

Being and becoming church: ecclesiological and organisational  
perspectives on Renewal and Reform in the contemporary Church  
of England

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of PhD

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University of Roehampton 2022



## Abstract

This thesis investigates the ecclesiological and organisational rationales of the Church of England's Renewal and Reform programme. At the same time, and in order to develop a frame of reference for considering Renewal and Reform, it explores the practical and theoretical value of organisation theory in this ecclesial context. It develops an ecclesiological argument for understanding the Church of England to be, in part, an organisation, by conceiving the nature of church as both Body of Christ and human system in sacramental terms. It argues that organisation theory offers a richer source of ideas and practices than critics allow, and that these ideas and practices are capable of illuminating and supporting the concrete existence of the Church of England as a pilgrim church in history. It develops an experimental example of an 'organisational ecclesiology', in the form of a model of ecclesial adaptivity, the 'Theological Trialogue'. This model brings together organisational cybernetics and the theological concept of faithful improvisation and is used as part of the interpretative framework employed in empirical research into Renewal and Reform.

The Renewal and Reform programme is then investigated empirically. The findings from a thematic analysis of the programme's documentation and of interviews with fifteen senior Church of England officers are set out. Renewal and Reform is discovered to be shaped by a desire for church growth, principally in numerical terms, and by the urgent concern of its architects to reverse the decline in the Church of England's numbers of adherents. The ecclesiological and organisational rationales lack clarity and are somewhat incomplete, especially with regard to the Church of England's identity and ecclesial traditions. The thesis concludes with recommendations for revised practice which focus on adopting a more systemic approach to change and a greater appreciation of the Church of England's nature and being.



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## Acknowledgements

I wish to express my appreciation of and gratitude to the following:

All those who agreed to be interviewed and gave generously of their time and their trust;

Wilson Ng, Andrew Rogers and Clare Watkins, for their patient and rigorous supervision;

Sue Miller and the Susanna Wesley Foundation, for the bursary, the friendship and the conversations;

John Beckford, for suggesting the thing in the first place;

My colleagues at Sarum College, for teaching me more than they probably realised about academic writing and research;

James Woodward, for encouragement, interest and advice;

The wardens and people of St John the Baptist, West Byfleet, for being understanding about the time this all takes;

My wife, Annabelle, for putting up with the hours, the stress and the absences with great love and patience.



# Chapter 1. Renewal and Reform: a programme raising ecclesiological and organisational questions

## 1.1 Introduction

In 2015 the Archbishops of Canterbury and York introduced a new programme for the Church of England which came to be known as Renewal and Reform. In doing so, they launched what was probably the first ever comprehensive programme aimed at renewing the Church of England, one which at least appears to combine organisational change (procedural and financial initiatives) with what the term “renewal” suggests are theologically conditioned objectives.

I am an Anglican priest and management consultant. I find Renewal and Reform fascinating because of this combination of ecclesiological and organisational dimensions. I wanted to investigate the programme and understand how it was conceived and intended to work as a programme of change for the Church of England. In this thesis, therefore, I will investigate the ecclesiological and organisational rationales of Renewal and Reform (R&R).

In order to do this I will develop a theoretical approach to the use of organisational and management concepts in the Church of England to provide a framework for the investigation. This means that the project will also explore the relevance, contribution and ecclesiological significance of selected features of organisation theory in relation to the Church of England and its contemporary situation. I will consider the possibility that organisation theory offers resources that can both illuminate and enrich the ecclesiological understanding of the Church of England’s nature and identity as well as aid that church practically by enhancing its management and problem-solving capability and help it to respond to contemporary challenges.

In this opening chapter I will offer a brief introduction to the R&R programme and its reception. I will then further explain why the programme and the themes I intend to explore are of interest to me and of significance to the Church of England. This will lead me into to an account of the questions I have about the programme and to the research question at the centre of this thesis. The next step will be to offer some context in relation to the situation facing the contemporary Church of England as background to the programme. I will conclude by

describing how the investigation will be conducted and reported in subsequent chapters and with a note on my use of the terms 'organisation' and 'church'.

## 1.2 The Renewal and Reform Programme

### *The development and content of Renewal and Reform*

In this section I will provide necessary background for the understanding of this research project and offer a "pre-reflective" account of the situation which this thesis investigates. This follows the research process proposed by Swinton and Mowat which I adopted and which I will describe fully in chapter six.<sup>1</sup> I will proceed, therefore, to offer a short, initial account of R&R and its reception. My full account will be offered in chapters seven and eight.

When the archbishops launched Renewal and Reform they asserted that a new focus on numerical and spiritual growth was urgently required and necessitated by the deep problems facing the Church of England:

The urgency of the challenge facing us is not in doubt. Attendance at Church of England services has declined at an average of 1% per year over recent decades and, in addition, the age profile of our membership has become significantly older...The age profile of our clergy has also been increasing.<sup>2</sup>

The Renewal and Reform programme was developed from the work of a series of task groups set up to "discern what was happening in parishes and dioceses, to ponder the implications of the *From Anecdote to Evidence* findings<sup>3</sup> and to reflect on the experience dioceses had in developing their mission and ministry".<sup>4</sup> *Anecdote to Evidence* claimed to provide solid evidence about the factors that enabled churches to grow.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 1. publ. ed. (London: SCM Press, 2006), 95.

<sup>2</sup> Justin Welby and John Sentamu, *In Each Generation: A Programme for Reform and Renewal*, General Synod (GS 1976) London: Church of England, 2015),1.

<sup>3</sup> Church Growth Research Programme, *From Anecdote to Evidence: Findings from the Church Growth Research Programme* (London: Church of England, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Welby, *In Each Generation*.

<sup>5</sup> The evidence was based on the following research. A team of from Essex University, led by Professor David Voas, analysed data collected centrally by the Church of England and surveyed 1700 parish churches. Other teams from theological institutions investigated the evidence available from the experience of church planting and Fresh Expressions of church. A cathedrals and greater churches sub-strand was led by Revd. Canon John Holmes. See Church Growth Research Programme, *From Anecdote to Evidence*, 32. It has been suggested by Mark Hart that the conclusions offered in *From Anecdote to Evidence* are not justified by the research itself. See Mark Hart, "From Delusion to Reality: An Evaluation of From Anecdote to Evidence." Last accessed 11 May 2022. <https://www.dropbox.com/s/rtepkv5h4tco6gk/From%20Delusion%20to%20Reality.pdf?dl=0>. I will make some comment on the use of *From Anecdote to Evidence* in chapter seven.

The programme was composed initially of the recommendations of five task groups contained in five reports. Those task group reports are: *Developing Discipleship*,<sup>6</sup> *Resourcing the Future*,<sup>7</sup> *Resourcing Ministerial Education*,<sup>8</sup> *Simplification*<sup>9</sup> and *The Green Report*.<sup>10</sup> Proposals were made, respectively, in relationship to the development of lay discipleship; the distribution of the Church Commissioners' funds; the recruitment and training of clergy; reforms to perceived legal and procedural hindrances to effective mission; the training of senior clergy and the development of a "talent pool" to provide future senior clergy. All of the task groups say they took their inspiration from Synod's 2010 quinquennial goals: "contributing as the national Church to the common good; facilitating the growth of the Church; re-imagining the Church's ministry".<sup>11</sup> The reports were approved by General Synod and the proposals enacted. *The Green Report* did not require Synodical approval.

A further paper, *Church Commissioners Funds and Inter-Generational Equity*, setting out the basis on which the Church Commissioners would support additional spending on the programme, was part of the initial programme.<sup>12</sup> Subsequently the Renewal and Reform programme was augmented. In 2016 William Nye, Secretary General of General Synod, published an overview of the programme entitled *A Vision and Narrative for Renewal and Reform*.<sup>13</sup> In 2017 *Setting God's People Free* set out proposals for lay ministry and mission in the Church of England.<sup>14</sup> I will describe the programme and its content in detail in chapter seven. I include there a table (Table 7.1) summarising the publication dates and content of all the R&R documents. I wish to note here, however, that this was the first national programme of this kind adopted by the Church of England, which explains in part its significance. There had been previous national initiatives – the 'Decade of Evangelism' in the 1990s, for example – but none supported by such a programme of specific financial, structural and procedural measures.

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<sup>6</sup> Task Group for General Synod of the Church of England, *Developing Discipleship*, The Church of England, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing the Future of the Church of England*, (London: Church of England, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Task group, *Resourcing Ministerial Education in the Church of England*, (London: Church of England, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Task Group, *Simplification* (London: Church of England 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Lord Green Steering Group, *Talent Management for Future Leaders and Leadership Development for Bishops and Deans: A New Approach*. (London: Church of England, 2014). It is usually referred to as the Green Report.

<sup>11</sup> House of Bishops and Archbishops' Council, *Challenges for the New Quinquennium* (London: Church of England, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Andreas Whittam-Smith, *Church Commissioners' Funds and Inter-Generational Equity GS 1981* (London: Church of England, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> William Nye, *A Vision and Narrative for Renewal and Reform*, (London: Archbishops' Council Church of England, 2016).

<sup>14</sup> Archbishops' Council of the Church of England, *Setting God's People Free*, (London: Church of England, 2017).

As a result, perhaps, the programme attracted much attention. It also enjoyed a decidedly mixed reception.

#### *Reception of the reports and programme*

R&R received much favourable comment in General Synod in the debates that followed its launch in February 2015. For example, Synod member Adrian Greenwood responded with this intervention: "Could I just say that I am personally very excited about this package of reform and renewal and I am looking forward very much to engaging with it".<sup>15</sup> Mr Philip Giddings, Chair of the House of Laity at the time, also welcomed the programme: "I am enormously excited by the programme of reform and renewal", though he went on to offer some reservations to which I will refer in chapter seven.<sup>16</sup>

Dr Ian Paul, a prominent Anglican evangelical, offered warm support for the programme reflected in an article for the *Church Times* in 2016.<sup>17</sup> The pages of the *Church Times* also, however, offer a useful guide to the critical reception often afforded to R&R. It was suggested that the programme lacked a sound theological basis. This is made clear in an article by Jeremy Worthen in an article introduced thus: "'Where is the theology?' is a question that has been levelled at the Church of England's Renewal and Reform programme".<sup>18</sup> Dr Ian Paul was reported as feeling the need to defend "the commitment to numerical growth, and was highly critical of an article by Giles Fraser that suggested that a church that successfully proclaims the Christian message was "likely to be empty and not full", and that the worst churches "judge their success in entirely worldly terms, by counting their followers".<sup>19</sup> Some criticism reflected a perception that the programme was too focused on the institution and too influenced by concepts from management. Trevor Beeson wrote:

That the new reform project is Church - rather than Kingdom-orientated is clear on every page of its reports - most especially, as might be expected, on that which is concerned with the allocation of financial resources. There the secular business model of "investment for growth" is unashamedly announced, in stark contrast to the gospel

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<sup>15</sup> General Synod of the Church of England, *Report of Proceedings 2015 General Synod February Group of Sessions Volume 46 no. 1* (London: The General Synod of the Church of England, 2015), 93.

<sup>16</sup> General Synod, *Report of Proceedings 2015*, 94.

<sup>17</sup> Ian Paul, "Not Just Rearranging Deckchairs", *Church Times* 16 December 2016, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2016/16-december/comment/opinion/not-just-rearranging-deckchairs>.

<sup>18</sup> Jeremy Worthen, "The Theology Behind Renewal and Reform," *Church Times*, 9 December 2016, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2016/9-december/comment/opinion/the-theology-behind-renewal-and-reform>.

<sup>19</sup> "Bishop Broadbent Rounds on the Critics of Reform and Renewal," *Church Times*, 17 April 2015, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2015/17-april/news/uk/church-growth-bishop-broadbent-rounds-on-the-critics-of-reform-and-renewal>.

model that was expressed by T. S. Eliot in "Choruses from The Rock":  
"Take no thought of the harvest, But only of proper sowing".<sup>20</sup>

One article reported on the reception of the programme in the Anglo-Catholic or high church part of the Church of England. "“There’s a lot of resistance to anything conceived as ‘management speak’ on the Catholic wing of the Church,” Fergus Butler-Gallie, an ordinand at Westcott House, says”.<sup>21</sup> The programme has been described as a project of one part of the Church of England, the evangelical wing:

Since the launch of the Archbishops’ Renewal and Reform (R&R) programme, some have queried the extent to which it has been embraced by church people outside the Evangelical tradition. The National Mission and Evangelism Adviser, Dr Rachel Jordan-Wolf, has admitted that more work is needed to engage Anglicans who are not from an Evangelical background.<sup>22</sup>

In short, Renewal and Reform has been criticised for a perceived lack of theology and ecclesiology, for a perceived debt to management concepts and for a perceived failure to engage with or represent the breadth of opinion and theological traditions in the Church of England.

In the light of this mixed reception I want to know how the programme was, in fact, conceived and intended and whether the criticisms that have been made were fair. For some critics the programme represents an attempt to reorientate the Church of England in ways that diminish it. I want to understand whether or not that is the case, as part of my exploration of the ecclesiological and organisational questions raised by R&R.

#### *Renewal and Reform considered from an organisational perspective*

Most commentary on the programme reported above emphasises ecclesiological perspectives. The criticisms of the programme largely concern the question of how well the programme reflects the nature and theology of the Church of England. It seems reasonable, at least on the face of it, also to consider R&R as an organisational change project, given that it frequently uses the language of planning and strategy and its intention, at least in part, is to create a better future for the institution.<sup>23</sup> The church media reports of the programme and an

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<sup>20</sup> Trevor Beeson, "Reform of the CoE Debate Continues," *Church Times*, 30 January 2015. <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2015/30-january/comment/letters-to-the-editor/reform-of-the-c-of-e-the-debate-continues>.

<sup>21</sup> Church Times, "Catholics Seek to Embrace Mission if Not Jargon " *Church Times*, 3 March 2017. <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2017/3-march/news/uk/catholics-seek-to-embrace-mission-if-not-jargon>.

<sup>22</sup> Church Times, "Catholics Seek to Embrace Mission".

<sup>23</sup> Although it might be argued that the ultimate objective is to grow the church of God, considered in its universal sense, it does appear that the programme sees the strengthening of the institution of the Church of England as, at the very

initial reading of the R&R material left me unclear, however, about the rationale of the programme in organisational terms. There are considerations frequently found in an organisational change project which appear to be underplayed in the R&R literature. These include an analysis of the problem facing the organisation; an explanation of how the proposed remedies will address the problem and do so in a way that serves the organisation's fundamental character and objectives; and some account of what the renewed organisation will look like, how it will differ from the organisation as it is in the present.<sup>24</sup> R&R is a programme criticised for its indebtedness to management ideas: I want to find out what part organisational ideas play in the programme and how strong it is, in fact, in management, as well as ecclesiological terms.

### 1.3 My interest in the project

As I indicated briefly earlier, my interest in this project arises directly out of my personal experiences and commitments. I wish to acknowledge this and describe my interest in more detail. This should be seen, in part, as a component in the personal reflexivity which is an important feature of the research process and which I will describe in chapters three and six when introducing my methodology and research methods respectively. I am a priest in the Church of England. I am also a management consultant. I have considerable experience of engaging with the Church of England in organisational terms. My experience and interests give me an inclination to believe that organisation theory has a valid and useful role in churches, though that position comes with some qualifications as I will describe below. I have been interested in applying the principles that informed my consulting work in other organisations in the churches, the Church of England in particular, and wrote a book which set out how the

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least, an important enabler of this outcome. See, for example, Nye, *A Vision and Narrative for Renewal and Reform*, 1: "Renewal and Reform is a body of work which seeks to provide a narrative of hope to the Church of England". The archbishops comment on the role of the task groups that: "the groups were asked to explore specific aspects of the institutional life of the Church of England, where, on the face of it, there appeared to be scope for significant change" Welby, *In Each Generation*, 1.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston, Mass: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012); Russell Lincoln Ackoff, *Creating the Corporate Future* (New York: Wiley, 1981); John Beckford, *The Intelligent Organisation: Realising the Value of Information* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).



Church of England might apply these principles.<sup>25</sup> It was very much a practitioner's book rather than a work of scholarship.

When I began to consider the Church of England from an organisational perspective my experience was that there was not much enthusiasm amongst clergy or senior church officials for addressing the fact of declining attendances and influence and, what seemed to me, the strong likelihood that the trends would continue and threaten the continued viability of the Church of England. My enthusiasm for employing the insights of organisational and management thinking and practice also seemed a minority interest, one which was actively opposed by many. The appointment of Justin Welby as Archbishop of Canterbury in early 2013 appeared to lead to a sudden and quite marked shift towards characterising declining attendances as a crisis and to a new enthusiasm for concepts arising from management practice. In that year I was retained to help review the first leadership development programme for bishops, established before Justin became archbishop. The programme was, I thought, rather timid about drawing on secular management ideas and resources. Only a year later, however, in 2014, *The Green Report* was published. It advocated replacing the existing scheme with one to be led substantially by business schools and was quickly implemented. Having been an advocate of what I saw as realism about the seriousness of the situation facing the Church of England and of the value of organisation theory and practice as part of the response to decline, I became concerned that the pendulum had swung rather far the other way. The new enthusiasm for management concepts seemed too uncritical and insufficiently related to Anglican ecclesiology. I began this PhD research project with the intention of understanding what role organisation theory and practice might play from a theological and ecclesiological perspective, in both the contemporary Church of England's practice and self-understanding. I wanted to place this in the context of a deeper understanding of the thinking and practice that informs the Renewal and Reform initiative.

My history gives me, to some degree, an inside understanding of the subject matter and enables access to many of the individuals involved in shaping the story of R&R. But it also indicates that this is a project in which I have a personal stake. This is a powerful motivator but it also makes it necessary to ensure that my stance as a researcher is sufficiently aware and

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<sup>25</sup> Keith Elford, *Creating the Future of the Church: A Practical Guide to Addressing Whole-System Change* (London: SPCK, 2013).

critical of my position as a priest, as a committed supporter of the Church of England and as a management consultant. It is the case that part of the motivation to complete this research arises from my desire to make sense of these commitments at a particular point in the Church of England's history and in my own life and practice – but I have been concerned to do so with a degree of reflexivity that allows me to make use of my experience, and the access it allows, whilst guarding against the bias that could arise from the very same factors. I will address this issue more fully in chapter three when I address the question of methodology and chapter six when I describe my approach to collecting empirical data as part of this investigation.

#### **1.4 Research questions**

In the light of the R&R programme's reception, my history and interests, and my own initial reflections on R&R as an organisational change project, a number of issues are raised. These concern the specific nature of R&R, but also broader questions about the role of organisational ideas and practices in the ecclesial context. My principal research question is this: what potential is there for organisation theory, particularly those elements within it associated with creating the capacity for organisations to adapt and change, to inform in both practically useful, and ecclesiological appropriate ways, attempts such as Renewal and Reform to effect change in the Church of England? The overall research question breaks down into sub-questions and areas of investigation.

Firstly, I want investigate the nature and ecclesiological and organisational rationales of what at least presents to me as an ecclesiastical change programme. I want to know whether the programme is coherent and convincing in ecclesiological and/or organisational terms. A key contributory question here concerns the role, if any, played in the conception and practice of R&R by ideas derived from organisation theory, consciously or unconsciously; and the theology, implied or explicit which underpins the use of those ideas.

Secondly, because the way that management concepts are thought to be applied within the Church of England is, as I have shown, a focus of some criticism and dissatisfaction, I need to consider whether and how organisational ideas and practices might legitimately be employed in the Church of England. I wish, therefore, to investigate the ecclesiological and practical value

of organisation theory to the contemporary Church of England and of viewing that church from perspectives derived from organisation theory.

Thirdly, in order to investigate these matters I will need to consider how the Church of England understands itself ecclesiologicaly and whether that ecclesiological understanding allows it to be viewed and treated, at least to some extent, as an organisation.

I wish to make it clear that I am not investigating whether or not R&R has been or will be successful in achieving its objectives. My approach to the programme is focused on achieving a critical understanding of its ecclesiological and organisational rationales and coherence. I will, however, offer reflections (especially in the final chapter) on how R&R or programmes like it, might achieve, in terms associated with practical theology, a more “faithful performance” in the future.<sup>26</sup> I will also offer reflections on the nature, mission and ministry of the Church of England today, with some commentary on how it too might appropriately ‘be and become’ itself, that is, change in a way that preserves its integrity, in the circumstances it faces.

## **1.5 The Church of England and its situation**

I will be looking at a church that is said to be in ‘decline’, a term used to refer to significant decreases in attendance at worship and influence in society. Between 1979 and 2005 church Sunday attendance in England declined from 11.7 % of the population to 6.3%. This means that there are now fewer than 3 million regular churchgoers. About one third of this churchgoing population attends Church of England services – now less than 1 million people, with a high proportion aged 50 plus. In 2000 a survey found that 58% of the population in Britain self-identify as religious or spiritual.<sup>27</sup> This number has dropped dramatically in a more recent survey.<sup>28</sup> The ageing nature of congregations means that a further dramatic fall in attendance is likely and John Spence, the chair of the Archbishops’ Council’s Finance Committee, warned General Synod in 2016 that by 2046 churchgoing would likely be reduced to 1% of the

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<sup>26</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology*, 4.

<sup>27</sup> Linda Woodhead and Rebecca Catto, eds., *Religion and Change in Modern Britain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 5-6.

<sup>28</sup> David Voas and Steve Bruce, "Religion Identity, Behaviour and Belief Over Two Decades," in *British Social Attitudes: The 36th Report*, ed. Curtice, J., Clery, E., Perry, J., Phillips M. and Rahim, N. (London: The National Centre for Social Research, 2019).

population.<sup>29</sup> This last assertion is speculative but seems to be a reasonable suggestion on the basis that current trends continue. It is indisputable that attendance at Church of England churches and affiliation to the Church of England are in numerical decline: the question concerns how these facts are interpreted and what action, if any, should be taken in response.

