteronomy 4:5-8 and Isaiah 2:2-3 promise Israel that the ethical quality of their lives and the nature of their worship would attract the nations to the Lord.

If the Old Testament *modus operandi* of God’s people was attractional in nature—centripetal—than the New Testament paradigm is centrifugal—God’s people are sent into the world to worship as opposed to calling the world to the worship at one location. As God sent the Son into the world, so too are redemptive communities sent; at their very core redemptive communities are sent people—missionary people.\(^6\) And while believers are indeed sent into the world, it is not merely that they *are* sent, but rather how they are sent. The New Testament depicts believers as going out into the world—imaging Christ’s coming into the world—rather than Israel’s stationary worship that invites others in. Termed *incarnational* or *missional*, a redemptive community is sent by God into the world to have an affinity for and ultimately identify with a given people group for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Finally, a thorough explication of the institutional church was undertaken in chapter four. Acts 2:42-47 and Acts 2:32-37 reveal that from the earliest days of the church, worship, Word, and sacrament were among the most vital and important elements present when believers gathered together; these elements always took place in the context of authentic Biblical community marked by love and unity. Authentic Biblical community—while fostered and facilitated by the institutional church—cannot be dependent on programs for its creation or sustainment. Authentic Biblical community is a lifestyle rather than the participation in an event—a lifestyle in which people consider one another, prefer one

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another, and sacrifice for one another, and it requires the church to see itself as a people and not merely a gathering of people.\(^7\)

Titus tells us Jesus Christ came to both redeem His children from their sin as well as to purify for Himself a people committed to Him:

> For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works, (Titus 2:11-14).

The Gospel of Jesus Christ goes hand-in-hand with the role of community in a believer’s life; community is integral to one’s faith in Jesus Christ, and understanding the implications of the Gospel in one’s individual and corporate life is a necessary task for the believer.

While not intended to speak directly to the church as an institution, the current project speaks to the life and health of the church by reminding its members what type of community they are: a community redeemed from lawlessness, purified, and zealous for good works. These emphases must not be looked to as panaceas for all that ails the church, but rather as the marks of a genuine relationship with God Himself:

> But our proposals should not be viewed as a recipe for success nor a guarantee of authentic ministry. Christianity is not a strategy or a set of principles. It is a relationship of love with the Triune God. The gospel word and the gospel community must be central to Christian practice. But our hearts should be fixed on the grace of God, the love of God, and the glory of God. The only true center of Christian existence is God himself.\(^8\)

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\(^8\) Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping around Gospel and Community* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 203.
Man, created in the image of God, is created for community. This community—authentic, transparent, and humble—is marked by love for one another and is rooted in love for God; love for God must necessarily result in love for one another, and love for one another must necessarily be informed by God. Such a community is not dictated by a prescribed form or style of church, but rather cultivated as a reality within a given church body. An accurate understanding of man’s existence is discovered through a theological anthropology—man is created in the image of God and is incomplete apart from a community that reflects the character and nature of God.
All valid Christian leadership, however varied its style, however wise its use of sociological findings, however diverse its functions, must begin with this fundamental recognition: Christian leaders have been entrusted with the gospel, the secret things of God that have been hidden in ages past but that are now proclaimed, by their ministry, to men and women everywhere. Moreover, they must beware of politely assuming such a stance, while their real interest lies elsewhere. This will not do. The servants of Christ have a fundamental charge laid on them: They have been entrusted with the gospel, and all their service turns on making that gospel known and on encouraging the people of God, by word, example, and discipline, to live it out.

- D. A. Carson, The Cross and Christian Ministry
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