This thesis does not set out to answer these questions as such but they are a significant background factor in my research. I will, therefore, briefly rehearse the issues and my thinking about it. The facts involved can be and are interpreted in different ways. One suggestion is that decline in church attendance does not signify a decline in Christian faith as such but a rejection of membership of organised religious groups and a preference for “believing without belonging”<sup>30</sup> – though some of the trends referred to above suggest ‘believing’ is also in decline. Then there are a number of ways of understanding why people have turned away from organised Christian activity. Some commentators focus on changes in lifestyle and culture, which both crowd out and offer beguiling alternatives (especially on a Sunday morning) for modern families.<sup>31</sup> Callum Brown offers an influential account which I find persuasive. He suggests that church attendance remained relatively stable through the Victorian period and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and collapsed abruptly in the 1960s. This happened, he argues, because a persistent cultural narrative, rooted in Christian ideas, of female spirituality as a civilising influence on men, weakened over time and collapsed suddenly in the face of the liberal counterculture of the 1960s.<sup>32</sup>

One popular way of assessing the significance of the shifts in the social, political and cultural landscape and the decline in affiliation with the historic churches is to describe them as symptoms or features of a movement to “post-Christendom”, that is, to a period in which Christianity ceases to be the dominant influence on political and social life.<sup>33</sup> I find Charles Taylor’s account of secularisation illuminating, especially his argument that our era is characterised by a deeply significant change not simply in the loss of “public space” for religion, nor in the decline in the numbers professing faith, but also in a change in the conditions in which

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<sup>29</sup> John Bingham, “No Growth for 30 Years - Church of England Predicts,” *Daily Telegraph* 17 June 2016.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/12161845/No-growth-for-30-years-Church-of-England-predicts.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox*, 2nd ed. (Chichester: Wiley, 2015). Her argument seems less persuasive in the light of the recent data from the British Social Attitudes Survey reported above.

<sup>31</sup> E.g. the account offered in The Mission Shaped Church Working Group, *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004).

<sup>32</sup> C. G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>33</sup> E.g. Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2018); Mission Shaped Church Working Group. *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*. London: Church House Publishing, 2004.

faith is found – namely, one in which religious faith is now a choice and one among many legitimate alternatives.<sup>34</sup>

Most of these arguments focus on changes in the world. But arguments are also made that decline is the result, at least in part, of failures of the Church of England itself. It is easy and no doubt reasonable to point to failures in child protection as a likely factor. But others go further. Brown and Woodhead assert that the Church of England has retreated from its role as the church for all.<sup>35</sup> This, they say, is signified by misplaced preoccupations such as opposition to the liberation of women and homosexuals; the church's embrace of charismatic evangelical theologies and practices; drives to centralise the church; and a new focus on the Anglican Communion as a kind of "global church". Whatever the justice of these accusations, the fact that the downward trend in attendance and influence affects the other historic churches in a similar fashion suggests that the problems that affect the Church of England transcend the question of its own institutional failures.

It will be evident that these arguments need not be exclusive. They can be used in combination and it seems unlikely that there is any single, simple cause. My position, however, is to emphasise the suggestion that the Church of England is experiencing a degree and depth of change in its environment that is profoundly challenging. The idea that we are passing through a profound social, cultural and political 'paradigm shift'<sup>36</sup> to something that we could reasonably characterise as post-Christendom appears to best account for the range and depth of change taking place. My view is that the Church of England is indeed probably facing a severe threat to its continuing existence, at least in something like its current form.

## 1.6 The shape of the thesis

The questions I am asking about the R&R programme lead me first (in chapter two) to place this research within the existing church-situated discourse about the role and value of

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<sup>34</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2007).

<sup>35</sup> Andrew Brown and Linda Woodhead, *That Was the Church that Was: How the Church of England Lost the English People* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

<sup>36</sup> The phrase is used here to denote the replacement of one model or set of theoretical structures that guide and reflect practice with another, following David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 3. print. ed., (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1991).

organisation theory in churches. I will address some important articles and some works critical of organisation theory as a partner for churches, but at the heart of the chapter will be a substantial critical account of a small body of major works that engage explicitly in an exploration similar to mine.<sup>37</sup> The objective is to identify common themes and outstanding questions, notably that voiced by Clare Watkins concerning how we can describe, adequately theologically, the nature of ecclesial bodies, as both "Body of Christ" and "social system".<sup>38</sup>

In chapter three I will explore the interdisciplinary and methodological questions raised by my project in order to create a platform for further theoretical discussion and the account of the empirical research which will be a key part of the investigation. In particular, I will address the issues that arise from my approach to this project as a person with a particular commitment to the Christian faith. This will, further, necessitate an account of my particular theological position. This account engages principally with the concepts of the Trinity and the mission of God in the world, drawing on the work of Paul Fiddes.<sup>39</sup> I will support this with an exposition of the ways in which the philosophy of critical realism has been used and understood in Christian theology, making especial reference to the work of Andrew Wright.<sup>40</sup> I will describe how this project is conceived as a venture in practical theology and set out an approach to that discipline which, in critical realist fashion, and making use of the approach set out by Swinton and Mowat, combines a respect for normative sources of theology with the potential to learn about God in particular situations and experiences.<sup>41</sup>

I turn next to the ecclesiological issues (in chapter four) and the question of whether a church can be treated as an organisation. This entails addressing the question of the nature of church raised in chapter two. In this I draw first on Roman Catholic discussions of church because the sacramental perspectives found in that tradition offer a powerful way of thinking about church as both gift of God and human system. I will focus particularly on the work of Nicholas Healy and his account of church as a phenomenon existing in history, time and

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<sup>37</sup> Peter F. Rudge, *Ministry and Management: The Study of Ecclesiastical Administration* (London: Tavistock, 1968); Patrick Granfield, *Ecclesial Cybernetics: A Study of Democracy in the Church* (New York: Macmillan, 1973); Thung, *The Precarious Organisation: Sociological Explorations of the Church's Mission and Structure* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976); Joseph F. McCann, *Church and Organization: A Sociological and Theological Enquiry* (London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1993).

<sup>38</sup> Clare Watkins, "Organizing the People of God: Social-Science Theories of Organization in Ecclesiology," *Theological Studies* 52, no. 4 (Dec 1, 1991), 691. doi:10.1177/004056399105200405.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Fiddes, "Ecclesiology and Ethnography: Two Disciplines, Two Worlds?," in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2012).

<sup>40</sup> Andrew Wright, *Christianity and Critical Realism: Ambiguity, Truth and Theological Literacy* (London: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>41</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology*.

culture.<sup>42</sup> I then turn more specifically to Anglican sources (including Paul Avis, Stephen Sykes and Mark Chapman)<sup>43</sup> and offer a discussion of the nature of the Church of England in which I will employ sacramental terms.

I will proceed thereafter, in chapter five, to offer an account of aspects of contemporary organisation theory linked to some preliminary application of organisational ideas to the Church of England together with ecclesiological commentary. In this chapter I will draw heavily on the notion of presenting organisation theory through its key metaphors, using the work of Gareth Morgan.<sup>44</sup>

In chapter six I will describe my approach to the collection of empirical data, based on a process derived from the work of Swinton and Mowat.<sup>45</sup> I will set out the process by which I will develop a thematic analysis first, of the R&R reports and, second, of qualitative interviews with those associated with the development of the R&R programme. In this chapter I will, further, develop a particular model of ecclesial adaptivity, the 'Theological Dialogue', which I will use as part of the process of theological reflection upon the data collected. This model brings together the organisational cybernetics of Stafford Beer as developed by contemporary followers, Peter Dudley and John Beckford<sup>46</sup> with the Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England's theological concept of "faithful improvisation".<sup>47</sup>

In chapter seven I will present the findings from the first part of the empirical research, that is, from my analysis of the R&R reports. In chapter eight I will present the findings from the interviews. In both chapters I will reflect on the data in the light of the theoretical discussion in earlier chapters and, more particularly, the Theological Dialogue. I present my conclusions on the investigation in chapter nine.

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<sup>42</sup> Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology*, 1. publ. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000).

<sup>43</sup> Notably: Paul D. L. Avis, *The Identity of Anglicanism: Essentials of Anglican Ecclesiology* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2008); Stephen Whitefield Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism* (London and Oxford: Mowbray, 1978); Chapman, Mark D. "The Church," In *The Vocation of Anglican Theology*, edited by McMichael, Ralph, 153-195. London: SCM Press, 2014.

<sup>44</sup> Gareth Morgan, *Images of Organization*, Updated ed. (London: Sage, 2006).

<sup>45</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology*.

<sup>46</sup> Stafford Beer, *Diagnosing the System for Organizations* (Chichester: Wiley, 1985); Peter Dudley, "Quality Management Or Management Quality?: An Adaptive Model of Organization as the Basis of Organizational Learning and Quality Provision." (The University of Hull, 2000); John Beckford, *The Intelligent Organisation: Realising the Value of Information* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>47</sup> Loveday Alexander and Mike Higton, eds., *Faithful Improvisation?: Theological Reflection on Church Leadership* (London: Church House Publishing, 2016).

In line with this scheme, my next step is turn to the examination of previous ecclesiological treatments of the church in relation to organisation theory. But before I do so, I wish to add a note on my use of the terms 'organisation' and 'church' in this thesis.

### **1.7 Organisation and church: a note on terminology**

I want to offer the reader some explanation here of the way I use the terms 'organisation' and 'church' in this thesis. I will offer both further support for the validity of my choices of terminology and fuller exploration of the issues relating to my choice of terminology in chapter four (p.74ff) when I consider how we might theologically consider churches to be organisations.

#### *Organisation*

I use the term 'organisation' in a generic and comprehensive sense, as a way of referring to purposeful social bodies of all kinds, including businesses, charities and public bodies.<sup>48</sup> If it is objected that by applying the term organisation to churches I imply that those ecclesial societies are human creations I respond that I will argue later that churches are both spiritual mysteries and human societies, existing by the grace of God but also by human choice. I suggest that, in any case, whatever term from the social sciences I might substitute for the term organisation would be open to a similar criticism.

There are ecclesiologists who prefer the term 'institution' for churches, including Martyn Percy, apparently because to him the term organisation suggests something instrumental and commercial.<sup>49</sup> As I argued in the previous paragraph, I do not accept that the term organisation carries such a narrow meaning. The term 'institution', on the other hand, carries a range of meanings. My primary understanding of what is conveyed by the term follows Philip Selznick. He describes it as denoting the idea that over time organisations typically become valued for themselves and what they represent and not merely for the achievement of the objectives for which they were created.<sup>50</sup> Organisations become institutions, that is, they become something of wider cultural and social significance. In this sense the term institution is indeed apt for the Church of England. The term is also used, however, to refer to the broader social and cultural

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<sup>48</sup> This comprehensive definition is assumed in classic texts of organisation theory such as Morgan, *Images of Organization*; Mary Jo Hatch and Ann L. Cunliffe, *Organization Theory: Modern, Symbolic and Post-Modern Perspectives*, 2. ed. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006); James G. March, Simon and A. Herbert, *Organizations*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).

<sup>49</sup> Martyn Percy, "It's Not an Organization, it's the Body of Christ," *The Church Times* 2013. [www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2013/22-november/comment/opinion/it-s-not-an-organization-it-s-the-body-of-christ](http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2013/22-november/comment/opinion/it-s-not-an-organization-it-s-the-body-of-christ).

<sup>50</sup> Philip Selznick. *Leadership and Administration: A Sociological Interpretation*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1957).



process by which habitual actions and practices become 'institutionalised' in society, that is, where "there is a reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors".<sup>51</sup> Institutional theory is a particular form of organisation theory that explores how organisation structure and practices are shaped by institution understood as institutionalised practice, whether this is legal, social or cultural.<sup>52</sup> These different (though related) meanings of the term institution lead me to prefer 'organisation' as the primary concept, partly for reasons of clarity. I also believe the general usage in organisation theory of the term organisation includes the concept of institution with its differing meanings. Finally, the interest of this thesis is in organisation theory in the ecclesiological context so it seems natural and appropriate to prefer that terminology.

There is an exception to my use of the term organisation with the broad meaning generally employed. In chapter eight I make reference to the idea (suggested by one of my interviewees) that the social existence of the Church of England might be usefully understood in three dimensions. These are: community (people in relationship); institution (a body valued as a spiritual-cultural reality by its adherents and by wider society); and as organisation (in this case, the term organisation being used in a more limited sense, referring to such factors as structure, governance and deployment of resources). I find this idea helpful for the specific and limited purpose of exploring an aspect of the nature and identity of the Church of England, that is, its existence as a body tied into wider society and linked to broader and institutionalised habits and practices.

### *Church*

I avoid references to 'the church'. Instead I prefer to speak of a particular church (usually the Church of England), to churches or to church as a social phenomenon. I do so to emphasise my interest in the particular, concrete existence of churches in history and culture.<sup>53</sup> I am not denying the existence of the church universal, transcending time and space, but wish to focus on what is experienced this side of the eschaton. I wish to emphasise that the visible, empirical church itself exists holistically as both mystery and social system.

I understand the Church of England to be a part or "branch" of the universal church of God.<sup>54</sup> It is the nature of such parts or branches of the church of God that they manifest the life

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<sup>51</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 1. ed. (London: Penguin, 1966), 72.

<sup>52</sup> Hatch, *Organization Theory*, 86

<sup>53</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 39.

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, Avis' discussion of the theology of James Ussher: Avis, *Anglicanism and the Christian Church*, 69.

of the universal church in distinct and unique ways. It is this distinct and unique identity that is the focus of this investigation. I am interested primarily in the Church of England as a particular social (organisational) entity which nevertheless embodies the divine mystery.

## Chapter 2. Organising church: an under-developed discourse

### 2.1 Introduction

The purpose of my investigation is to understand the rationale and practice of Renewal and Reform using perspectives drawn from ecclesiology and organisation theory. In doing so I also wish to test my hypothesis that organisation theory can be used in ways that are ecclesologically valid and illuminating as well as offering practical value for the Church of England. Further, I am interested in how such an integrated approach might help that church in a period of unusually intense (and, perhaps, threatening) change in the world by providing resources to develop its adaptivity. This chapter contains the first step in my exploration by reviewing existing work on the theme of church as organisation, that is, work considering or applying organisation theory as a means of supporting the churches in developing their life and mission.

There is, of course, an extensive sociological literature considering churches as examples, usually seen as rather unusual examples, of organisation. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries the churches proved a subject of considerable interest for the leading exponents of the emerging disciplines of social science such as Weber and Durkheim.<sup>1</sup> The sociology of the churches remains a discipline of interest for scholars, including Christians who are also social scientists, such as David Martin and Robin Gill.<sup>2</sup> There has also been a recent renewed interest in churches and religious bodies as distinct examples of organisation by theorists such as Paul Tracey and others.<sup>3</sup> Although these sociologically positioned works have much to contribute to the general theme of church and organisation they are not central to this inquiry. I am not saying that works produced from a primarily sociological perspective do not or may not have ecclesiological value. I shall refer to some in chapter four when I consider the question of how churches may or may not be understood as organisations considered from an ecclesiological perspective. In order, however, to address the research questions and concerns summarised

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1956). Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 2. ed. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1976).

<sup>2</sup> E.g. David Martin, *The Future of Christianity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011). Robin Gill, ed., *Theology and Sociology: A Reader*, New and enl. ed., 1. publ. ed. (London: Cassell, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Paul Tracey, "Religion and Organization: A Critical Review of Current Trends and Future Directions," *The Academy of Management Annals* 6, no. 1 (Jun 1, 2012), 87-134; Paul Tracey, Nelson Phillips and Michael Lounsbury, *Religion and Organization Theory*, 1. ed., Vol. 41 (Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2014); Bent Meier Sørensen et al., "Theology and Organization," *Organization* 19, no. 3 (2012), 267-279.

briefly at the beginning of this chapter, I need to focus here on those works that engage with organisation theory from a confessional, ecclesiologicaly committed perspective, with a concern for the benefit of church as a theological as well as practical reality and of the Christian faith. In the review of existing work on my key themes which is the burden of this chapter I shall, therefore, limit myself to work which engages with organisation theory from such a committed, ecclesiological position.<sup>4</sup>

I want to know what answers are provided to my research questions by existing literature and what remains to be done. I shall argue that some existing work gives us a strong start in imagining what an organisationally informed ecclesiology might contribute to the Church of England. Nevertheless, fundamental questions, notably that of whether that church may be treated organisationally, from a theological perspective, remain insufficiently addressed. The need to address these matters convincingly is only underlined by the appearance of more recent works denying the value of the notions of organisation and organisation theory applied to the churches. Further, there are some new circumstances which have not been addressed by existing literature. One is the development of new perspectives in the burgeoning field of organisation theory. A second is a sense of crisis about the state of the churches in relation to declining attendance numbers and social influence. This, in turn, creates a greater urgency about the question of the churches' capacity to respond to that crisis.

I will argue that two of the existing works, those of McCann<sup>5</sup> and Moore,<sup>6</sup> make a strong case for an ethical imperative for treating a church as an organisation and managing it effectively, and that this perspective is both helpful and should be built upon. I will contend that the fundamental ecclesiological question concerns one's basic understanding of ecclesial communities and, particularly, how one reconciles a church's nature as 'Body of Christ' and as an empirical, human system. Finally, I will discover an approach which I will develop further as a central feature in this thesis, that of church described or conceived in sacramental terms.

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<sup>4</sup> I also exclude Torry's exhaustive works, including Malcolm Torry, *Managing God's Business: Religious and Faith-Based Organizations and their Management* (Florence: Routledge, 2005). Torry's work is primarily aimed at developing organisational approaches suitable for faith based organisations in general and is, in my view, predominantly sociological in its stance. I exclude Margaret Harris's work for the same reasons: Margaret Harris, *Organizing God's Work: Challenges for Churches and Synagogues* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Joseph F. McCann, *Church and Organization: A Sociological and Theological Enquiry* (London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Geoff Moore, "Churches as Organisations: Towards a Virtue Ecclesiology for Today," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 11, no. 1 (2011), 45-65.

### *Exploring and characterising the field of relevant literature*

The field of relevant literature is not extensive. When Clare Watkins surveyed it for an article in *Theological Studies* in 1991 she identified a small number of significant, full length treatments of the subject.<sup>7</sup> She followed that article with a consideration of ecclesiology in relation to church management in *Modern Theology* in 1993.<sup>8</sup> When she returned to these themes in 2018, she observed:

Significantly, a quarter of a century later, a search for academic papers on management in church in the English-speaking academic world still identifies this issue of *Modern Theology* as one of the more significant publications... This remains a strangely underdeveloped area.<sup>9</sup>

The texts in this rather particular area of study are, aside from the acknowledged area of shared interest, otherwise perhaps surprisingly diverse. They do not constitute a connected or developing body of literature. The early works in particular were written in different geographies, most emanate from quite different ecclesiological traditions and few were written with knowledge of the other works under consideration. The works do, however, fall fairly neatly into two phases characterised by different preoccupations and outlooks divided by a natural transition point. The phases are distinct, in the first place, because they match approximately to changes in attitude in the Church of England and, perhaps, elsewhere, to the concept of management. In the second place, the chronological division I propose makes sense because it coincides roughly with important changes in both theology/ecclesiology and organisation theory that bring (or should bring) new considerations to the discussion.

The first phase I identify comprises three major texts written in the 1960s and 1970s, each characterised by a sense (or so it seems to me) of undertaking something new, significant and positive. These are the texts reviewed by Watkins in her 1991 article: her account of them highlights some of the key questions they raise and which remain pertinent to this investigation. I plan to use Watkins' 1991 article as the end of a first phase. I propose this scheme partly as a

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<sup>7</sup> Watkins, "Organizing the People of God.

<sup>8</sup> Clare Watkins, "The Church as a 'Special' Case: Comments from Ecclesiology Concerning the Management of the Church," *Modern Theology* 9, no. 4 (Oct 1, 1993), 369-384, 369.

<sup>9</sup> Clare Watkins, "Ecclesiology y management: ¿Qué tipo de relación interdisciplinaria es posible?," Olvani Sánchez Marcela Mazzini Geraldo De Mori eds., *TEOLOGÍA PRÁCTICA E INTERDISCIPLINARIEDAD*, (Bogotá: Editorial Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2022), 195-216. Published in Spanish and made available to the researcher in English by the author.

convenient way of managing the material, but there is also reason to suggest that it was published at just about the time of the transition I described above.

One way of reading the recent history of the Church of England is to characterise it as a story of increasing centralisation. The trend of the last one hundred years or so has been to concentrate more resources at diocesan level (departments of mission, education, ministry and so forth, with directors and staff) and national level (the national church institutions or NCIs, including Board of Mission, Ministry Division and so forth).<sup>10</sup> In the 1990s there was a development which can be seen as a further example of a centralising tendency, in the form of the publication of the report *Working as One Body*.<sup>11</sup> This attempted to rationalise the national church institutions and recommended the creation of the Archbishops' Council as a means of exerting more control and greater clarity. Its recommendations were only partly implemented. At least one of the prominent critics of Renewal and Reform I interviewed as part of the empirical investigation to be described later traces an unwelcome preoccupation with management concepts to this development. Whether or not this report was the direct cause, there appears to have been a change in the way management concepts were viewed in the Church of England in about this period. Some of the more substantial treatments of church as organisation post-1991 have been negative.

The other feature of the period post-1991 is the emergence of new ecclesiological and organisational theories that offer different perspectives to the question of church as organisation. In ecclesiology there has been a growing focus on ethnographic exploration of the church understood as a concrete phenomenon in which the spiritual and the human are interwoven.<sup>12</sup> In theology there has been a debate about the admissibility of social science theory in the light of its secular provenance and debt to enlightenment philosophy.<sup>13</sup> In organisation theory the field has been considerably enlarged and diversified, primarily, perhaps,

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<sup>10</sup> Andrew Chandler, *The Church of England in the Twentieth Century*, 1. publ. ed. (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> The Archbishops' Commission on the Organisation of the Church of England, *Working as One Body* (London: Church House Publishing, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> See, notably, Pete Ward, ed., *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); Helen Cameron et al., *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010). Healy's discussion of the "concrete church" is a key theological influence on this trend even if Healy himself has since changed his mind about the value of ethnographic research: Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology*, 1. publ. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> See, notably, John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006); Robin Gill, ed., *Theology and Sociology: A Reader*, New and enl. ed., 1. publ. ed. (London: Cassell, 1996). John A. Coleman, "Every Theology Implies a Sociology and Vice Versa," in *Theology and the Social Sciences*, ed. Michael H. Barnes, Vol. 46, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001).

as a result of a new interest in the epistemological, ontological and social foundations of the discipline.

Watkins has provided a review of texts produced in what I am designating the second phase of writing on church and organisation in her 2018 article. Her 1991 and 2018 article are the only two such critical summaries of work within the area of interest of this investigation. Given all the factors which make these two periods distinct it seems useful to review the field using the scheme of two phases with Watkins' 1991 article as the endpoint for the first period and her 2018 paper as endpoint for the second. The review, will, however, engage with works not considered by Watkins and offer a critical perspective on Watkins' work itself. Throughout, my underlying concerns will be: the ecclesiological basis presented for understanding the church as an organisation (or not); the theological case for and against making use of secular organisation theory; and evidence for the ecclesiological and practical value of engaging with organisation theory.

## **2.2 Phase 1: pre 1990s**

In this section I will discuss three major treatments of organisation theory applied to churches together with Watkins' 1991 article. I shall describe how these writers on church and organisation developed grand visions for the use of organisation theory in churches, seeing, especially, the potential of organisation theory to help churches better meet the challenges of contemporary society. These visions have never really been built upon. These writers, Peter Rudge,<sup>14</sup> Patrick Granfield,<sup>15</sup> and Mady Thung,<sup>16</sup> each recognise the need to justify the use of organisation theory in churches, and do so in different ways. Overall, however, I argue that the ecclesiological portions of these works are relatively under-developed and unsatisfactory. Watkins also devotes considerable attention to a much earlier work, Bonhoeffer's *Sanctorum Communio*, which was the first substantial modern work to treat the church explicitly in both theological and sociological terms.<sup>17</sup> Although it does not engage with organisation theory

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<sup>14</sup> Peter F. Rudge, *Ministry and Management: The Study of Ecclesiastical Administration* (London: Tavistock, 1968).

<sup>15</sup> Patrick Granfield, *Ecclesial Cybernetics: A Study of Democracy in the Church* (New York: Macmillan, 1973).

<sup>16</sup> Mady A. Thung, *The Precarious Organisation: Sociological Explorations of the Church's Mission and Structure* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976).

<sup>17</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, trans. Krauss and Luykens (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1930); Clare Watkins, "Organizing the People of God," 709.

(which was in its earliest days as a field of study at that time) the treatment of the church in sociological terms is highly relevant. It should, therefore, be understood as a key text on my theme of church and organisation. I will offer a short account of that work and, in that context, I will introduce the idea, which will be central to this thesis, of seeing the church in sacramental terms. I start with the three major works of the 1960s and 1970s which pioneered the intentional and explicit application of organisation theory to the churches. As I suggested above, they offer positive and extensive accounts of how organisation theory can be employed effectively by churches.

*Grand visions of the how the churches might engage with organisation theory*

The three works explicitly concerned with church and organisation to be considered here are *Ministry and Management: The Study of Ecclesiastical Administration* by Peter Rudge, *Ecclesial Cybernetics: A Study of Democracy in the Church* by Patrick Granfield and *The Precarious Organisation: Sociological Explorations of the Church's Mission and Structure* by Mady Thung.<sup>18</sup> Rudge, Granfield and Thung all treat the study of management and organisation as a resource that offers great, even transformative, possibilities if used by churches. Each of these books is characterised by enthusiasm and optimism. Rudge sets himself to contribute to the founding of a new discipline, the study and practice of what he calls “ecclesiastical administration” or “managerial theology”. He tells us that he had studied management prior to ordination and, once in a parish, found “the earlier administrative training was at least equal in value to the theological training”.<sup>19</sup> As the sole Anglican contributor in this period to the discussion about the use of organisation theory in churches, Rudge is a particularly important source for my project and many of his concerns remain relevant. For example, a large part of his purpose was to provide a useful resource for clergy who are (in his view) as much managers and leaders as priests and pastors. As we shall see later, especially when considering *The Green Report*, this remains a controversial assumption but also an important topic of concern.<sup>20</sup>

Granfield also proposes a new area of study and practice – “Ecclesial Cybernetics” – which he wishes to develop and employ as a means of reforming the Roman Catholic Church. Cybernetics is the science of the management of information and a central part of the systems

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<sup>18</sup> Rudge, *Ministry and Management*; Granfield, *Ecclesial Cybernetics*; Thung, *The Precarious Organisation*.

<sup>19</sup> Rudge, *Ministry and Management*, xiii.

<sup>20</sup> Green, *Talent Management for Future Leaders*.



approach to organisations.<sup>21</sup> Granfield understands the Roman Catholic Church to be in a period of transition, in “a new age in human history”. This age is characterised as post-Christian. It is also the “information age”.<sup>22</sup> He believes that the Roman Catholic Church must democratise if it is to respond effectively to the challenges of the new age and build on the gains of Vatican II. He understands the practices associated with cybernetics as a means of supporting that end.

Mady Thung offers a remarkably comprehensive account of how organisational ideas might be applied to churches, though she is careful to limit her declared intention to that of providing “an outline for further research rather than a complete investigation”.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, her aim is to contribute to renewal in the western churches from a sociological point of view. She asks “what would be the most suitable organisational set-up for a church which tries to cope with its mission in society”?<sup>24</sup> She describes “a new type of church” devoted to mission.<sup>25</sup>

Watkins’ 1991 article includes the only critical academic review of which I am aware of these three works considered together. The article approaches the question of the church and organisation theory from a particular angle, that is, the relation of church and social science theories of organisation, considered explicitly from an ecclesiological point of view. She asks why an “organisational ecclesiology” might be worth pursuing.<sup>26</sup> She is particularly concerned to emphasise the need for an ecclesiological justification for comparing the church with other organisations and for making use of ideas and practices derived from social science of the kind employed by those organisations. It is from this perspective that she provides a critical account of the three major texts under review. Because her concerns are very close to those of this investigation her observations are particularly pertinent for my purposes and I will refer to her work when offering ecclesiological commentary.

### *The potential and uses of organisation theory in churches*

The works of Rudge, Granfield and Thung develop their ‘grand visions’ in different ways, though a feature shared by all three is the conviction that organisation theory can help churches address contemporary challenges and adapt to changing times. The concern is less explicit in

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<sup>21</sup> I will return to the theme and ideas of cybernetics in chapter six: I believe that it has much to offer in the forms developed since Granfield wrote.

<sup>22</sup> Granfield, *Ecclesial Cybernetics*, xi.

<sup>23</sup> Thung, *The Precarious Organisation*, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Thung, *The Precarious Organisation*, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Thung, *The Precarious Organisation*, 3.

<sup>26</sup> Watkins, "Organizing the People of God", 690.

Rudge's work but he frequently refers to changes within and without churches. All of them employ the ideas of systems theories of organisation with Granfield and Rudge favouring them explicitly. There are many valuable insights. I think it is also fair to suggest, however, that these works lack a clear sense of how they might actually influence practice.

Rudge's book provides a guide to the (then) principal ideas of organisation theory: he identifies five distinct approaches. These are: the traditional, the charismatic and the classical (all following Weber), human relations and the systemic. He describes each of these in turn, assesses their strengths and weaknesses and illustrates how they both are and could be applied in the Church of England. The book is most effective when it gleans insights from organisation theory that illuminate and enrich the reader's understanding of the Church of England. For example, Rudge characterises the model of leadership and authority typically found in parishes as an example of Weber's traditional model of leadership. In that model the leader occupies his or her position as part of the unquestioned, natural order of things: Rudge suggests that the leadership of parish clergy is often understood in these terms but that it is easy to confuse theological principle with models of organisation. He suggests that "in the Church the questionable point is whether the existing structure is in fact the expression of the gospel or merely the continuation of organizational life appropriate to a bygone age".<sup>27</sup> He further suggests that the traditional model is typically at work in parishes but the classical model (bureaucratic, rational) prevails at the level of the diocese. This creates a disconnect which separates dioceses and parishes and ill-prepares those selected as bishops for their roles: "bishops and archbishops whose background is generally in the traditional theory are virtually required to become administrators".<sup>28</sup> These observations seem as relevant and apt in contemporary discussion about renewal in the Church of England today, and especially in relation to the controversy around the adoption and implementation of *The Green Report*, with its focus on the development of management skills for senior clergy.<sup>29</sup> They emphasise the point also, that in fact the churches are influenced by wider trends in organisational practice: it is surely important to understand what choices are being made and to be able to distinguish between ecclesiological and organisational factors in making them.

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<sup>27</sup> Rudge, *Ministry and Management*, 113.

<sup>28</sup> Rudge, *Ministry and Management*, 120.

<sup>29</sup> Green, *Talent Management for Future Leaders*.

As I indicated above, Granfield is interested in the application of cybernetics to a project to create greater participation and democracy in the Roman Catholic Church. He includes an account of basic systems ideas, such as those of the open system, that is, the conception of the organisation in organismic terms,<sup>30</sup> existing in dynamic relationship with its environment. Cybernetics is a key concept in open systems and provides an understanding of how control may be exercised in the organisation through the flow of information (understood as feedback) within the system.<sup>31</sup> It is not clear whether Granfield believes that cybernetics implies or requires democracy or is itself a democratic form of organisation, but he certainly sees the ideas of cybernetics as offering a practical way of creating and managing the information flows on which democratic participation depends. He sees these developments as crucial to the future of the Roman Catholic Church and wants to “set up a system in which continuous self-renewal and growth can occur”.<sup>32</sup> He begins by explaining cybernetics and then describes how the Roman Catholic Church works when scrutinised through the lens thus provided. He illustrates the application of cybernetic ideas to contemporary controversies, explores the idea of democracy in the Roman Catholic church both historically and theologically and sets out proposals for the development of democratic participation in that church. I find it difficult, however, to see how this could be translated into real change in the Roman Catholic Church because of the relative rigidity of Roman Catholic Church systems and structures. This highlights the issue, central to this thesis, that churches differ in the status they afford to their order or polity, particularly whether or how those things are regarded as part of the founding gift of God. Where they are so regarded they likely to be less open to some forms of organisational change. This issue becomes more evident when comparing Granfield’s work to that of Mady Thung (who writes from within a tradition that tends not to see polity as of the essence of church). I shall pick up the question of differing conceptions of church in the next section.

Thung offers a far more detailed specification for her scheme for the ‘missionary church’ than Granfield does for his application of ecclesial cybernetics. She uses sociological ideas to suggest how the missionary church might be shaped and what it might do. She begins by developing a ‘new model’ of church based on an application of sociological models and typologies to church. She proceeds to describe how the missionary church should relate to its

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<sup>30</sup> ‘Organismic’ is a term used by organisational writers to refer to organisational ideas derived from analogies with natural systems such as the brain or the body. These will be explored in chapter five.

<sup>31</sup> I will explore these basic ideas further in chapter five.

<sup>32</sup> Granfield, *Ecclesial Cybernetics*, 213.

environment and develop its internal structure. Her account of social theory is remarkably knowledgeable and comprehensive and she offers a fuller and more critical treatment of her sources than either Rudge or Granfield. As an example she notes the critique which has been made of systems approaches that they tend to reify social systems with “the effect of neglecting the goals, decisions and motivations of individual actors”.<sup>33</sup> The alternative perspective offered is that of the “action frame of reference” which focuses on “the motivations and the perceptions of the actors” and the creation of “shared meanings”.<sup>34</sup> Bringing these two approaches together she combines both descriptive and prescriptive approaches. I mean by this that she draws on the work of theorists who are primarily concerned with understanding organisations as social phenomena and those whose work is aimed primarily at helping organisations to be more effective or successful.<sup>35</sup> Watkins notes that “Thung’s work undoubtedly represents the most detailed attempt to date to employ organization theory in ecclesiology”<sup>36</sup> and that remains the case today. Thung includes, notably, a full and enlightening treatment of key questions such as the extent to which it is possible for an organisation concerned with “ultimate aims” to set the kinds of more proximate goals associated with other organisations. In other words, she invites us to consider whether it is possible for a body concerned with, for example, the realisation of something as ‘other’ as the ‘Kingdom of God’, something so apparently beyond the control of human agency, to set the time specific goals associated with organisations with much more this-worldly concerns. Further, she considers whether such ultimate goals might be achieved, at least partly, via specific, time-related goals set by human beings. Thung concludes that these things are possible – and I will return to the question and her reasoning in chapter four.

Even here, however, I have a sense that the discussion is somewhat *theoretical*. It is far from clear how the ideas contained in these works ever could or should be operationalised. This is true even of Thung’s detailed work, though, in the era of church planting, it is easier to imagine being in a position to create a church from scratch in the way described than it might have been when the book was written. It is also the case that the field of organisation theory has grown and diversified considerably in the period since these works were written. In that rather obvious sense, they are out of date. In addition, as I indicated in chapter one, the sense

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<sup>33</sup> Thung, *The Precarious Organisation*, 23.

<sup>34</sup> Thung, *The Precarious Organisation*, 24, referencing Berger and Luckman. Today these might be seen as complementary rather than alternative approaches as in Morgan’s *Images of Organization*.

<sup>35</sup> This is a division of emphasis in the field of organisation theory. The primary interest of this thesis, as noted in chapter one, is in those theorists whose work is designed to improve organisational effectiveness.

<sup>36</sup> Watkins, “Organizing the People of God,” 706.

that churches face a crisis in the UK and Europe has intensified: according to most of the available metrics the position of the churches has worsened considerably in the period since these books were written.<sup>37</sup> In the second half of this chapter I shall consider whether more recent literature offers more up-to-date, theologically apposite and practical possibilities for the contemporary churches.

#### *Under-developed conceptions of church*

The next theme I want to highlight concerns how the three writers conceive of church and how they justify the use of organisation theory in the ecclesiological context. I will argue that the theological questions that arise from these projects are not satisfactorily resolved and an ecclesiology that would justify the characterisation of church in organisational terms is not sufficiently developed.

Thung's discussion of questions such as whether ultimate aims can be translated into specific objectives highlights the theological difficulties faced by ecclesiologists engaging with the assumptions and concepts of organisation theorists. All three works under consideration recognise and address the need to articulate a convincing theological and ecclesiological framework for such an engagement. They offer quite different approaches, at least partly, it seems, reflecting the differing ecclesiological models found in the traditions to which they belong.

Granfield's work is rooted in the movement culminating in the Second Vatican Council to increase the role of the laity in the life and government of the Roman Catholic Church in which "a number of more sociologically involved ecclesiologies emerged in the Roman Catholic tradition".<sup>38</sup> He acknowledges the ecclesiological issues that arise, recognising the special nature of that church as a sacramental body "bound to revelation as the given communication input".<sup>39</sup> Granfield does not, however, engage fully enough with theological/ecclesiological questions raised by the distinctive nature of churches (especially the Roman Catholic Church) and their activity in relation to the kind of democratic participation he envisages. For example, what authority might or might not be granted to majority opinion in the context of the Roman Catholic Church? This is not to say that he is wrong in his desire for democratisation but to say

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<sup>37</sup> See, for example: Davie, *Religion in Britain*; Woodhead, *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*.

<sup>38</sup> Watkins, "Organizing the People of God", 698.

<sup>39</sup> Watkins, "Organizing the People of God", 698.

that he does not make a clear theological case for its adoption or for his means of facilitating it. I agree with Watkins that “because he fails to give a detailed theological account of this ecclesiological perspective, he is unable to move beyond a generalised understanding of Church...we look in vain for a really critical synthesis of a detailed and complex ecclesiology with a comparably complete social-science theory”.<sup>40</sup>

With Rudge’s work it is the absence of a convincing ecclesiological argument for the treatment of the Church of England as organisation that stands out. He does not address this question head on but approaches it by considering which of the theories of organisation is most compatible with the churches’ self-understanding. He concludes that the systemic approach best reflects the core images of church found in the New Testament, particularly that of ‘the Body of Christ’. This is because the systemic approach is based on a conception of the organisation as an organism. His approach to further addressing the theological basis for his engagement with organisation theory is to discuss the theories in the light of Christian doctrines – of the church, of church and society, of ministry, of God and of Man (his terminology) and seek correlations and affinities between the theology and the organisation theories. Watkins observes: “the depth at which Rudge examines the Christian doctrine is limited...ultimately the interrelating of theological and sociological perspectives remains on a general level, while the particularities of ecclesiastical administration are dominated by organizational theories”.<sup>41</sup> That is a reasonable observation but I detect an omission that precedes it. What is lacking in Rudge’s account is a coherent ecclesiology that goes beyond the consideration of the New Testament images – and that seems a crucial omission. Further, disappointingly, for all his Church of England specific examples, he makes no attempt to offer a distinctively Anglican ecclesiological perspective.

The treatment of ecclesiological questions in Thung’s work is, typically, more comprehensive than that of either Rudge or Granfield. She, too, acknowledges the theological/ecclesiological questions of whether the churches can be seen as organisations and whether they can employ organisation theory with legitimacy. Where she offers a fuller perspective on these questions is in her recognition that the answer to those questions depends considerably on the ‘model’ or understanding of church one holds. Those who have a high

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<sup>40</sup> Watkins, "Organizing the People of God", 699.

<sup>41</sup> Watkins, "Organizing the People of God", 703.

doctrine of the presence of the Spirit as the decisive factor in the life of the church may reject what “appears like an audacious human effort to take the fate of the church into the hands of man”.<sup>42</sup> Thung concludes that the theological nature of churches must be respected but that “the distinction cannot be equated with that between an organised and an unorganised church”.<sup>43</sup> I take this to mean that a church must always, in practice, be organised, an argument that has some force. Her missionary church is, however, focused on outward-facing socially engaged activity and seems to lack the practice of worship and fellowship normally associated with the life of the church in most traditions. In Daniel Hardy’s terms, there is a notable lack of “intensity” alongside the “extensity”.<sup>44</sup> This is a conception of the church that might win support within the Dutch Reformed tradition in which Thung was located, but it seems unlikely to be acceptable within the Church of England in which worship is a central area of concern and practice.<sup>45</sup>

#### *Identifying the key ecclesiological question*

These books raise but do not resolve essential ecclesiological questions. These, to summarise, concern whether or not a church can be conceived theologically in organisational terms and employ products of the social sciences (organisation theory) with integrity. This brings us to an issue which lies at the heart of this investigation. The three works so far considered highlight the difficulty of resolving what Watkins describes as “the problem of talking about the Church as properly both social system and mystery, or Body of Christ”.<sup>46</sup> This is partly a matter of reconciling the two but also of holding them both together in a comprehensive account of church. She considers the prospect that it may only be possible to work with a detailed organisation theory and a weak ecclesiology or vice versa. She then, however, offers “a third alternative”:

It is possible that an ecclesiological language and understanding of structure could be developed, so that eventually each detail of organization theory could be matched with concrete ecclesiological (i.e. properly theological) detail based on doctrine, revelation and the faith of the church.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Thung, *The Precarious Organisation*, 32.

<sup>43</sup> Thung, *The Precarious Organisation*, 35.

<sup>44</sup> Daniel W. Hardy, *Finding the Church: The Dynamic Truth of Anglicanism* (London: SCM Press, 2001).

<sup>45</sup> Avis, *The Identity of Anglicanism*, 18.

<sup>46</sup> Watkins, "Organizing the People of God", 691.

<sup>47</sup> Watkins, "Organizing the People of God", 708.

This does appear to me to be a key concern and, represents, to a large extent, the burden of this present thesis. The reference to “in every detail”, however, invites us to consider what constitutes enough theological ‘coverage’ for the use of organisation theory to be considered adequately “theological”. Is it necessary to relate the language and concepts of theology quite so fully to the discussion of organisational life, even in the churches? It seems at least possible that one might reasonably make a theological case that theology and organisation theory have their own proper fields of competence and an accompanying proper authority whilst remaining part of a world conceived in explicitly theological terms. Thung makes a remark somewhat to that effect in a later essay.<sup>48</sup> I will address this question in chapter three in a discussion of these interdisciplinary questions. Watkins’ remarks also raise the related questions of how the task and role of theology is conceived and authority understood in different churches: her remarks appear to assume a particular conception of the role of the normative and of revelation. This might be reasonably described as, in part, an outlook arising from her Roman Catholicism. I will address these questions also in chapter three.

Particular ecclesiologies tend to reflect different resolutions of the question of the relationship between church as mystery or Body of Christ and church as social system. There are different conceptions of the nature of church at work and they are not always explicitly identified. It is clear that Thung is operating with a quite different ecclesiology from that of Granfield, although neither names them as such. Thung’s conception of church appears to be unencumbered by the notion that the institution itself is of the essence of church and she thus considers herself free to propose reforms in line with her understanding of goals appropriate to a church’s mission in the late twentieth century. Granfield, in contrast, struggles throughout with the difficulties posed for reform in a Roman Catholic environment where, even post Vatican II, the structure, offices and processes of that church are more closely identified with the ‘givenness’ of the church. The choice of model or understanding of church is crucial, therefore, for the fundamental question of whether or not ecclesiology permits us to think of church in organisational terms.

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<sup>48</sup> Mady A. Thung, “An Alternative Model for a Missionary Church,” in *Theology and Sociology: A Reader*, ed. Robin Gill (London: Cassell, 1996), 340.



*Bonhoeffer: introducing a sacramental approach*

Watkins' article refers extensively to one approach that might offer a way forward in such an endeavour: that of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.<sup>49</sup> His 1930 work, *Sanctorum Communio*,<sup>50</sup> precedes all the treatments of church as organisation considered in this chapter, but it should, nevertheless, be understood as a landmark work of significance for this study. It was the first modern ecclesiology to offer a theological treatment of church as a social reality, and attempt to draw on readings from the social science of organisation and social life.

It is notable, first, that Bonhoeffer has a high doctrine of revelation and of church as possessing a special nature but he still conceives of it having a dimension that can be approached in sociological terms. Other protestant theologians of his period (notably, Brunner and Barth) share a high doctrine of revelation, but it takes them to rather different positions than that occupied by Bonhoeffer.<sup>51</sup> Watkins points out that Barth's emphasis on the "peculiarity and mystery" of the ecclesial community makes it difficult for him to consider church in any but theological terms.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, Brunner's understanding leads him to distinguish between the invisible church as a communion of believers and the visible church as a human structure with the result that "structures may be changed along theological lines once the "true" nature of the church has been theologically described".<sup>53</sup>

Bonhoeffer also insists that the church is primarily a theological community; but it is, at the same time, a fully human one. He conceives Christianity as fundamentally concerned with persons-in-relation, with what Daniel Hardy much later calls "sociality".<sup>54</sup> He is concerned with humanity in its totality before God, in which both have agency and reality. The basic relations between God and humanity are redeemed in Christ so that "The church is God's new will and purpose for humanity". This is not an abstract or idealised concept: "God's will is always directed towards the concrete, historical human being".<sup>55</sup> Redemption is characterised as the transformation of fundamental relationships, between God and humanity and between human beings. The church is understood as a unique empirical and historical form of community

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<sup>49</sup> Watkins, "Organizing the People of God", 709.

<sup>50</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*.

<sup>51</sup> Watkins, "Organizing the People of God", 709.

<sup>52</sup> Watkins, "Organising the People of God", 694.

<sup>53</sup> Watkins, "Organizing the People of God", 709.

<sup>54</sup> Hardy, *Finding the Church*.

<sup>55</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 141.

subject to the ambiguity of all human action but existing in the context of the new relations established by God in Christ. This new community is a model for humanity, for sociality at large.

Bonhoeffer identifies two mistakes which may be made. One is *historicizing*, “overlooking the fact that the new basic-relations established by God actually are real”, meaning that God has transformed relationships between God and human beings and between human beings as a universal reality. The other mistake is *religious*, not taking seriously that “human beings are bound by history”.<sup>56</sup> Only the perspective of faith can define church finally. Nevertheless, it is a real, historical community, both Body of Christ and human community in its totality. On this basis it is proper to approach the churches sociologically, even if one must do so within a clearly theological perspective. Watkins describes this as a sacramental approach<sup>57</sup> and it is a theme which will be central to this investigation because if the churches can be understood coherently as Body of Christ *and* social system a route is opened up to retaining the special or unique identity of the churches *and* understanding them as organisations. This may allow at least some of those disposed to resist the notion of organisation applied to the churches because it undermines the ‘special’ nature of the church, to accept it as part of the churches’ holistic identity.

## **2.4 Phase 2: the 1990s to today**

In the period from 1991 until today<sup>58</sup> there has been no flowering of the ecclesiological study of church as organisation. Rudge’s hope that a “managerial theology” might become an established area of ecclesiological study has, so far, been disappointed. The works of Rudge, Thung and Granfield possess considerable scope and ambition but it would be difficult to argue that they have had a consonant impact or influence.

Since 1991 I am aware of only one book and a small number of important articles proposing, supporting or investigating the use of organisation theory from an ecclesiological perspective. This is not to say there has been no interest in management in church – on the contrary. In Britain, MODEM, a membership body for church members with a concern for

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<sup>56</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 125.

<sup>57</sup> Watkins, "Organizing the People of God", 709.

<sup>58</sup> The most recent work cited is Watkins' 2018 paper. I have not been able to find either a review of the literature or an addition to the literature more recent than that.

management, was formed and, though small, remains active.<sup>59</sup> Under its banner books on the theme have been published, but these tend to focus on the application of particular organisational ideas in ecclesial contexts, not on the fundamental relationship between ecclesiology and organisation theory.<sup>60</sup> The influence of management ideas on the churches (not least in relationship to Renewal and Reform in the Church of England) is much discussed in ecclesiastical circles, as I described in chapter one, and there has been something of a backlash against what is often described as ‘managerialism’, for reasons which I mentioned earlier in the chapter. The backlash is reflected in two books and an article which I will consider below. A disappointing feature is the paucity of engagement with organisation theory as it has developed in this period – in particular in relation to the diversification of the field that was sparked by a new and critical interest in the epistemological and other assumptions informing organisation theory.<sup>61</sup> I note also, that recent ecclesiological discussion of church as the legitimate subject of ethnographic study has not been linked to the idea of church as organisation or the use of organisation theory in ecclesial contexts. This is significant because the interdisciplinary questions involved are similar, linked by the consideration of churches in human or sociological terms, using sociological ideas and practices. These are themes that I will take up in this thesis.

In this section I will focus on two discussions (by McCann and Moore) that emphasise an ethical argument for treating church as organisation: that churches need to attend to their organisational life if they are to live up to their calling with integrity. I will then describe three works that are theologically sceptical about the use of organisation theory. I will express my reservations about their arguments but will note concerns about the notion of management as reductive and instrumentalising and accept that a response will be required in this thesis. Following this I will again explore the theme of church as sacrament. It appears firstly as part of an argument *against* the idea of treating the churches in organisational terms. Thereafter I take up Watkins’ suggestion that a sacramental conception of church might be better understood as the positive basis *for* an engagement with organisational concepts and practice.<sup>62</sup> Finally I

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<sup>59</sup> “MODEM was founded in 1993 as a successor to CORAT, the Christian Organisations Research and Advisory Trust... There was a clear need for an organisation that could help churches and church organisations become better led and managed... Since its inception, MODEM has organised meetings and residential conferences, produced four books, commented on papers for church reorganisation, and established local groups.” See [www.modemuk.org](http://www.modemuk.org).

<sup>60</sup> E.g. John Adair and John Nelson, eds., *Creative Church Leadership* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2004).

<sup>61</sup> The biggest influence on this development was Burrell and Morgan’s 1979 text which I will address in chapter five when arguing that organisation theory offers a much richer field than is often assumed by theological critics. Gibson Burrell and Gareth Morgan, *Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis* (London: Heinemann, 1979).

<sup>62</sup> Watkins, “Eclesiologia y management”.

consider the possibility that organisation theory might be linked to the concept of an ecclesiology 'from below'.

*Ethical arguments for treating the empirical church as part of an ecclesiological whole*

I am going to discuss the ethical argument found in Joseph McCann's *Church and Organization: A Sociological and Theological Enquiry*,<sup>63</sup> but first I will offer a description of the work to set the discussion in context. McCann's is the one work from this period that attempts a full-length treatment with an ambition and scope resembling the works of Rudge, Granfield and Thung. McCann sees large scale organising as a key phenomenon of contemporary life and seeks to "explore the relationship between organizational theory and church structures".<sup>64</sup> Recognising the extensive nature of the two areas of study involved, his aim is "not to discuss all these issues exhaustively, but to establish a perspective from which these many subjects may be viewed".<sup>65</sup> Building on the tentative but startling suggestion that "Christ learns organisation from Caesar" based on an exposition of the meeting between Christ and the centurion in Luke 7,<sup>66</sup> he offers a survey of the principal approaches found in organisation theory. He discusses the classical model through the lens of the guiding metaphor of the machine and the human relations model through the metaphor of the organism before describing and declaring a preference for the open systems model. This section of the book is similar in content to Rudge's summary of available approaches to organisation but also suggests some awareness of Morgan's highly influential *Images of Organization* which will be discussed at some length in chapter five.<sup>67</sup> If that is the case, however, McCann does not develop the link and there are no explicit references to Morgan in the book. Where he certainly extends Rudge's work is in his exploration and integration of organisational and ecclesial typologies: this forms the greater part of the work. Using an impressive array of sources, McCann synthesises a model of "Eight regimes and four structures" within which churches can be located according to differing understandings of their perceived situation, membership and task.<sup>68</sup> He also adopts a more critical approach to his material than Rudge or Granfield, exemplified in his discussion of the fundamental dilemmas inherent in institutionalisation, which

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<sup>63</sup> McCann, *Church and Organization*.

<sup>64</sup> McCann, *Church and Organization*, 20.

<sup>65</sup> McCann, *Church and Organization*, 20.

<sup>66</sup> McCann, *Church and Organization*, 20.

<sup>67</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*.

<sup>68</sup> McCann, *Church and Organization*, 120.

he describes as perhaps inherently compromising for faith.<sup>69</sup> In his discussion of church growth he points out that increasing the size of the organisation is not in itself usually an aim of the organisation.<sup>70</sup> Growth is something that serves a larger purpose. Despite the possible influence of Morgan's work he does not engage with the development of post-modern and interpretive perspectives that is such a feature of this period of organisation theory.<sup>71</sup> For all the range and skill demonstrated, as with the works from phase one, we are left wondering where this leads us, how it helps in practice.

According to McCann, the book is primarily about creating awareness: "thus equipped [readers] will be in a position to speculate more widely about the theology of organization".<sup>72</sup> Its most interesting feature from my perspective is his introduction of an ethical dimension to the case for bringing organisation theory into the churches. His starting point is the significant suggestion that many of the Roman Catholic Church's internal difficulties can be traced to social or organisational factors. He believes the result of the evident failures of that church, the patent contradiction between the church's principles and the empirical reality, to be the existence of a kind of "organisational guilt".<sup>73</sup> This is a theme also explored in Nicholas Healy's writing, which I will refer to substantially, especially in chapter four, when developing an ecclesiology which allows church to be understood as organisation.<sup>74</sup> McCann (like Healy, a few years' later) seeks an ecclesiological understanding which embraces the empirical church, partly in order to acknowledge and respond to the Roman Catholic Church's empirical fallibility. In McCann's case this allows him to employ organisation theory as a means, in part, of addressing that church's institutional failures. The sinfulness that is found within the Roman Catholic Church,<sup>75</sup> Healy argues, is made worse by an ecclesiological idealism which leads or contributes to a failure to take the actual life of the empirical church sufficiently seriously.<sup>76</sup> It seems likely that better organisational practice, better management, is required to prevent further failures. This is, in fact, what is happening and not only in the Roman Catholic Church. In the UK, in Anglican and Roman Catholic dioceses, safeguarding policies and procedures derived from secular, statutory sources have been adopted. Thus, a spiritual problem (sin) which has negative

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<sup>69</sup> McCann, *Church and Organization*, 58.

<sup>70</sup> McCann, *Church and Organization*, 86.

<sup>71</sup> The first edition of Morgan's *Images of Organization* to which I will refer extensively later, was published in 1986.

<sup>72</sup> McCann, *Church and Organization*, 31.

<sup>73</sup> McCann, *Church and Organization*, 25.

<sup>74</sup> Notably Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*.

<sup>75</sup> I will take up this theme in chapter four: I am aware that there is debate about whether the church as a body can be considered sinful or whether only individual Christians may be so described.

<sup>76</sup> Healy, *Church, World and Christian Life*, 9, 37.

empirical consequences must be addressed, in part at least, it seems, by organisational measures. This is a particular but urgent example of why it is important for the churches to develop a theology which makes sense of both the specifically religious and organisational dimensions of its life.

The ethical argument derived from McCann's work focuses on correcting the churches' evident and public failures. Geoff Moore is more broadly concerned with the question of virtue and the congruence of the churches' core (spiritual) practices with their ecclesiology and management. Moore is a rarity, as a churchman who is also an expert on organisations – in particular, on organisational ethics. His 2012 paper attempts a new synthesis.<sup>77</sup> Building on Mannion's proposal for a virtue ecclesiology<sup>78</sup> and on his own work developing a virtue-based form of organisation theory, he proposes an organisational application of the ideas of MacIntyre to the churches, which are conceived as existing as both practice and institution. Moore spells out MacIntyre's understanding of practices and of the relation of practice to institution. Practices are inherently social, focused on "internal goods". They exist in tension with institutions:

They form a single causal order; practices cannot survive without being institutionalised; and yet practices are always vulnerable to the acquisitiveness and competitiveness of the institution – and similarly the essential association *and* tension between internal and external goods, and that gives organisational life a central dilemma.<sup>79</sup>

Here is an echo of the Weberian idea, found also in McCann, that institutionalisation is inherently compromising. Perhaps the suggestion is more that it is unavoidable but contains risks that have to be managed. This seems, historically speaking, indisputable, in that the churches have been guilty of many organisational failures yet inevitably tend towards institutional form.

Moore explores the concepts of practice and institution as a way of holding together an understanding of church as both community of faith and organisation. He is concerned that defining church in terms of its practice alone places an undue emphasis on the local church and makes little sense of larger national or denominational structures. Drawing on Harris'

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<sup>77</sup> Moore, "Churches as Organisations".

<sup>78</sup> Gerard Mannion, *Ecclesiology and Postmodernity: Questions for the Church in our Time* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007).

<sup>79</sup> Moore, "Churches as Organisations", 50-51.

*Organising God's Work*<sup>80</sup> and Berry's account of control and accountability in the Church of England<sup>81</sup> he demonstrates the "significant presence of the institution in the life of the church", and upholds the value of church conceived as organisation as well as community of practice:

Without the institution, life may be simpler, but describing the practices of the church does not describe the church in all its fulness. An organisation theory-informed virtue ecclesiology points to the need for both elements.<sup>82</sup>

In his final section he begins to explore what this means in practice. Having noted the ways in which institutions frequently exercise power without consent, he suggests that churches may be organisations in which practice and institution should be uniquely in harmony. Those in the higher offices of a church are expected to remain in full engagement with the practices of that church rather than operate only in a 'management' capacity. Though this undoubtedly distinguishes churches from many other organisations this is, however, no guarantee of harmony between institution and practice: "that this is often not the case...is a weakness of the church that a MacIntyre-informed organisational analysis exposes".<sup>83</sup> This is, to my mind, an interesting and compelling way of suggesting that churches, though possessing an organisational structure entrusting those in management roles with particular responsibilities, are, nevertheless, bodies that should be operated on the principle that all its members share a common life and common cause. To put it more theologically, its members all belong to a royal priesthood.<sup>84</sup> As we saw in chapter one R&R has been criticised as a 'managerial' imposition by the national Church of England on its parishes. If this is the case, it does not seem an appropriate expression of church as described by Moore. I shall set out my investigation of R&R later, but Moore's work provides one indication that organisational thinking need not take us in the controlling direction suggested by terms like 'managerialism'.

#### *Modernism and instrumental reason*

This thought brings me to works which have criticised the use of management concepts in the churches. Scepticism about the use of management ideas and practices in the churches has been, as I suggested, a development of this second phase in the scheme I am using to

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<sup>80</sup> Margaret Harris, *Organizing God's Work: Challenges for Churches and Synagogues* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1998).

<sup>81</sup> Anthony J. Berry, "Accountability and Control in a Cat's Cradle," *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal* 18, no. 2 (Mar 1, 2005), 255.

<sup>82</sup> Moore, "Churches as Organisations," 60.

<sup>83</sup> Moore, "Churches as Organisations," 61.

<sup>84</sup> 1 Peter 2.9

review the relevant literature in this chapter. Two of the three works I will consider make their objection on the basis that, *contra* Moore, management is a concept inevitably associated with instrumentality and control. Before I come to the works that focus on this critique, however, I turn to *The Faith of the Managers* by Stephen Pattison, published in 1997, which provided an influential critique of management from a theological perspective.<sup>85</sup> His concern was that management, especially as expressed in popular ideas influencing the conduct of organisational life, can take on the character of a kind of quasi-religious faith. This faith he argues, is unfounded, poorly evidenced and dependent on illusory notions about the world. He gives extensive consideration to the ideas and practices of leadership which have been influential in the world and in the churches. He questions whether, however, the concept of leadership has any basis in Christian thought or practice. Pattison sees that concept as “elusive”, a “chimera” and “another part of the myth and faith world that surrounds contemporary management”.<sup>86</sup> Pattison is not really anti-management, however: he wants to see management ideas addressed with much greater rigour, in the churches and in the world of organisations. It is my intention that this thesis should do exactly that for the Church of England, by indicating the range of credible sources of organisational insight and engaging directly with some examples.

Others are more wholly negative. Milbank’s essay entitled “Stale Expressions: the Management-Shaped Church” is primarily a discussion of the phenomenon of ‘Fresh Expressions’ of church as promoted by the Church of England.<sup>87</sup> It asserts the primacy of the parish with its mixed church community over notions of church which are composed of networks and interest groups. This Milbank bases on a “Catholic” conception of the church as against that of modern “mass Protestantism”. The latter is characterised as overly indebted to, as colluding with, a conception of Christianity reduced to a narrowly defined understanding of mission as evangelism, hopelessly entangled with capitalistic ideas and practice – church reduced to a “trade in souls”.<sup>88</sup> Management is characterised as the primary means by which this capitalist church organises itself, at the expense of the truly spiritual, the focus on the person, on the cure of souls. It is, more or less, irredeemable. Milbank concludes:

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<sup>85</sup> Stephen Pattison, *The Faith of the Managers: When Management Becomes Religion*, 1. publ. ed. (London: Cassell, 1997).

<sup>86</sup> Pattison, *The Faith of the Managers*, 32.

<sup>87</sup> John Milbank, “Stale Expressions: The Management-Shaped Church,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 21, no. 1 (2008), 117-128.

<sup>88</sup> Milbank, “Stale Expressions”, 120-121.



The issue here is not the 'ethical management' of ecclesiastical life. It is rather one of sustaining a true Catholic *ethos* against the barbarism of instrumentalizing reason. 'Management' cannot be ethicized, since the term denotes the meaningless but efficient manipulations which are all that is left to do with things once they have been de-sacramentalized.<sup>89</sup>

Milbank's argument constitutes a vigorous critique of trends in the contemporary Church of England and, probably, even more, of Renewal and Reform given that programme's affinity with and relation to projects that are directly criticised, such as 'Fresh Expressions'. Here, however, I wish to focus on the damning verdict on the nature of management, the assertion of its association with and dependence upon the *mores* of capitalism and to the plea for a more sacramental ecclesial practice. A related critique is advanced at far greater length in Shakespeare's *Being the Body of Christ in the Age of Management*.<sup>90</sup> Shakespeare's argument is that management theory depends on an account of the social body that in turn "displays an account of the human body that fits within the general empirical theories of materialism or *physicalism*" that Shakespeare believes to be a major and negative feature of the last 400 years. This outlook privileges "the managerial practices of efficiency, calculability, predictability and control".<sup>91</sup> This is contrasted with a "Christian" account of what it means to be a body, drawn from a reading of Aquinas:

Accounts of the church, therefore, that adopt the logic of managerialism reflect a conceptual problem in attending to the interconnection of human bodily life, human purposefulness, and the promise of divine happiness and joy. Whereas a vision like that of Aquinas promises a fully human account of life with God, all that a managerial-inspired ecclesiology can sustain is a dim picture of a machine-like body that requires the manipulation by techniques for it to appear to be alive.<sup>92</sup>

It is notable that, like Milbank, Shakespeare contrasts this mechanical view with a "catholic" understanding of church, insofar, at any rate, as Shakespeare works from a sacramental conception, that is, one that sees church as a community characterised by the "clothing of material things with sacred meaning".<sup>93</sup> Shakespeare has a conception of church that strongly emphasises a status as the community of those who, by the agency of God enjoy a spiritual or theological status "in Christ" expressed in a sacramental form.<sup>94</sup> Later I will consider

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<sup>89</sup> Milbank, "Stale Expressions", 128.

<sup>90</sup> Lyndon Shakespeare, *Being the Body of Christ in the Age of Management* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016).

<sup>91</sup> Shakespeare, *Being the Body of Christ*, 5.

<sup>92</sup> Shakespeare, *Being the Body of Christ*, 180.

<sup>93</sup> Shakespeare, *Being the Body of Christ*, 2.

<sup>94</sup> Shakespeare, *Being the Body of Christ*, 2.

the suggestion that arguments starting from a similar understanding of church might lead to a quite different conclusion but now I note that these objections assume quite a lot about what management is. As Watkins observes, many of the features of management theory most regretted by Milbank are no longer advocated by a great many theorists.<sup>95</sup> Neither Milbank nor Shakespeare, however, discuss management with reference to any management thinkers or organisation theorists. In fact Shakespeare offers what is really more accurately characterised as a critique of the post-enlightenment project, of modernism as such, rather than of management theory and practice. It might be argued that the nature of contemporary management thinking is made evident in the observation of practice (Milbank does offer some anecdotal evidence of this kind) and it would be idle to deny that everyday management is not sometimes, frequently perhaps, characterised by the unreflective use of crude, stereotypical management tropes. Nevertheless, both Shakespeare and Milbank fail to do justice to the range of thinking found in contemporary organisation theory. In particular, neither seems aware of the variety of approaches and underpinning assumptions which became available towards the end of the twentieth century. I shall discuss this range of approaches in chapter five. Now I note that both appear to focus their critique on the functionalist, positivistic theories of the early and middle twentieth century, as if that were the character of the whole field of organisation theory.<sup>96</sup>

Eve Poole counters the arguments deployed by Milbank and Shakespeare by contrasting 'A' and 'B' theories of management, that is theories based on "hard" or "soft", technical or people-based concepts of management.<sup>97</sup> The latter (drawn from the human relations school) are, she suggests, more compatible with ecclesiological and theological understandings of the person and community. This is a useful corrective but not entirely adequate I suggest. I shall argue in chapter five that there is useful and useable material to be found in all the main areas of organisational theorising. This includes those ideas associated with classical theory, emphasising control and efficiency, which appear to be Shakespeare and Milbank's primary target. I will point out that there are important threads in organisation theory (especially post 1980) that are much more aware of the dark, oppressive side of organisations, far more cautious about notions of control, and more critical of the capitalistic assumptions with which

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<sup>95</sup> Watkins, "Eclesiologia y management", 9-10.

<sup>96</sup> This characterisation of earlier management theory is derived from is derived from the scheme found in Burrell, *Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis*.

<sup>97</sup> Eve Poole, "Baptizing Management," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 21, no. 1 (Apr, 2008), 83-95.

organisation theory has, it must be admitted, often been associated.<sup>98</sup> I do not, however, deny the imperative to offer a theological account of the interdisciplinary issues, one that addresses arguments raised by Milbank and Shakespeare and allows us, if possible, to make use of secular sources with integrity. I shall argue that not only does theology normally make use of such human sources but that it must do so and base the argument on an entirely orthodox trinitarianism. Meanwhile I note that an engagement with contemporary management practice is sometimes both a practical and moral necessity, as the ethical discussion above makes clear.

### *Ecclesiology from below*

I will now indicate some ecclesiological themes which offer signposts for my investigation. Firstly, the idea of 'ecclesiology from below'. Moore's article, discussed above, offers a substantial contribution to the ecclesiological study of church as organisation. As well as engaging with a specific area of organisation theory he includes theological consideration of his organisational themes. The ecclesiological frame within which he sets his exposition arises from a short account of Mannion's ideas. Moore contrasts ecclesiologies "from above" with those "from below". From above the church is given, grounded by God in Christ, animated by the Holy Spirit. It is pre-critical in that "it will not admit a *critical* historical account of the church's origins, but rather tends towards an attempt to affirm and uphold an a-critical *doctrinal* account."<sup>99</sup> In other words, according to Mannion, a distinctive feature of ecclesiology from above is not so much that it disregards the reality of the churches' life in history as that it does not want the understanding of church to be shaped or influenced by critical historical accounts of the churches. Ecclesiology from below, in contrast, takes account of social forces and conceives of the church as existential and historical – but still "theological, such that it cannot be reduced to conclusions that can be generated by history and sociology alone".<sup>100</sup> Moore comments that this distinction can be over-emphasised: "For a faith focused on God's self-revelation through historical particularities and contingencies, neither is an exclusive option".<sup>101</sup> Nevertheless, Moore brings MacIntyre's ideas to the discussions of church to enrich ecclesiology principally from below. In doing so he makes a rare connection between an

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<sup>98</sup> The dark side is referenced for example, in the image of the organisation as a "psychic prison". The *lack* of control in management is a theme of many contemporary theories, but notably of later systems theory and complexity theory – see Gareth Morgan, *Images of Organization*. On capitalism, one must also acknowledge that a great deal of organisation theory has been developed in the context of supporting the success of business corporations and in the milieu of business schools.

<sup>99</sup> Moore, "Churches as Organisations", 46, quoting Mannion.

<sup>100</sup> Moore, "Churches as Organisations", 46, again quoting Mannion.

<sup>101</sup> Moore, "Churches as Organisations", 47.

important contemporary ecclesiological perspective and organisation theory. The notion of ecclesiology 'from below' is closely aligned to my concerns and I will develop it and associated ideas in chapter four (when I address ecclesiological perspectives on the church directly) drawing on the work of Haight in particular.<sup>102</sup>

#### *Church in sacramental terms*

The second ecclesiological signpost involves returning to the concept of church as sacrament. In her article of 2018, and addressing the arguments of Milbank and Shakespeare, Watkins observes:

What is striking, from a Roman Catholic theological perspective, is that for these writers it is that distinctively Catholic account of the church as 'sacramental' in its organisational embodiment which militates against a constructive interdisciplinary relationship between ecclesiology and management sciences...in contrast to my own instincts that it is precisely such a sacramental ecclesiology which enables such interdisciplinarity.<sup>103</sup>

To understand the reasoning behind this assertion it is helpful to go back to Watkins' 1993 article where she addresses the question of church as a "special case" directly.<sup>104</sup> She sets out a range of ecclesiological approaches to understanding church as both a theological and empirical phenomenon. To the discussion of the ideas of Brunner and Bonhoeffer found in her 1991 article she adds those of Congar, Barth and Rahner. In Watkins' account Congar understands the 'otherness' of the Roman Catholic Church to be "such that its institutions transcend sociological analysis".<sup>105</sup> This is because the structure of that church comes not from history, but directly from Christ and the apostles: "it represents a mystery given to her from above and ontologically anterior to the existence of a community".<sup>106</sup> Again, in Watkins' account, Barth is also concerned with the rootedness of church in divine revelation, but not, like Congar, in the form of a "hierarchical tradition" but in the "word of revelation, which calls the community into being".<sup>107</sup> Barth's understanding of the fallen nature of human beings and of creation also militates against the use of the social sciences in ecclesiology. "For those, like Congar and Barth, who reject sociological analysis in ecclesiology on the grounds of the

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<sup>102</sup> Haight, *Christian Community in History* 1, 4ff.

<sup>103</sup> Watkins, "Eclesiologia y management", 6.

<sup>104</sup> Watkins, "The Church as a 'Special' Case".

<sup>105</sup> Watkins, "The Church as a 'Special' Case", 371. She refers to Yves M. J. Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, Eng. trans, and expanded ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 1964).

<sup>106</sup> Watkins, "The Church as a 'Special' Case", 372, quoting Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, 51, 171-172.

<sup>107</sup> Watkins, "The Church as a 'Special' Case", 372. Watkins refers to Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clarke, 1936), 4/36.751.

specialness of the Church, the central conviction is that...the Church, as such, precedes the human community and transcends it."<sup>108</sup> Rahner, on the other hand, according to Watkins, sees church as sacrament:

Within this tradition the institutional structures of the Church...are themselves in some way divinely instituted and bear the promise of the Spirit. It is a tradition which emphasises the identity of the Church with the Body of Christ, and tends to a far-ranging use of the language of incarnation. Typically it is a tradition which can assert 'the empirical church is the Body of Christ'.<sup>109</sup>

Rahner's ecclesiology emphasises that the specialness of church is found in everyday church life in a way that both permits and limits the role of organisation theory: "it is because the institution is sacramental that its importance warrants detailed analysis and constant renewal; but it is also precisely its sacramental nature which prevents this analysis being the proper task of managerial sciences alone."<sup>110</sup>

The particular contribution of the notion of sacrament is the conception that the gift of God, the Body of Christ, is actualised and experienced in materials and structures that belong to or arise from the created world. We still need to consider what exactly this means, however. There is still a question (at least from an Anglican point of view) about the nature of the empirical church, about the sense in which it is "divinely instituted". Does it mean that a church's form, its orders of ministry, its organisational fundamentals, are given and therefore, fixed? Or can the form of a church vary according to need, context and the flux of history? In practice most churches probably sit somewhere between these two extremes and are characterised by (likely different) limits to both change and continuity. Such considerations notwithstanding, the conception of church in sacramental terms offers a crucial standpoint for my purpose for reasons I discussed earlier and I will give it much fuller attention when considering ecclesiological perspectives in chapter four.

Watkins' 2018 article suggests that there are theological as well as ecclesiological questions which need to be addressed if organisation theory is to be employed in an integrated

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<sup>108</sup> Watkins, "The Church as a 'Special' Case", 372. Watkins refers to two works by Rahner: Karl Rahner, *The Spirit in the Church*, (London: Burns and Oates, 1979); Karl Rahner, *Meditations on Freedom and the Spirit*, (London: Burns and Oates, 1977).

<sup>109</sup> Watkins, "The Church as a 'Special' Case", 376. The quotation at the end of this passage is from Bonhoeffer: Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 145.

<sup>110</sup> Watkins, "The Church as a 'Special' Case", 377.

and appropriate way.<sup>111</sup> A response is required to three “key tenets of management – control, efficiency and goal achievement.”<sup>112</sup> These responses are required in terms of the doctrine of the person, pneumatology and eschatology. Under the first heading Watkins considers the nature of ecclesial belonging or membership. “Ecclesial managerial practices” respond to decline by emphasising the benefits of belonging and community and ‘market’ church on this basis. “But our ecclesiology is more inclined to speak of church belonging in terms of *communion....and participation in Christ’s Body* through baptism”.<sup>113</sup> Pneumatology raises the questions of power and how and by whom it is exercised. Power belongs to God and should, in the churches, be received and practised as a gift of the Spirit. This directly contradicts management practice when conceived purely as a matter of human agency and control. Management is also normally interested in purpose, in objectives and goals. This also raises problems for churches: “The first concerns the proper theological sense of the ‘goal’ or *telos* of church as *eschatological*: it is only in the eschaton that the pilgrim church will fulfil its identity and purpose.”<sup>114</sup> How can such an ultimate goal be related to proximate goals and who has the ability or right to make such determinations? As we saw, Thung does address this question, but it remains a significant issue. Watkins asks questions which require a serious response and I will keep these in mind, in chapter four when considering ecclesiological perspectives on the church and in chapter five when considering aspects of organisation theory as a partner for ecclesiology.

## 2.5 Conclusion

The literature on church as organisation considered from an ecclesiological perspective, is, I reiterate, formed of a relatively small group of mostly disconnected works in which there is a notable lack of any sense of an organised and developing discourse. Nevertheless, some important arguments and approaches emerge. These include a tantalising (though, perhaps, inconclusive) sense of the potential of organisation theory for the churches. The ethical considerations I have highlighted emphasise the importance of a church engaging with its

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<sup>111</sup> Watkins, “Eclesiologia y management”, 14.

<sup>112</sup> Watkins, “Eclesiologia y management”, 8. The notions of control and efficiency seem to be problematic even for advocates of engagement with organisation theory, but I note that there are many areas of church life where they might be/are received with gratitude, not least in such matters as safeguarding, or more prosaically, in the maintenance of ministerial residences. I will return to this theme in chapter five.

<sup>113</sup> Watkins, “Eclesiologia y management”, 14.

<sup>114</sup> Watkins, “Eclesiologia y management”, 16.

organisational dimension if it is to live up to its vocation in its empirical life. The rejection of management characterised as instrumentalising reason poses a serious challenge. The notion of an ecclesiology from below (emphasising the role of historical and sociological insight for ecclesiology) and of the church in sacramental terms (emphasising that the gift of God is given in and through the things of this world) offer promising avenues of inquiry in considering the basic question of whether it is ecclesiologicaly permissible to see a church as an organisation. All these issues will be addressed in the chapters that follow. There is one crucial distinction which I will make now for the sake of clarity later. I refer to that between the idea that a church *is* a sacrament, as the eucharist is a sacrament, and the idea that it is sacramental, meaning *like* a sacrament. I will be arguing for the latter in this thesis.

For the specific purposes of this project, concerned as it is with the adaptivity of the Church of England, in a period of what is frequently characterised as dramatic decline, in the context of a specific programme of reform, there are some other observations I wish to note. Firstly, although many of the works considered characterise the world as changing, note the difficulties being faced by the churches and some offer proposals for reform (with mixed results) none address the question of organisational adaptivity *as such* directly. This investigation will do so explicitly and will offer a model for addressing this aspect of the life of the church drawing on organisational and theological perspectives (to be developed in chapter six). Secondly, although reference is made to a number of concrete situations, the exploration of the application of organisation theory is not accompanied by empirical research. This project, in contrast, will, carry out empirical research into the Church of England using an integrated, interdisciplinary, theological-organisational approach. Thirdly, there is no fully convincing discussion in the literature considered in this chapter of the issues in a distinctly Anglican ecclesiological context. Rudge's work provides a positive example but is disappointing in its failure to offer a specifically Anglican ecclesiology. Milbank provides a negative account from a rather particular Anglican perspective. Moore's work offers an encouraging account of the theme within an Anglican frame of reference but his references to Mannion (a Roman Catholic theologian) are not linked to a specifically Anglican ecclesiology. I will attempt to address this omission.

A considerable agenda has been suggested for the rest of this thesis and will be pursued in the chapters that follow. Specifically, in chapter four, I will address the ecclesiological question of whether the Church of England church may be seen as an organisation and, in

chapter five, the question of the value and admissibility of organisation theory. These chapters will set the scene for the development of an integrated ecclesiological-organisational approach to the empirical research into Renewal and Reform which is a key focus of this investigation and which will be the concern of succeeding chapters. First, I proceed, in chapter three, to a discussion of the interdisciplinary and methodological issues inherent in my project.



## Chapter 3. Interdisciplinarity and methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

This is a research project that raises particular interdisciplinary and methodological issues. It investigates the rationale of the Church of England's Renewal and Reform (R&R) programme by viewing that church from perspectives derived from organisation theory. This makes it interdisciplinary in two ways. Firstly, it posits a relationship between ecclesiology and organisation theory. Secondly, because it is an investigation of a church's practice it is understood to be a work of practical theology, and that discipline frequently employs methods derived from the social sciences, in this case, the use of qualitative research methods. Furthermore, the project is also undertaken from a confessional position, that is, from a faith commitment and an understanding of the nature of reality rooted in theological commitments and concepts. It is necessary, therefore, to make sense of the relationships between these differing disciplines and perspectives as it is far from obvious that they can be combined with integrity. This is because theology concerns God and makes claims about the nature of reality which could be seen as incompatible with the perspectives and assumptions typically employed within the social sciences. I propose, therefore, in this chapter, to explore the way I understand these interdisciplinary relationships and to relate these to the project's methodology.

I will note here that my investigation raises some particular interdisciplinary questions which I will not address in this chapter but in those that follow. I will address the specifically ecclesiological questions (what kind of thing is the church? Can we describe it as an organisation?) in chapter four. Though the question of the theological legitimacy of employing organisation theory in an ecclesial context is closely related to the interdisciplinary questions discussed in this chapter there are specific queries about the legitimacy of employing organisation theory in the Church of England. These will be taken up in chapter five.

In this chapter I will develop a theological argument for a positive interdisciplinary relationship between theology and the social sciences. My first step will be to set out my understanding of theology: this emphasises the Trinity and is based on a concept of revelation, in which God makes himself known but in a way that requires a process of interpretation by human agents whose capacity has creaturely limitations, even though they are assisted by the

Holy Spirit. I will then argue for the value of critical realism as a philosophical complement and reinforcement to my theological position. It offers a contemporary theory of knowledge that allows me to maintain a confidence in the reality of God and our knowledge of God, whilst acknowledging also the subjectivity which places limits on our knowledge and recognises a degree of openness and provisionality in our understanding of reality.

This prepares the way for a discussion of interdisciplinarity which argues that theology is shaped explicitly by a narrative about God and God's interactions with human beings. From this narrative is derived a fundamental understanding of reality, one which is explicitly dependent on a concept of faith. This sets theology apart from other disciplines. Specifically, and, crucially, the life and death of Jesus Christ is understood as revealing the "distinctive nature and character of God".<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the nature of God as mystery and of human beings as limited, situated and sinful means that the process of revelation is never complete, or incontestable or comprehensive.<sup>2</sup> Further, the narrative of the acts of God in history through which God reveals Godself, does not, in itself, provide answers to a range of questions theologians have about reality. Theologians are, and always have been, dependent on partnership with other disciplines in exploring and developing their understanding of the world.<sup>3</sup> This is possible because other disciplines, though they may typically operate within a different conception of the nature of reality and are not dependent on larger narratives linked to a concept of revelation,<sup>4</sup> they are developed in a world created by God, redeemed by God and sustained by God, that is, held within the trinitarian embrace.<sup>5</sup>

I turn then to a consideration of practical theology and the methodology that shapes this project, and will describe how my theological understanding leads me to adopt critically an approach (Swinton and Mowat's concept of "hospitality") which emphasises the thoroughly theologically conditioned nature of the investigation.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 6th ed. (New York and Oxford: Wiley, 2016), 301.

<sup>2</sup> A. Wright, *Christianity and Critical Realism*, 88-89.

<sup>3</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 41.

<sup>4</sup> Thung, "An Alternative Model for a Missionary Church," 341.

<sup>5</sup> Fiddes, "Ecclesiology and Ethnography".

<sup>6</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology*, 91.

### 3.2 Theological position

In this section will I set out 'where I am coming from' theologically. I am going quite a way 'back' to first theological principles. In doing so my purpose is not to defend my position, nor to suggest it is original or remarkable, but to elucidate it so as to make sense of the arguments I make concerning interdisciplinarity and methodology later in the chapter. I also understand this as theological reflexivity, that is, part of the process through which I manage my role in this project as a situated researcher. I start with Anselm's famous remark that theology is "faith seeking understanding" as a succinct statement of a perspective I share and which has important implications.<sup>7</sup> These are, firstly, that theology is undertaken from a perspective of faith commitment and, secondly, that theology is concerned with the further exploration and understanding of what faith implies. In other words, theology is concerned with the effort to further work out and understand something to which one already has a commitment, namely, the Christian faith.<sup>8</sup>

At the centre of my theological understanding is a concept of revelation. We know about God because God reveals Godself, primarily in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. These events, though unique and definitive, did not take place in a vacuum. They took place within a tradition of faith and practice (that of the Jews) and, although they offer a radical reassessment of much of that tradition, they also assume it. Further, at the centre of Christ's teaching is the concept of the 'kingdom of God', understood both as being made present in Christ but also as an eschatological hope. In my understanding, Christian theology arises from reflection upon these events, and the faith tradition in which they took place, with the Christ event as the central factor. Those reflections are developed into theological statements which may then be held confidently to constitute true accounts of God and the world. Those which are judged to be normative may be formally adopted as doctrine by churches. The primary theological conception to emerge from this process concerns the nature of God, encapsulated in the

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<sup>7</sup> Anselm of Canterbury c.1053-1109. His slogan continues to be quoted frequently, often, though not exclusively, in the context of discussions of practical theology – see, for example, Clare Watkins, Deborah Bhatti, Helen Cameron, Catherine Duce, and James Sweeney. "Practical Ecclesiology: What Counts as Theology in Studying the Church?" in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, edited by Ward, Pete. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 170; Pete Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology: Mission, Ministry, and the Life of the Church*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 28.

<sup>8</sup> The term theology is, of course, sometimes used today to describe the beliefs of other faiths but it is the Christian specific sense employed here that constitutes the predominant usage. It is distinguished from "religious studies" which adopts a less committed perspective and is interested in religions as phenomena.

doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>9</sup> Theological reflection upon revelation involves an iterative process of interpretation of the key events which Christians understand to be guided by God, by the Holy Spirit. It can be described as what Andrew Wright calls “retroduction”: Christian thinkers seek the best possible explanation of what they and their forebears have witnessed and experienced and refine it through a process of hypothesis and critical development.<sup>10</sup>

What I have described so far sounds, but is not, of course, straightforward. It is a process that involves acts of interpretation. The ‘data’ can be and are seen, in many different ways.<sup>11</sup> The churches reflect upon these events, make sense of them, exercising imagination and discernment in doing so. We know that there is broad agreement on some matters – according to Nicholas Healy, there is, for example, concerning the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>12</sup> There are, however, also many differences of interpretation and a variety of theological schemes are held, some normatively, by churches, groups and individuals.

Further, this is a process that continues in history. In chapter four I shall argue that, in Healy’s terms, derived from the Second Vatican Council, the pilgrim church responds to the exigencies of history and hears the voice of God and develops its understanding as it goes.<sup>13</sup> In that sense, revelation is not a static, one-off event, but a process. In the terms of the Faith and Order Commission’s report on leadership, which will also be discussed in later chapters, the Church of England is always engaged in a process of “faithful improvisation” as it re-evaluates the tradition in the light of circumstances and what God is believed to be saying in the present.<sup>14</sup> N.T. Wright offers us a useful way of thinking about our location in history and the relationship between what is given and what is discovered. He starts by asking whether the revelation is in the events, or in the story (the events told, primarily in scripture) which recount and interpret them.<sup>15</sup> By building a case for the importance of the actual history and the texts as both theology and literature interacting together, he makes an argument for seeing the revelatory hand of God in the process as a whole. On this understanding revelation is an event characterised by the participation of God with human beings in the drama of history and embodied existence. In this drama certain events are decisive, but God is always active and

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<sup>9</sup> McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 301-303; A. Wright, *Christianity and Critical Realism*, 74-75

<sup>10</sup> A. Wright, *Christianity and Critical Realism*.

<sup>11</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 40

<sup>12</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 33.

<sup>13</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*.

<sup>14</sup> Alexander, *Faithful Improvisation?*.

<sup>15</sup> N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 1. publ. in Great Britain 1992, [Nachdr.] ed., Vol. 1 (London: SPCK, 2002), 16ff.

always revealing his truth. N.T. Wright suggests that we imagine that the history of the world is a five act Shakespeare play, a larger story, which both tells us about ourselves and our place in the world and includes us in the narrative. Act 1 is the creation, act 2 the fall, act 3 the story of Israel, act 4 Jesus and act 5 the later New Testament events, text and the subsequent history of the church and the world, including the period in which we live. We live, then, in the fifth act and have to improvise the drama on the basis of what has gone before in acts 1-4, so that we can develop the story with integrity and so that it arrives at its proper ending (the eschaton). By being deeply grounded in an understanding of the first four acts and knowing enough about the ending we are able to work out our parts. On this basis we combine revelation and confidence about a genuine knowledge of God with a refusal to see religious authorities as providing a set of timeless truths or a manual for every situation.<sup>16</sup> A similar perspective emerges in Healy's account of the church's life in the world as participation in the "theodrama", a concept he borrows from Von Balthasar.<sup>17</sup> I shall return to his account of the theodrama in chapter four. In that chapter my understanding of the Christian life as dependent on the gift of God, yet only known in embodied, situated, culturally specific form in history will underpin the discussion of the question of whether a church may be characterised, from a theological perspective, as an organisation.

### **3.3 Theology and critical realism**

In this section I want to add to the concept of theology as founded upon a narrative formed of God's actions in history and developed by a continuing process of experience and reflection in history under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. My argument is that this process gives us genuine knowledge of God, though I am not claiming it is certain or complete. This is because the unfolding process of revelation relies significantly on human interpretation and because there are specifically theological reasons for being cautious about the extent and reliability of what we can know about God. Our capacity for such knowledge is made limited by the nature of God (beyond comprehension) and by the nature of human beings (characterised both by finitude and sin).<sup>18</sup> I am aware that the claim to have reliable knowledge is also

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<sup>16</sup> N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 140ff.

<sup>17</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 53.

<sup>18</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 68.

vulnerable to a philosophical critique in which epistemological questions come to the fore. I will acknowledge the challenges posed from this perspective and argue that critical realism provides a helpful and credible way of responding to them and does so in a way that augments my more specifically theological argument. This will create the basis for a discussion of the interdisciplinary issues inherent in my project which will follow. First, however, I want to set the scene by describing why contemporary thinking is problematic for the view I have set out so far.

Since the enlightenment, what was understood to be the Christian understanding of reality, based on revelation and the claim that this constitutes genuine knowledge of God, has been challenged. Initially this challenge was associated with the rise of science (understood as the rational, objective exploration of the physical world) and a related emphasis on what could be known by observation or experimentation. Logical positivism became, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a particularly influential expression of the more extreme version of the argument from science, which held that the only knowledge possible was obtained by this scientific method.<sup>19</sup> In recent times epistemological questions have come even more to the fore. In an influential work of practical theology Elaine Graham describes several of the many important late 20<sup>th</sup> century texts that question the possibility of objective knowledge.<sup>20</sup> These influential works repudiate grand narratives (especially metanarratives of the kind at the heart of Christian theology), suggesting that they should be understood as a means of exerting power rather than as reliable claims to knowledge.

It is not within the scope of this project to deal directly with the claims and arguments which characterise current philosophical debate, though I will observe that the simple fact of the existence of many influential exponents of the views recounted by Graham does not, in itself, and as she appears to believe, make them compelling. For Graham the difficulty is that the worldviews associated with postmodernity make it difficult, perhaps impossible, to speak of possessing reliable or normative knowledge of God. On her understanding the knowledge we can claim is primarily inductive, that is, worked out from practice. She argues that:

The primacy of disclosive practices...impels the faith-community to see its practices of enacting and naming the divine presence in the world as paramount...to ensure that the disclosive imperatives of

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<sup>19</sup> Described, for example, in N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 32ff.

<sup>20</sup> Elaine L. Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty*, (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002). She references, amongst others, works by Baudrillard, Lyotard and Foucault.

transformatory practice determine the self-understanding of the community of faith and not the other way around.<sup>21</sup>

I accept, of course, that the process of interpretation and the role of reason and experience means that theology will always have an essential inductive dimension and be influenced by the limits of human capacity. I want also, however, to maintain confidence in the Christian tradition of theology as reflection upon God's self-revelation and on the centrality of the Christ events: this seems to me crucial to maintaining a faith that is distinctly Christian.

It is in this connection that I employ the arguments of the position described as critical realism. Appeals to the term can be found in many influential theological works. For example, N.T. Wright contrasts it with what he calls "naïve realism", the belief that there are "some things about which we can have, and actually do have, solid and unquestionable knowledge...things that can be tested 'empirically'".<sup>22</sup> The alternative is often held to be only "subjectivity or relativity".<sup>23</sup> Instead, he proposes:

a form of *critical realism*. This is a way of describing the process of 'knowing' that acknowledges the *reality of the thing known, as something other than the knower* (hence 'realism'), while fully acknowledging that the only access to this reality lies along the spiralling path of *appropriate dialogue or conversation or between the knower and the thing known* (hence 'critical').<sup>24</sup>

Swinton and Mowat argue similarly, for a:

continuum between a naïve realism that accepts that truth can be fully accessed through human endeavour, that is, that theoretical concepts find direct correlates within the world, and a form of mediated or *critical realism* that accepts that reality can be known a little better through our constructions while at the same time recognizing that such constructions are always provisional and open to challenge.<sup>25</sup>

In these examples the term critical realism is used in a way that combines a conviction that we have genuine access to knowledge about God with a recognition of the limitations of human knowledge. Such knowledge is always subject to interpretation, bias, and limitation because human beings cannot claim objectivity: all human knowing is situated, embodied,

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<sup>21</sup> Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 205-206.

<sup>22</sup> N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 32-33.

<sup>23</sup> N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 33.

<sup>24</sup> N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 35.

<sup>25</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology*, 37, referring to John Swinton, *Spirituality and Mental Health Care: Rediscovering a 'Forgotten Dimension'*, (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2001).

historical and, theologically speaking, is subject to the limitations imposed by our creaturely and sinful nature.

#### *Going further into critical realism*

In order to develop this perspective I want to go a bit further into the philosophy of critical realism than either N.T. Wright or Swinton and Mowat in order to offer philosophical reinforcement to my theological argument that Christianity depends on the self-revelation of God, but relies also upon human interpretation of what is revealed. Andrew Wright seeks a more thoroughgoing rapprochement between Christianity and the critical realism of Roy Bhaskar, the most influential exponent of that philosophy.<sup>26</sup> Critical realism combines a realist ontology with epistemic relativism. A realist ontology means that “objects exist and events occur in reality whether we are aware of them or not”.<sup>27</sup> An “epistemic relativism asserts the priority of ontology over epistemology: reality precedes knowledge of reality”.<sup>28</sup> This is a view that reflects the understanding of theology as “faith seeking understanding”.<sup>29</sup> “we have rational warrant to embrace and act on our beliefs, so long as we hold them to be true, and until such time as we encounter good reasons for rejecting them”.<sup>30</sup> Critical realism is also characterised by “judgemental rationality”: “it is possible to judge some [accounts of reality] to be more truthful than others”:

Critical realist epistemology follows the path of pursuit of the best possible explanation. We make sense of the world by constructing theoretical models designed to provide powerful and comprehensive explanations of the objects and events we seek to understand...through the production of retroductive explanatory hypotheses...Once a hypothesis is established it is then subject to iterative testing and revision in the light of further insights gleaned from the investigator’s ongoing interaction with the object.<sup>31</sup>

Applying these ideas to Christianity Andrew Wright argues that:

It is necessary to recognise: (1) Christianity makes alethic<sup>32</sup> truth claims about the ultimate ontological ground, nature and structure of reality; (2) that these truth claims are contested, both within and beyond the Christian community; and (3) that is nevertheless possible to make informed judgements regarding the veracity of Christian truth

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<sup>26</sup> A. Wright, *Christianity and Critical Realism*.

<sup>27</sup> A. Wright, *Christianity and Critical Realism*, 11.

<sup>28</sup> A. Wright, *Christianity and Critical Realism*, 13.

<sup>29</sup> A. Wright, *Christianity and Critical Realism*, 14.

<sup>30</sup> A. Wright, *Christianity and Critical Realism*, 14.

<sup>31</sup> A. Wright, *Christianity and Critical Realism*, 15.

<sup>32</sup> ‘Alethic’ is a technical term used by Bhaskar and taken up by Wright meaning claims about the state of affairs in the world that have an established, normative status – somewhat like Kuhn’s use of the term ‘normal science’.



claims, on the understanding that such judgements are themselves open to further evaluation.<sup>33</sup>

Andrew Wright regards an epistemic relativism which is open to critical evaluation as entirely consistent and consonant with orthodox Christianity. He recognises that there are “Christians who insist that their truth claims are self-evident and beyond contestation and secularists who deny that Christian truth claims are amenable to critical evaluation”.<sup>34</sup> He identifies theologies – versions of Christianity – which seek to achieve a form of “epistemic closure”, either by positing transcendent truth claims that are “affirmed as self-evident” or by dismissing transcendent truth claims.<sup>35</sup> These include what Andrew Wright calls “essential Christianity” which attempts to identify Christianity with some idealised abstract ‘essence’ “above and beyond the contingencies of history”.<sup>36</sup> For Andrew Wright, however, orthodox Christianity is “grounded in contingent historical events surrounding the life of Jesus of Nazareth...the essential being of God cannot be separated from his historical acts”.<sup>37</sup> A further version of Christianity is what Andrew Wright calls “nominal Christianity” which tends to understand Christianity in terms of its concrete manifestations of religious belief and praxis and correspondingly to deny or underplay the idea that Christianity makes “truth claims about the ultimate nature of reality” beneath the “particularities of socio-cultural appearances”.<sup>38</sup> Andrew Wright contrasts these other versions of Christianity with what he characterises as orthodox, mainstream, Trinitarian Christianity. Trinitarian Christianity makes truth claims about the nature of God generated from retroductive assessment of the acts of God in history, but this “knowledge is generated by fallible human beings in particular socio-cultural contexts”.<sup>39</sup>

I reiterate that the value of these perspectives for this thesis is that they offer a philosophical counterpoint for my theological argument that Christianity depends on the self-revelation of God, but relies also upon human interpretation of what is revealed. It adds weight to the view offered earlier: that theology cannot be characterised as the formulation of timeless truths, but as human reflection upon the narrative of God’s acts in history, particularly those

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<sup>33</sup> A. Wright, *Christianity and Critical Realism*, 59. It must be admitted that though Bhaskar’s thought took what Wright calls a “spiritual turn”, his own conception of the transcendent is focused on an inclusive notion of God related to new age concepts and the proposition that there is a tradition of transcendence beyond particular or exclusive claims about God. Wright devotes considerable space to the contention that Bhaskar’s position is inconsistent with his own critical realist principles.

<sup>34</sup> A. Wright, *Christianity and Critical Realism*, 59.

<sup>35</sup> A. Wright, *Christianity and Critical Realism*, 67.

<sup>36</sup> A. Wright, *Christianity and Critical Realism*, 60.

<sup>37</sup> A. Wright, *Christianity and Critical Realism*, 60.

<sup>38</sup> A. Wright, *Christianity and Critical Realism*, 66.

<sup>39</sup> A. Wright, *Christianity and Critical Realism*, 79.

concerning Jesus of Nazareth, undertaken with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Spirit in the process is critical because the essence of the concept of revelation is that we rely on God to know about God. The involvement of human beings, however, places limitations on our knowledge of God and the world. To put it in critical realistic terms, we have real knowledge but the process of interpretation, of “judgemental rationality” continues and our knowledge is never complete or certain.

I want to make a connection which suggests resonances between this account of critical realism and more specifically theological approaches to a developing understanding of theological truth. This is with the Anglican triad, particularly appropriate because of the focus of this investigation on the Church of England.<sup>40</sup> The triad describes sources of theological authority and is composed of scripture, tradition and reason. The approach is quite commonly accepted within Anglicanism but different things may be meant by it. It can be used in a rather inflexible, hierarchical way. I favour the reading of it offered by Sam Wells. This sees the Church of England's approach to authority as a recognition that the triune God continues to be active in the world by the Holy Spirit, that nothing exists outside Christ and that, therefore, revelation is not a one-off event but a continuing unfolding of God's nature and truth so that he affirms that “Scripture, tradition and reason constitute complementary and overlapping sources of revelation”.<sup>41</sup> Reason, refers, at least in part, to the products of human wisdom. From my perspective the triad supports and develops what I earlier described as the dialogue between “what is given and what is discovered” in the world.

The theological conception I have espoused, influenced by critical realism, has significant implications for my understanding of the interdisciplinary relationships which lie at the heart of this investigation. I will explore these relationships next.

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<sup>40</sup> For the role of the triad in Anglican tradition see, for example, Jenny Gaffin, “Anglican Wisdom”, in *The Oxford Book of Anglican Studies*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) or Samuel Wells, *What Anglicans Believe: An Introduction* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2011).

<sup>41</sup> Wells, *What Anglicans Believe*, 41.

### 3.4 Theology and the social sciences

I have set out a position that sees theology in a way that does not place divine revelation and human insight in opposition or as alternatives. Instead, it sees theology as part of the human response to God's activity, arising from faith, and dependent on the divine revelation – made primarily through event and story. Human activities, inspired by the Spirit, continue to mediate revelation. Though guided by the Holy Spirit, the human response is intrinsically fallible and incomplete and therefore open to new insight and to correction. Christian doctrines offer the best explanation available of the God revealed in history. They are the way many churches capture and sustain the insights deemed as relatively stable, gleaned, to adopt N.T. Wright's terms, from reflection upon the first four acts of the divine/human drama. Another way of putting it is to say that these insights usually operate almost unquestioned as "normal science", to use the term associated with Thomas Kuhn,<sup>42</sup> but "theology is provisional" and open to further evaluation,<sup>43</sup> however cautious churches might be about such re-evaluation. On this understanding a door is opened to the use of social sciences as part of the means by which such reflection is undertaken. It is worth noting that Christian theology has, in fact, been conducted in some form of partnership with non-Christian thinkers since its early engagement with the Hellenistic thought of the apostolic and patristic eras. Such a partnership is evident in the use of Aristotle in the work of Aquinas and in the contemporary enthusiasm of ecclesiologists for the Aristotelian revival found in the work of MacIntyre.<sup>44</sup> In this section I will develop the position set out thus far and argue that a trinitarian conception of God means that no form of human science can exist altogether outside God and, further, that theology is essentially interdisciplinary, that it must engage with and employ the insights of human science and culture, albeit with a recognition of the ambiguities and dangers created by an understanding of the world as fallen.

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>43</sup> Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, 29. There has been considerable interest in recent writing in the notion that the theological method and the scientific method are more closely aligned than has been usually imagined. This understanding has been aided by the recognition that the scientific method is characteristically deductive as well as inductive, typically dependent on imaginative insights tested through data gathering, conditioned by 'tradition' and prior assumption (about the coherence and intelligibility of reality for example) as well as by the aspiration to disinterested inquiry. Fiddes makes these points in Fiddes, "Ecclesiology and Ethnography". Andrew Wright offers a not dissimilar account based on Torrance's "theological science": A. Wright, *Christianity and Critical Realism*, 210-212. These perspectives offer a response to one argument for the theological inadmissibility of human sciences, that they employ fundamentally different methodologies or ways of seeing the world.

<sup>44</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Second ed. (London: Duckworth, 1985); Moore, "Churches as Organisations,"; John Fitzmaurice, *Virtue Ecclesiology: an Exploration in the Good Church*, (Abingdon: Ashgate, 2016).

## *The world and the Trinity*

In setting out my understanding of the implications of the argument so far, and of the significance of the doctrine of the Trinity in particular, I will draw on the thinking of Paul Fiddes. For him the church is “a community that is engaged in the communion of the triune God”.<sup>45</sup> The churches’ mission is shaped by the Father’s sending of the Son: “ecclesiology is grounded in God, and its story is nothing less than the metanarrative of the Trinity...a narrative given through the self-disclosure of God at key moments in human history”.<sup>46</sup> The focus here on revelation might lead us to suppose that Christian theology operates exclusively in deductive fashion – but Fiddes suggests that the trinitarian focus of theology compels us to conclude otherwise. He refers to the “central, linked ideas of incarnation, sacrament and revelation”.<sup>47</sup> If God reveals himself primarily by becoming a human being in a particular historical context rather than in some general universal way we are led to “a kind of ‘sacramental’ understanding of reality in which God is encountered in an embodied way”.<sup>48</sup> Everyday life becomes the arena for encounter with God who is revealed as a person rather than in a set of propositions. In saying this I am not rejecting propositional truth: it is a key part of the iterative cycle of reflection and interpretation and helps to create and safeguard the context of meaning in which God is then encountered. It does mean, however, that theology has, as I argued earlier, an inductive dimension – God is encountered in human life, not just through authoritative texts or institutions. Because of the doctrine of creation, but especially of incarnation, revelation does not descend from above whole, but is discovered in an embodied, contextual, situated form.<sup>49</sup> The key point that Fiddes then makes is that if faith is embodied in worldly and secular forms then secular tools and disciplines have their place “in the service of theological reflection”, to assist us to find “the theological dimension in the worldly forms of life”.<sup>50</sup> This takes us to a position put well in a slightly different way by Ward:

If all things are “in Christ”, then this must relate to social and cultural expressions, and this is also true of the means that might be used to research it...interdisciplinary conversations are not constructed

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<sup>45</sup> Fiddes, “Ecclesiology and Ethnography,” 16.

<sup>46</sup> Fiddes, “Ecclesiology and Ethnography,” 17.

<sup>47</sup> Fiddes, “Ecclesiology and Ethnography,” 18.

<sup>48</sup> Fiddes, “Ecclesiology and Ethnography,” 19.

<sup>49</sup> This is true in the obvious sense that our access to the story of revelation comes via records compiled and edited by human beings. It is also true in the sense that any attempt to describe the acts and nature of God is incomplete, subject to error. Further, all is subject to the uncontrollable vagaries of the interpretation that accompanies all attempts at communication. My ontology might suggest that “timeless truths” exist, but my epistemology is clear that we cannot access them in such terms. Language itself fails before God. “Understanding God is not like other forms of understanding...God is infinite, hidden from direct view, and ultimately beyond understanding”. Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, 29.

<sup>50</sup> Fiddes, “Ecclesiology and Ethnography,” 20.

around a disembodied and sacred “theology” and a profane and misguided social theory, but arise from the possibility of analogy and dialogue from social and cultural realities that are in Christ.<sup>51</sup>

I accept that this description, on its own, might be thought to disregard the implications of the theological concepts of sin or the limitation on human understanding. It seems more than likely that social science will sometimes advocate positions which are in conflict with basic Christian convictions and will, no doubt, participate in or reflect that in the world which is hostile to God. I note that the same might be said of theology itself, a point which highlights the ambiguity which affects everything that is part of this world. I am certainly not denying the need for discrimination and care. But Fiddes helpfully quotes von Balthasar here: ““there is nothing outside God” – even, ironically, “the human “no” of rejection of God...the drama of human life can only take place within the greater drama of the divine life”.<sup>52</sup> This understanding makes it difficult to exclude *a priori* the products of modernity and late modernity on the grounds that such works are uniquely anti-Christian in their content as Milbank appears to do.<sup>53</sup> This is not, I reiterate, to deny that all work is ‘theory-laden’, nor that there is plenty of work which is either overtly or implicitly uninterested in God or hostile to Christian views of the world. It is, however, to deny that this means that the products of modernity are automatically incompatible with theological reflection – because everything exists within the embrace of God. This position risks co-opting (at least in principle) some thinkers who would, no doubt, resent it, but I see no alternative if trinitarian faith is our starting point.

*The need to work with other disciplines and avoid theological reductionism*

The argument based on the Trinity above does not mean that I am trying to make everything theological in a sense that suggests that everything could or should be understood as a sub-set of academic theology, or in a way that obscures the proper competence and academic independence of other disciplines. God’s revelation is the inspiration and foundation, and his truth the particular concern of the formal discipline of theology, but God and the nature of God’s world may also be revealed in other truth-seeking endeavours. The idea that theology can offer a complete explanation of God and the world is a particular kind of reductionism, a point to which I will return below.

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<sup>51</sup> Ward, *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, 3.

<sup>52</sup> Fiddes, “Ecclesiology and Ethnography,” 27.

<sup>53</sup> John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).

Theology arises from and attempts to explicate God's revelation, which takes the form of the story of God's acts. From this narrative theologians derive a fundamental vision of reality. The narrative of God's acts, however, though of fundamental importance in understanding the nature and meaning of phenomena in the world, does not, in or by itself, constitute a world view in the sense that theologians "do not share a single horizon...in part because the Christian thing is so multi-faceted that it may legitimately be construed in different ways".<sup>54</sup> Healy adds the important additional thought that this is, in part, "because every horizon contains non-Christian specific elements", that is, it draws on material that does not originate within the churches or the work of theologians.<sup>55</sup> In other words, different ways of seeing or interpreting the world arise within the Christian faith partly because what has been given is intrinsically open to such variety of interpretation and partly because interpreters are influenced by the wider world of culture, practice and ideas. This dependence on material derived from beyond the entirely explicit world of Christian thought and practice seems undeniable historically. In fact it is hard to imagine what such an entirely Christian specific world could possibly look like, how faith could ever be sealed against the world of culture, practice and ideas.

On the other hand, the social sciences can be and are conducted within a range of accounts of reality. Furthermore, it is necessary to respect the particular objectives, frames of reference, and concerns found in the social sciences. Theology may believe it is concerned with a revelation that holds the key to the final nature and meaning of life but that does not mean it has a privileged access to all aspects of reality. Theology and the human sciences operate at different 'levels'. Mady Thung uses the example of a theological and medical view of the body. Clearly, from a theological perspective these views are related and to keep them entirely separate risks medicine becoming unduly reductionist and insufficiently aware of the human being in a holistic sense.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, there is a valid distinction between theology and medicine. One interprets experience, relating it to a larger frame of reference: the other examines it within a particular frame of reference: "the theologian is concerned with the *whole* and not with the aspects which have been 'anatomically' analysed".<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 41

<sup>55</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 41

<sup>56</sup> This concern is not only associated with theologians: many doctors and therapists today seek a more holistic approach to medicine in which emotional, psychological and environmental factors are considered, along with the physical, as part of an interactive human system.

<sup>57</sup> Thung, "An Alternative Model for a Missionary Church," 341.

It is important to avoid a kind of ‘theological reductionism’ in which complex and multi-layered reality is collapsed into theological categories alone. The notion of reality as layered or stratified, in which ‘higher’ levels depend upon and are emergent from, lower levels, accompanied by associated fields of study, is a notable feature of Bhaskar’s critical realism.<sup>58</sup> Thus, for example, biology, which deals with life forms, is higher than, but dependent upon, physics, which examines the properties and laws governing reality at the fundamental level. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the meaning of this concept for the role of theology in any depth. On the basis of my argument to this point, however, I want to affirm three principles. Firstly, there is only one reality but it can be viewed with validity in various ways, at different levels (e.g. from physics, biology or the social sciences). Secondly, theology offers a view that is decisive for the ultimate nature of reality, especially considered holistically, that is, as existing within the embrace of the triune God, created, dependent upon and bearing a character determined by God. Thirdly, that any aspect of reality might be considered to have theological significance as part of a greater whole (e.g. the human body) but can at the same time be viewed legitimately within a narrower frame of reference (e.g. medicine).

This does not mean that I am suggesting that the products of academic disciplines (especially the social sciences which are the principal concern of this project) are simply to be accepted as true or reliable or sufficient accounts of reality. This is partly because in the social sciences there is usually not the kind of verifiable mode of investigation found in the natural sciences, but much more that is open to interpretation, and, therefore there are many contested findings and theories. It is also because, as I argued earlier, theology provides an overarching framework within which the results of human inquiry must, for theological purposes, be assessed with care, discrimination and spiritual discernment. This is especially important given the specifically theological awareness of the different and sometimes destructive forces at work in a world understood as being fallen as well as created, redeemed and engaged in a journey towards final transformation. For example, the theologian may judge that the influential work by and in the tradition of the organisational writer Frederick Taylor<sup>59</sup> is insufficient because it so emphasises a reductive view of the human being (as a kind of cog in a machine) but that this does not invalidate its use as a source of wisdom on the creation of efficient processes. The

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<sup>58</sup> Collier, *Critical Realism*, 45ff.

<sup>59</sup> Frederick Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (Norwood: The Plimpton Press, 2014). Taylor was a leading figure in the “classical” phase of early organisation theory in which ideas of bureaucracy and machine-like performance were dominant. I will say more about these ideas in chapter five.

theologian may further judge that efficient processes, whilst insufficient as the entire goal of organisational life, are a valuable feature of that organisational life, not least from the point of view of the worker who would prefer to be paid the agreed amount on time on a regular basis.

Finally, though theology provides the framework within which the products of human science are seen, it can itself be influenced, its convictions re-evaluated, by the insights derived from investigation into and theorising about human experience. We see this happening in black or feminist or liberation theology for example. Theology can be carried out starting with human experience and human science, as well as from the traditional sources of theological authority, such as scripture and tradition. I understand this to be the logical and inevitable consequence of my linked understanding of the following: of revelation as an iterative process of reflection on the Christ events undertaken within history; of the belief that everything is held within the embrace of the Trinity; and of the conviction that God continues to act, speak and reveal himself within the world.

### **3.5 Practical theology and methodology**

The trinitarian argument made in the last section for a positive interdisciplinary relationship between theology and the human sciences— particularly those concerning the theological value of the products of human wisdom – will underpin the more particular discussion of the compatibility of organisation theory with ecclesiology which I will take up in chapter five. I turn now though to the methodology that shapes my investigation. My positioning of theology as human and contextually influenced reflection upon faith and revelation leads me to value practice and experience as a locus of theological enquiry and insight. I would argue that all theology is practical, in the sense that it is concerned with our ability (in N.T. Wright's terms) to negotiate the drama of history faithfully and well. Practical theology has, however, developed a specific focus on the investigation of practice as a source of theological insight and understanding. I am investigating the practice of the Church of England from a theological perspective and understand my project as a work of practical theology. By this I mean that I wish to understand the theological significance of the Church of England's practice (in relation to what at least appears to be an organisational change programme) and to offer insights which



might help that church in finding its way through the challenges of this phase of its journey through history. I will therefore adopt a methodology associated with that sub-discipline.

Practical theologians adopt approaches that differ, however, in the relative weight given to practice and to other sources of theological insight, especially normative Christian sources. They also differ in the conception of the relationship with the human sciences which usually play a role in practical theological investigations. I will favour an approach that is consistent with my convictions about the role of revelation, a realist ontology and a certain primacy for theology in the relationship with other disciplines. I will explore these issues shortly, but will begin by exploring some of the ideas and features typically shared in practical theological research.

### *Common ground in practical theology*

The core conviction shared by practical theologians is that Christian practice has theological significance and a vital role in the development of theological insight.<sup>60</sup> Further, whether the approach is more postmodern or critical realist, practical theologians tend to share an understanding that human knowledge is limited and situated. Practical theologians also, it seems, share an interest in influencing practice. Swinton and Mowat, for example, would be seen as operating on the more 'conservative wing' of practical theology and Elaine Graham would be seen as more 'liberal', but they appear to agree on this point: "Practical theology...functions in order to enable communities of faith to 'practice what they preach'".<sup>61</sup> I understand this to mean something similar to what Swinton and Mowat convey when they speak of practical theology enabling the church to "perform more faithfully"<sup>62</sup> – a phrase that has echoes of N.T. Wright's ideas referred to earlier in the chapter and is, I believe, based on a similar concept of the drama of history. My own investigation seeks data that can inform the contemporary understanding of the nature of the Church of England, and also inform that church's practice as it seeks to meet contemporary challenges.

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<sup>60</sup> E.g. Zoe Bennett et al., *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology* (Abingdon: Taylor and Francis, 2018); Judith Thompson, Ross Thompson and Stephen Pattison, *Theological Reflection*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2019); Pete Ward, ed., *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 2012). Graham, *Transforming Practice*; Claire E. Wolfeich, ed., *Invitation to Practical Theology* (New York: Paulist, 2014); Cameron, *Talking about God in Practice*.

<sup>61</sup> Elaine Graham, "Practical Theology as Transforming Practice," in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, eds. James Woodward and Stephen Pattison (Malden MA, Oxford UK, Carlton Victoria: Blackwell, 2000), 106. Of course, the questions of authentic belief and authentic practice cannot easily be separated as recent debates about sexuality illustrate well. In fact, one might say that it is the dilemmas and facts of practice which pose questions to traditional attitudes and beliefs.

<sup>62</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology*, 25.

Practical theology has a strong relationship to the social sciences as it typically draws on approaches and methods from those fields in its research. It is usually qualitative in its approach to empirical research, bringing theological reflection to empirical data collected as part of the investigation of a situation. Theological reflection is often carried out with the assistance of insights from the social sciences, but the researcher's concerns go beyond those normally associated with the social sciences. The practical theological researcher seeks to discern the Spirit at work. As Bennett et al put it: "Divine grace is found in everyday experiences. This revelation occurs through human experience as well as revealed tradition...careful attention to the object of study has revelatory potential".<sup>63</sup> Following this practical theological account, a concern of my own investigation will be to understand the Church of England from ecclesiological and organisational perspectives so as to discern an insight (however small) into where God might be at work and what God might be saying to that church today.

#### *My approach*

I have set out some of the common ground in practical theology and indicated its influence on my thinking and process. It is evident, however, that there is also significant divergence of approach based on the theological and philosophical positions held by practical theologians. I will explore examples of these now and set out my own.

I noted earlier Elaine Graham's concerns about the credibility of Christian grand narratives and preference for regarding practice as the primary site of theological enquiry. I share her emphasis on the situated nature of human knowing and its attendant limitations. I am also, of course, in agreement with the notion that God makes himself known through experience and practice. But as I said earlier, I also believe that theology is based on God's self-revelation. I affirm the centrality of the Christ events and the place of doctrine in Christian theology. This leads me to seek a role for normative theological accounts in my approach. Graham might accept my affirmation of revelation and the centrality of the Christ events but she seems definitely to exclude a role for normative accounts in practical theology.<sup>64</sup> I, therefore, need a methodology that gives due weight to normative Christian faith.

A further issue concerns the interdisciplinary approach found in practical theology. Stephen Pattison has advocated an approach to practical theology which he describes as

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<sup>63</sup> Bennett, *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*, 30.

<sup>64</sup> Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 138-141

“mutual critical correlation” or “mutual critical conversation”.<sup>65</sup> The notion that practical theology works by correlating the insights of the human sciences with those of theology is found in the works of many practical theologians, including influential works by major figures in the discipline such as David Tracy, Don Browning and Pattison himself.<sup>66</sup> Pattison emphasises the mutuality of the process, an equality between the conversation partners and an openness of dialogue. These conversations are difficult and demanding because they require a willingness to work with and work through the differing assumptions which the conversation partners bring to the table.

There is a great deal to admire about this open, honest, truth-seeking approach. I particularly like its desire to respect the independence and competence of the different disciplines which may enter the conversation. Earlier I emphasised my desire to do the same. The difficulty I have with this way of working is that, for reasons I have already given, I feel bound to bring a more explicitly theological frame to the investigation and to privilege theology in my methodology. If theology is derived from a decisive narrative about the world those who have faith in that narrative are bound to shape their investigation in those terms. In other words, though I have every confidence that there is much to learn (and to learn theologically) from the human sciences, I cannot see the relationship between the disciplines in such equal terms.

I seek, therefore, an understanding that allows me to engage with other disciplines whilst operating from within my theological convictions, which include the belief that there must be a place for normative theology, along with a role for continuing revelation and discovery. I find this in the approach proposed by Swinton and Mowat, that of “hospitality”.<sup>67</sup>

The notion of hospitality is described by Swinton and Mowat as “the Spirit-enabled ability to show kindness, acceptance and warmth when welcoming guests or strangers”.<sup>68</sup> This idea is extended to the use of social sciences:

The practical theologian shows hospitality towards the method she is working with. She welcomes it and takes what it has to say seriously. However, she welcomes these methods *as a Christian theologian*. In showing hospitality towards the research method the practical

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65 Stephen Pattison, “Some Straw for the Bricks: A Basic Introduction to Theological Reflection,” *Contact* 99, no. 1 (1989), 2-9.

66 E.g. David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, (London: SCM Press, 1981). Don Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

67 Swinton, *Practical Theology*, 91

68 Swinton, *Practical Theology*, 91.

theologian does not need to compromise her position or pretend that she is something she is not.<sup>69</sup>

The aim here is to engage seriously and generously with the social sciences without conceding in advance that theology will simply follow or share the perspective they offer. Swinton and Mowat add two further principles: “conversion” and “critical faithfulness”.<sup>70</sup> The first of these refers to a conviction that the human sciences need to be converted, that is “grafted into God’s redemptive intentions for the world”.<sup>71</sup> Although I agree that the practical researcher will often not share the assumptions of the approaches he or she uses, and needs to be aware of the fact and maintain his/her theological perspective, the term conversion seems to me to overstate the theological risks involved in such engagements, and to detract somewhat from the conviction I possess that we live in one world in which there is one truth originating in the God who holds all things in his embrace. I will not, therefore, adopt the concept of conversion. Instead I emphasise the need for discrimination when using the products of a world God has already redeemed but which is also still marked by sin and error. Critical faithfulness, on the other hand, seems crucial. It requires of the researcher that she or he combines confidence in the God revealed in history and a critical awareness of the “interpretative dimensions of the process of understanding revelation and ensuring the faithful practices of individuals and communities”.<sup>72</sup> This, as I understand it, derives from Swinton and Mowat’s critical realist perspective on theological endeavour.

Swinton and Mowat’s discussion of these matters focuses on the use of qualitative research methods, and their understanding of hospitality and critical faithfulness will inform my own use of those methods in gathering data about Renewal and Reform. In my research, as well as qualitative research methods, I will be using organisation theory, and will do so to add to the theological and practical understanding of the Church of England and its situation. In principle the argument for employing social science research methods in theological enquiry applies equally well to the use of organisation theory. I have not forgotten, however, that organisation theory can be seen as bringing with it more problematic ideas and practices than social science methods of research. These concerns will be addressed in chapter five which will

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<sup>69</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology*, 91.

<sup>70</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology*, 92-93.

<sup>71</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology*, 92.

<sup>72</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology*, 93.

follow my consideration of the prior question of whether the Church of England may be seen as an organisation.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

I have established the intellectual and theological understanding from which my investigation proceeds and on which it is based. It emphasises the role of revelation, but also of human interpretation and experience. It gives priority to theology, but values the human sciences. It gives priority to scripture and tradition, but is open to innovation arising from efforts to discern the voice of God in contemporary contexts. In this endeavour it seeks the help of non-Christian specific sources. All these features of my understanding are linked to an emphasis on a trinitarian conception of God. I understand my project to require a practical theological methodology involving a partnership between theology and the social sciences. My arguments concerning theology and interdisciplinarity lead me to adopt a particular approach drawing on Swinton and Mowat's concepts of hospitality and critical faithfulness.

Having thus set out the principles on which this investigation is based I will now provide a brief description of how it will proceed. In chapter six I will describe the research design and process which will guide the data collection and analysis carried out in the empirical research portion of this investigation. That chapter will also include the development of a 'model' combining and integrating organisational and theological approaches to the adaptivity of the Church of England which I will use in analysis and theological reflection upon the data. In chapters seven and eight I will set out an analytical account of the data collected and reviewed using all the ecclesiological and organisational material developed as my lens.

The next step, however, is to attend directly to two of the key research questions I have set myself, both of which need to be addressed before I can proceed further. These are, firstly, whether the Church of England may be understood as an organisation and secondly, whether organisation theory may be appropriately and usefully applied within that church. I will address the first of these questions in chapter four, in a discussion of the nature of the church. The second will be addressed in chapter five, and linked to an account of the content and major

ideas of organisation theory. These chapters will also prepare the way and start to bring into the discussion the material out of which I will develop the integrated model in chapter six.

## Chapter 4. Church as organisation

### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I shall consider the fundamental ecclesiological questions raised by this investigation. In particular, I shall be exploring the ecclesiological case for regarding churches as organisations. In chapter two I characterised the ecclesiological issue as the problem of holding together properly an understanding of church that comprehends it as “both social system and mystery, or Body of Christ”.<sup>1</sup> Ecclesologically, the church is often understood as a ‘spiritual’ entity, as the gift of God, as the mysterious, invisible community of those incorporated into Christ. It is also, evidently, a visible, empirical reality, existing in the form of particular ecclesial societies – national churches, denominations, sects and so forth.<sup>2</sup> How is the relationship between these two dimensions of the church to be understood? The empirical church appears to be organised, to be like other ‘organisations’ in having structure, governance, and process, but perhaps this perspective cannot be maintained, for the Christian theologian at least, in the light of the conception of church as spiritual mystery. Consideration of the problem of what might be characterised as a tension between church considered as social system on the one hand, and Body of Christ on the other, will be the main burden of this chapter. In exploring this issue I will build on the theological perspective set out in chapter three in which a conception of God as Trinity underpinned an understanding of the nature of our existence as ‘sacramental’, that is, like a sacrament. Everything exists in God who is active in the world and involved in history. We experience God as embodied creatures living in time and culture. This has implications for the way we understand the nature of church in general and the Church of England in particular.

#### *Resistance to the idea of church as organisation*

Before I introduce my argument I want to indicate the nature of the objection made by some theologians and other commentators to the application of the term organisation to the Church of England. I will refer to an example written specifically in response to the publication of *The Green Report* (which advocated “leadership training” for senior clergy).<sup>3</sup> It has a

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<sup>1</sup> Watkins, “Organizing the People of God”, 691.

<sup>2</sup> Classic expositions of the language used here (denoting particular forms of church or religious organisation) are found in Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992). and Helmut Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York; London: Meridian Press, 1957).

<sup>3</sup> Green, *Talent Management for Future Leaders*.

journalistic, polemical character and does not, in fact, as I shall show, fully represent the views of the author, but it is useful here because it offers an indication of the kind of critique made of Renewal and Reform. In an article for the *Church Times* Martyn Percy put his opposition to the characterisation of the Church of England as an organisation in stark terms: “it is not a flagging organisation in search of a new, more appealing identity. It is the Body of Christ”.<sup>4</sup> The article relies on a distinction between “organisation” (instrumental, for limited and specific purposes) and “institution” (something valued in society for itself) justified with reference to the work of Philip Selznick.<sup>5</sup> As I indicated in chapter one, Percy designates the Church of England as an institution as against an organisation. His use of Selznick’s work does not, however, reflect Selznick’s thinking accurately: as Selznick insists, an institution is simply one type, or stage, of organisation.<sup>6</sup>

In a book written in the same period as the *Church Times* article Percy is more concerned with the need to avoid what he sees as reductive treatments of church and “neuralgic and reactive” forms of missiology.<sup>7</sup> In this work Percy offers, as one might expect, a much more measured account of the concept of church as organisation. He insists on the complexity of the ecclesial body and, consequently, the range of factors which those seeking to change it need to consider. He also recognises the need for the churches to be organised and managed and concedes that they are organisations (in a more generic sense) so that his opposition to the notion of ‘organisation’ is far less complete than it appears at first sight.

Some of the arguments Percy deploys in both pieces have similarities to those mounted by Shakespeare and Milbank against contemporary management ideas and practices which I discussed in chapter two and to which I will return in chapter five. The similarity is found in the suspicion of contemporary organisational practice as commercial, functional, instrumental, and based on an inadequate understanding of the person and society – and unsuitable for the churches. These critiques highlight the two related but distinct questions that I set out at the end of the last chapter. The first is whether churches can be described as organisations,

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<sup>4</sup> Percy, “It’s Not an Organization, it’s the Body of Christ”.

<sup>5</sup> Selznick, *Leadership and Administration*.

<sup>6</sup> As I described in chapter one, Selznick does not, as Percy suggests in the *Church Times* piece, distinguish between institution and organisation in such a way as to assert that organised social groups belong, in essence, to one of the two opposed types. On the contrary, although he distinguishes the two ideas typologically, in terms of instrumental priorities vs. values (Selznick, *Leadership and Administration*, 21-22.) he sees the development of institutional characteristics (as the “receptacles of group idealism”, valued in themselves) as a normal development of most organisations and the result of the organisation’s own distinctive history and the concerns of the people who have been in it. “No organization of any duration is completely free of institutionalization” (Selznick *Leadership and Administration*, 16.)

<sup>7</sup> Martyn Percy, *Anglicanism: Confidence, Commitment and Communion* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 207.



whether churches have a dimension of their existence that can be legitimately characterised in that way. The second is whether secular organisation theory can be appropriately employed by churches. It is the first question which will be addressed in this chapter. A consideration of the second question will follow in chapter five. I shall argue in this chapter that an understanding of church as both Body of Christ and social system is best understood and maintained by the conception of church in sacramental terms. In doing so I reject the suggestion made by Milbank that the characterisation of church as organisation is contrary to a more “catholic” conception of church. In this I align myself with Watkins in her remark quoted in the previous chapter, to the effect that it is exactly such a catholic, sacramental conception of church that seems to warrant exploration as the basis of a positive interdisciplinary relationship between ecclesiology and organisation theory.<sup>8</sup>

#### *The shape of this chapter*

I will proceed by first setting out the ecclesiological issues more fully, with the focus on the dual nature of church as Body of Christ and social system and how this may be understood. Healy calls this the “twofold construal”, a term he uses as part of a critique of what he calls “blueprint ecclesiologies” which typically consist of systematic schemes for identifying and reconciling the two aspects of ecclesial existence.<sup>9</sup> I will include a short account of sociological studies of churches which suggest that churches operate as part of the world of organisations, exchanging ideas and practices with others, and, at the same time, possess distinctive, special features. This will provide some sociological support for my essentially theological argument about the special nature of the Church of England and other churches. I will follow this with a consideration of the description of church in sacramental terms as it has been described in the Roman Catholic tradition and argue that it provides a powerful way of reconciling and bringing together the two dimensions of ecclesial community. I will then use a consideration of the work of Nicholas Healy, and, to a lesser extent, Roger Haight, to argue that this sacramental approach should be employed holistically and in a way that treats church fully seriously both as Body of Christ and as human system. I will then consider how the conclusions of the discussion to this point apply or otherwise in the Church of England. Specifically I will explore that church’s distinct ecclesiology in relation to the idea of church as sacramental and the question of church

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<sup>8</sup> Watkins, “Ecclesiology y management”, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 25ff.

as organisation. I will argue that though no particular ecclesiological formulation is likely to command support across that very diverse church, a sacramental conception of church can be employed in a way that is consistent with important and longstanding Anglican traditions. Let me reiterate that when I use the language of church as sacrament I do not mean that the Church of England should be understood as a sacrament in the sense that the eucharist is a sacrament or as one might describe Christ as a sacrament. I mean that the Church of England should be understood as like a sacrament, in sacramental terms.

I will then go on to make a connection between the concept of “faithful improvisation” as described by the Church of England’s Faith and Order Commission<sup>10</sup> and some of the themes drawn from Healy’s work. This will enable me to consider whether the Church of England can claim any distinct approach to corporate learning and change: this seems important considering that the theme of adaptivity in the Church of England lies at the centre of this investigation. I will suggest that faithful improvisation provides a more theological or ecclesial perspective on adaptivity that can be brought fruitfully into dialogue with organisation theory. I will conclude by suggesting that a sacramental conception of the Church of England offers a basis on which to view it as, in part, an organisation and does so in a way that may be persuasive for those most sceptical of the terminology.

#### *Some definitions and the question of agency*

First, however, a brief note on some of the issues that arise when we start to apply the term ‘organisation’ to the church. The difficulty of the matter indicates that the discussion would benefit from some further clarification of the range of meanings ascribed to that term. Mady Thung quotes Etzioni’s definition (“social units devoted primarily to the attainment of specific goals”) and that of Barnard (“a system of consciously coordinated personal activities or forces of two or more persons”).<sup>11</sup> There is no particular or necessary reference to business organisations here – the definition would apply as well to the Women’s Institute as to a global corporation. The understanding of organisations as goal-orientated and deliberately constructed raises the question of how appropriate it is to think of churches as entities that are constructed – presumably by human beings. It is not obvious either that churches are entities for which human beings can set objectives. These are not only questions concerning the nature of the

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<sup>10</sup> Alexander, *Faithful Improvisation?*.

<sup>11</sup> Thung, *The Precarious Organisation*, 16.

churches: they raise concerns about the relationship between divine and human agency. These are matters that I will return to in the course of the chapter.

#### 4.2 What is the church? Setting out the issues

I need to determine what 'kind of thing' a church is and whether it can be treated as an organisation like others. Leo Scheffczyk concedes that from a secular perspective "the Church has its origins not in the mystery of Christ...rather...the Church comes into existence...by means of an amalgamation of people who have decided for themselves what good cause to support and what ideal to follow."<sup>12</sup> In other words, it is a voluntary society, and Scheffczyk goes on to describe it as, from this perspective, an organisation. There is, of course, a considerable sociological literature, including recent examples, which understands the churches to be distinct and interesting examples of organisation.<sup>13</sup> It is helpful to take a brief excursion into the sociological literature because its account of the churches does affirm that, empirically, churches have the character of organisations. I suggest that if a church has all the empirical characteristics of an organisation there is a strong *prima facie* case for recognising it as such. This literature also suggests that churches have both influenced and been influenced by the organisational practices of the world in which they are set, suggesting that, however distinctive the churches may be, they participate in the normal exchange of ideas and practices found in society. At the same time, however, at least some of the sociological literature describes the churches as possessing characteristics which distinguish them from other organisations. Though this is hardly definitive from an ecclesiological perspective it does make the helpful suggestion, that, even considered sociologically, the churches are organisations, like others, but have a dimension not found in other organisations.

##### *Some sociological perspectives*

In his article of 2012 surveying recent articles in management journals about churches as organisations Paul Tracey makes it clear that sociologists detect a long history of extensive

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<sup>12</sup> Leo Scheffczyk, "The Church as the Universal Sacrament of Jesus Christ," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 10, no. 1 (Feb 1, 2010), 19.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. Paul Tracey, Nelson Phillips and Michael Lounsbury, *Religion and Organization Theory*, 1. ed., Vol. 41 (Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2014); Bruno Dyck and Elden Wiebe, "Salvation, Theology and Organizational Practices Across the Centuries," *Organization* 19, no. 3 (2012), 299-324; Bent Meier Sørensen et al., "Theology and Organization," *Organization* 19, no. 3 (2012), 267-279.

interaction and influence between churches and other organisations.<sup>14</sup> He starts by discussing classic sociological texts, referring to, for example, Weber's types of legitimate authority and his argument that Protestant beliefs and practices came together in a particular way to generate the capitalist spirit.<sup>15</sup> Weber's "traditional" form of authority is exemplified in churches but is shared with institutions such as the monarchy. "Charismatic" leadership is also a feature of religious and other social bodies.<sup>16</sup> "Bureaucratic" leadership is a distinctive feature of modern societies, one which has greatly influenced the churches in the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>17</sup> - yet bureaucracy may itself be, in part, the product of the "routinization of charisma" associated with the earlier development of churches into formal, hierarchical bodies.<sup>18</sup> For Weber, however, religion and society are, nevertheless, different phenomena with religion "underpinned by its own belief system or ethic".<sup>19</sup> Durkheim distinguishes between the sacred nature of religion in contrast to the functional, profane activity of society at large. In the religious arena, however, items from the everyday are used and acquire a sacred character in specific contexts. An example would be the wine which has one meaning in a wine bar, and another in a Christian eucharist.<sup>20</sup> This might be held to support a theological view of the churches as bodies that redemptively manifest themselves through the transformative, sacramental use of the ordinary stuff of the world. The sense here from both Weber and Durkheim is also of the churches providing an example of organisation which influences and is influenced by the wider world of organisational and social practice. On this basis the churches become, sociologically speaking, organisations, but of a distinct kind. It is not just that they operate in different 'sectors' (to use current terminology) but, rather, as described by Weber and Durkheim, that they operate in different domains, which I take to mean, with an essentially different remit. This suggests that, even sociologically speaking, there is some recognition that, though organisations, churches are also not quite the same 'sort of thing' as other organisations. When sociologists started to look at churches to understand aspects of their particular nature as church they were happy to analyse it in ways which reflected sociological approaches more generally but used them to reveal

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<sup>14</sup> Paul Tracey, "Religion and Organization: A Critical Review of Current Trends and Future Directions," *The Academy of Management Annals* 6, no. 1 (Jun 1, 2012), 87-134.

<sup>15</sup> Tracey, "Religion and Organization", 91.

<sup>16</sup> See also John Beckford, *Quality: A Critical Introduction*, 3rd ed. (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 41.

<sup>17</sup> Rudge, *Ministry and Management*. See also Chandler, *The Church of England in the Twentieth Century*.

<sup>18</sup> Rudge, *Ministry and Management*, 31.

<sup>19</sup> Tracey, "Religion and Organization," 90.

<sup>20</sup> Tracey, "Religion and Organization," 91.

distinctions which were unique to churches. The classic example is Troeltsch's church/sect theory.<sup>21</sup>

More recent work focuses on the debt that organisation theory and practice owes to theological influences. Dyck and Wiebe consider the influence of concepts of salvation on organising and speak of the "theological turn" in organisation studies.<sup>22</sup> By this they mean that management studies has come to address the "deeper meaning of work, how to treat the relatively powerless, and the purpose of life",<sup>23</sup> all of which are traditionally concerns of theology and are "concepts that transcend contemporary management theory".<sup>24</sup> Sorenson et al use theological concepts to think about organisations, arguing that organisation studies is already theological. A notable example is the use of corrupted or altered theological concepts such as that of charisma.<sup>25</sup> The point for the purposes of my enquiry is the further evidence of exchange between churches and the world of organisations. Other recent work, referred to by Tracey, continues to emphasise the interaction, similarity and difference between the churches and other organisations. He highlights, for example, the continuing influence of the churches on social movements;<sup>26</sup> churches as bodies seeking competitive advantage in the marketplace;<sup>27</sup> churches as examples of resilience and adaptation through change;<sup>28</sup> and as providing distinct but widely applicable examples of the problems associated with exercising leadership and control in organisations.<sup>29</sup>

A key question at the heart of my research is whether we might legitimately characterise the churches as organisations whilst retaining an ecclesiological understanding of them as divine gift and mystery. Those engaging with the churches from a sociological or organisational studies perspective can hardly answer that question which arises from a set of considerations, beliefs and perspectives which sociologists do not generally share, or do not think admissible in

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<sup>21</sup> Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*.

<sup>22</sup> Dyck, "Salvation, Theology and Organizational Practices," 319.

<sup>23</sup> Dyck, "Salvation, Theology and Organizational Practices", 319.

<sup>24</sup> Dyck, "Salvation, Theology and Organizational Practices", 320.

<sup>25</sup> Sørensen, "Theology and Organization."

<sup>26</sup> Tracey, "Religion and Organization," 104. referring to the work of Proffitt, W.T. and Spicer, A: Shaping the shareholder activism agenda: Institutional investors and global social issues, in *Strategic Organization*, 4 (2) 165-190, 2006

<sup>27</sup> Tracey, "Religion and Organization," 105 referring to Finke R., and Stark, R., "Religious economies and sacred canopies: Religious mobilization in American cities, 1906" in *American Sociological Review*, 53(1), 41-49, 1998

<sup>28</sup> Tracey, "Religion and Organization," 108 referring to Mintzberg, H., and Westley, F., "Cycles of Organizational Change" in *Strategic Management Journal*, 13(S2), 39-59, 1992

<sup>29</sup> Tracey, "Religion and Organization," 110 referring to Wilken, P.H., "Size of Organizations and member participation in church congregations", in *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 16(2), 173-179, 1971

their discipline.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, the perspective from those interested in the churches as organisation from a management or sociological point of view is suggestive. The churches are characterised as different in that they occupy a distinct domain, or certainly possess unique characteristics. Yet they are also like other organisations in certain respects, are susceptible to sociological analysis, are influenced by and influence other organisations and wider social practice. If the churches are indeed both Body of Christ and organisation we might expect a picture somewhat like this, one that combines elements of notable difference with likeness to other social bodies.

*Ecclesiological perspectives: a range of possibilities*

Though these perspectives are suggestive, however, they do not offer an adequate response to the question of the nature of church and how to make sense of it as Body of Christ and as social system. To take the argument further, I must return to ecclesiological sources. It is worth noting here something basic and unavoidable, that different conceptions of the nature of church (even conceptions with common features) produce different accounts of the permissibility of viewing the churches as organisations. I offered an example in chapter three, referring back to Watkins' discussion of the different conclusions of Barth and Brunner. Barth's emphasis on the otherness of the church as community called into being by the Word of revelation lead him away from a conception of church as social system.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand Brunner, also strongly emphasising revelation, makes a distinction between the invisible, mystical church as a community of people and the more contingent, human structure of the visible church.<sup>32</sup> This opened up the possibility of seeing churches in organisational terms. I suggest that Mady Thung, discussed in chapter two, offers us a picture of a church in which the mystical element appears almost entirely absent, with the emphasis all on outward-facing action: for her there is no difficulty in an organisational conception of such a church.<sup>33</sup> My own perspective on church seeks to hold together mystical and human dimensions, to see it as both the Body of Christ and a human system.

The task is made more complex by the fact that there is no definitive, normative understanding of church in relation to the questions I have posed to which to appeal. As Haight

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<sup>30</sup> Though this is true, there several Christian sociologists, whose work varies in the extent to which it reflects their personal faith perspectives, e.g. Grace Davie, Robin Gill, David Martin.

<sup>31</sup> Watkins, "The Church as a 'Special' Case," 372

<sup>32</sup> Watkins, "The Church as a 'Special' Case," 373-374.

<sup>33</sup> Thung, *The Precarious Organisation*.

argues, there is no single, definitive New Testament model of the church to build on.<sup>34</sup> Healy quotes Kelsey: differing ecclesiological understandings are based on theological imaginative judgements about “what the Christian thing is fundamentally all about”.<sup>35</sup> There is, however, “no single horizon shared by all Christians”.<sup>36</sup> In the absence of a formulation which commands common consent theologians produce models or approaches which reflect their theological predispositions. As a result, to a significant extent, ecclesiological understandings reflect wider, distinct theological agendas. This is true of Healy’s own account, as he acknowledges. As a result, the answer of the ecclesiological to the question of whether or not a church can be understood properly as an organisation is likely to depend on which understanding of church he or she adopts: this is itself likely to be shaped by his or her theological premises. The level of ecclesiological diversity can, however, be exaggerated. The 2013 WCC report, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (which appears to be the product of a process that includes contributions from many of the world’s principal Christian traditions), suggests that there is considerable consensus in the self-understanding of the churches on matters which will appear as themes of this chapter: as originating in the mission of God; as communion; and as a “pilgrim people moving towards the kingdom of God”.<sup>37</sup> There may be a gap between what a WCC report concludes and what individual churches believe in practice. I will, nevertheless, argue that these are important conclusions that are entirely compatible with and closely related to a sacramental understanding of church.

### 4.3 Church in sacramental terms

The understanding of the church as sacrament has been strongly associated with Roman Catholic theology in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. I referred to Watkins’ discussion of Karl Rahner’s sacramental ecclesiology in chapter two and I shall start my treatment of that theme by referring directly to his work. In his seminal book, *The Church and the Sacraments*, Karl Rahner begins as follows:

The Church is not merely a religious institution, established to meet religious needs. It goes without saying that it was not created by men

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<sup>34</sup> Haight, *Christian Community in History 1*, 126.

<sup>35</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 40.

<sup>36</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 41.

<sup>37</sup> *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No. 214, WCC Publications, 2013, 2.

for that purpose. But neither was it simply founded from above by Christ as a spiritual welfare establishment...The reality that has to be so organized and constituted, with a basis in a hierarchical and juridical order that is its expression, is not the amorphous mass of individual human beings in need of redemption, but the "people of God".<sup>38</sup>

On this basis churches cannot be satisfactorily described either in purely human or purely divine terms. Nor does it seem satisfactory simply to emphasise either the empirical or the mystical church. According to Dulles, the idea of church as sacrament offers "an intelligible synthesis" between two other 'models of the church', one that sees church primarily as an institution of divine foundation and another that sees church primarily as a mystical communion of Christians.<sup>39</sup> On their own these conceptions of church – as institution or as mystical communion – seem to lack something: the first "seems to deny salvation to anyone who is not a member of the organization" whereas the other "leaves it problematical why anyone should be required to join the institution at all."<sup>40</sup> The term sacrament expresses the conviction that the churches are "the sign, instrument and foretaste of communion", to use the language employed by ARCIC II.<sup>41</sup> This sacramental conception of church was emphasised at the second Vatican Council: "The church is in Christ as a sacrament or instrumental sign of intimate union with God."<sup>42</sup> The churches require both the invisible, inner dimension signified by communion in Christ and the outer, visible structure of the institution if the churches are to "signify in historical, tangible form the redeeming grace of Christ".<sup>43</sup> Further, a church is not just a collection of individuals but a body, the people of God bound together by participation in Christ *and* by a structure and order. According to Dulles, "The entire history of grace has its summit and crown in Jesus Christ. He is simultaneously the sacrament of God's self-gift and of man's fully obedient acceptance."<sup>44</sup> Church as sacrament understands the incarnation as the unique event that makes God's sacramental presence in the world possible and provides its pattern: church, as Body of Christ, is essentially sacramental.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments*, trans. W. J. O'Hara, English version 1974 ed. (Great Britain: Burns and Oates, 1963), 11.

<sup>39</sup> Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 2002) 55.

<sup>40</sup> Dulles, *Models of the Church* 55

<sup>41</sup> Adelbert Denaux, *Looking Towards a Church Fully Reconciled: The Final Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission 1983-2005 (ARCIC II)* (London: SPCK, 2016), 51.

<sup>42</sup> Second Vatican Council, "Lumen Gentium: The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church," in *Vatican II: The Essential Texts*, eds. Tanner and Norman (New York: Image, 2012), 1.

<sup>43</sup> Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 60

<sup>44</sup> Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 60.

<sup>45</sup> Scheffczyk, "The Church as the Universal Sacrament," 19



This understanding seems to provide a great deal of help in making sense of church in both its dimensions and it suggests a route by which I can find ecclesiological validity and practical value in treating church theologically as organisation whilst retaining an emphasis on its special nature. I recognise that it is not obvious that this theology can be simply carried over to the Church of England and I will address directly the concerns and reservations Anglicans may feel later in this chapter. First, however, in order to develop the ideas associated with this understanding of church and to prepare for a discussion about its application in the context of the Church of England, I want to explore it a little further as it is expressed in the Roman Catholic tradition.

The concept of church as sacrament is a way of thinking about the church that seems capable of being interpreted or used in different ways. According to Nicholas Healy the meaning of most such ecclesiological 'models' is "surprisingly underdetermined" and can be used to produce quite different ways of seeing the churches.<sup>46</sup> For example, Healy refers to differences in the meaning of the concept of church as communion in a variety of theologians, including Tillard and Boff.<sup>47</sup> In what follows I want to set out what I mean by describing church in sacramental terms, drawing principally on Healy's work but also with some reference to that of Roger Haight. I recognise that they do not describe their approaches in sacramental terms (and, indeed, Healy explicitly distinguishes his approach from the model of church as sacrament).<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless I suggest that their writing develops ideas that are consistent with the concept of church in sacramental terms as I have defined it and helpful for this enquiry. I note that both writers are working within a tradition that normatively describes church in the sacramental terms I have employed. That Healy does not use the term seems to me more a matter of rejecting single, exclusive and systematic models of church, than a rejection of the sacramental conception as such. I contend that the absence or rejection of explicitly sacramental language in the work of Haight and Healy is driven more by the desire to emphasise, in Haight's case, the historical church and, in Healy's case, the concrete church<sup>49</sup> than it is by the rejection of the basic ecclesiological perspectives expressed at the Second Vatican Council.<sup>50</sup> I will also draw on the work of Healy and Haight because their emphasis on

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<sup>46</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 44.

<sup>47</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 44-45.

<sup>48</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 28ff.

<sup>49</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 4.

<sup>50</sup> Second Vatican Council, "Lumen Gentium".

the practical, moral and theological importance of the church's empirical life has resonance also in the Church of England.

*"Blueprint ecclesiologies" contrasted with the concrete, pilgrim church*

Healy has become well-known for his discussion of blueprint ecclesiologies.<sup>51</sup> These are defined as attempts to provide definitive, systematic theological (and in Healy's view, idealised) accounts of the nature of church, which Healy believes to be a major preoccupation of 20<sup>th</sup> century ecclesiology.<sup>52</sup> Rahner's treatment of church as sacrament is described as an example.<sup>53</sup> Healy believes such accounts are unhelpful for a number of reasons. His dissatisfaction arises in part from considerations I have already mentioned: the lack of New Testament support for any particular understanding of church and a tendency for ecclesiologists to build models that reflect their wider theological agenda. He also identifies other, unhelpful and distorting features he finds in these blueprint approaches. According to Healy 20<sup>th</sup> century ecclesiologies typically share certain features. They may lean heavily on single phrase metaphors from the New Testament (e.g. "Body of Christ", "People of God"). They usually emphasise a two-fold structure in which the spiritual church is separated from the empirical, the invisible from the visible and in a way that generally privileges the former. Church is conceptualised so that it seems somewhat abstract, removed from its concrete identity in the world.<sup>54</sup> These characterisations underplay the human, empirical church and, consequently, tend to avoid or underplay the reality of sinfulness in the churches. Church is described in ways that over-emphasise the presence of the eschatological church in the church of the present. These descriptions focus on thinking about what church *should* be, rather than on the reality of its witness and institutions or its actual moral performance. Healy's concerns echo those referenced in chapter two in the discussion of the works by Moore and McCann. Both of these argue that if a church's practice is to match its principles, it needs to be more focused on the proper management of its actual institutional life.<sup>55</sup> The 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have witnessed too many egregious examples of the necessity of this concern.

I have some reservations about Healy's claims about blueprint ecclesiologies. I do not accept that Rahner, for example, is guilty of the tendencies Healy describes, or not to the extent

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<sup>51</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 25.

<sup>52</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 27.

<sup>53</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 28.

<sup>54</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 26ff.

<sup>55</sup> Moore, "Churches as Organisations,"; McCann, *Church and Organization*.

suggested. My reading of *The Shape of the Church to Come* is that Rahner works hard to maintain an emphasis on the importance of both dimensions of the church and to propose concrete reforms to the church's practice in a way that suggests he does not idealise the church. He argues that "the church of the future will be built from below" and that "concretely and socially, the Church will no longer exist through the mere persistence of her office, of her socially firm structures".<sup>56</sup> On the subject of 'models' the most well-known proponent of the idea that the church can be described in terms of models or typologies, Dulles, is well aware that the actual life of the ecclesial community exceeds what can be conveyed by any such model. He argues that the model of church as sacrament "does not encourage any deification of the actual form of the church's life, for it acknowledges that the symbolic expressions of grace are never adequate to the life of grace itself".<sup>57</sup>

This does not mean that models of church are not sometimes treated as Healy suggests. I am, however, less concerned with what Healy denies than with what he affirms. His own principal proposal is that ecclesiological reflection should take more notice of the concrete identity of church as a contextualised reality, and that models of church should be used to aid this endeavour. Ecclesiology should focus not on providing definitive accounts of church, but work as a "practical-prophetic discipline that seeks, above all, to help the concrete church perform its main tasks ever more adequately".<sup>58</sup> He goes on to describe features of church on which I also want to insist and which I argue are consistent with the idea of church as sacramental. These are the notions of the concrete church and the pilgrim church.

The concept of the concrete church constitutes an insistence both on the necessity of giving attention to the empirical church and on seeing it holistically. For Healy "everything is located within the sphere of God's creative and redemptive activity".<sup>59</sup> A church is a whole, soul and body, so to speak, and we cannot see the join between the Body of Christ and the human system. It all has theological significance and is all held within the purposes and presence of God. This appears to me to be a sacramental conception of church. Healy finds support from an Anglican source, Rowan Williams, in a piece that is expressly about church as sacrament. Williams agrees with Healy that we cannot divide a church into its human and spiritual

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<sup>56</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Shape of the Church to Come* (London: SPCK, 1972) 108.

<sup>57</sup> Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 66.

<sup>58</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 50.

<sup>59</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 66.

dimensions any more than we can agree with a Nestorian view of Christ which divides his humanity and divinity: "The Church is a mystery as a *whole*: not only in its praying and feeding but in its vulnerable historical actuality".<sup>60</sup>

Healy pursues this thought to insist also on the fallibility, the sinfulness, of the concrete church. This is where the tendency he detects (in Tillard's work for example)<sup>61</sup> to adopt an over-realised eschatology can have negative consequences:

The characteristics of the heavenly church are described as so thoroughly present within the earthly church that there is little to be said about the latter except to describe how these characteristics are realized...[but] the pilgrim church is concrete in quite a different way from the heavenly church. It exists in a particular time and place, and is prone to error and sin as it struggles, often confusedly, on its way."<sup>62</sup>

Again he receives support from Rowan Williams who, whilst insisting on church as mystery, also emphasises the importance of retaining the emphasis on the created, fallible human reality through which the divine mystery is revealed: "It is not a morsel of heavenly reality placed on the earth from elsewhere, but something genuine 'worldly' and thus vulnerable and questionable".<sup>63</sup> Churches have a life in and from the world which is as significant as their life in and from God.

In developing his notion of the pilgrim church, Healy relies heavily on his interpretation of von Balthasar's concept of theodrama. Christians live within the drama of salvation; they cannot see it from outside. Or, to put it another way, churches exist within the narrative of God's acts, not as an outside observer of them. A church has a part to play which involves finding ways of continuing the mission of God in changing circumstances, necessitating shifts in the way that church is lived out and expressed. In this endeavour non-Christian specific elements have a role to play, though not all prove helpful. The church lives tensively between the now and the eschaton, a mix of divine and human elements, influenced by and influencing other communities and groups in a way that has some resonances with the themes of some of the sociological depictions of the church noted earlier. It cannot be understood apart from God's

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<sup>60</sup> Rowan Williams, "The Church as Sacrament," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 11, no. 2-3 (May 1, 2011), 6-12, 9.

<sup>61</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 37.

<sup>62</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 37.

<sup>63</sup> Williams, "The Church as Sacrament," 7.

purposes, his activity in both church and world; in this sense the theological frame is essential. At the same time, a church is human and social and shaped by context.<sup>64</sup>

By seeing church in the way described, Healy helps us with the questions of setting objectives and of agency:

Within the theodramatic horizon...All human activity is dependent upon the prior activity of God, yet because of our location within the theodrama, we are truly free to play our own part in ways that are in some sense really independent of God.<sup>65</sup>

This does not involve a division of labour between God's will and ours; instead there is a complex relationship in which both play their part. Furthermore, the church on earth is not fixed or static. It moves with history and time, discovering new configurations and ways of fulfilling its vocation which are apt for new contexts and circumstances. In this journey, in this improvisation within the drama, it is inspired by, called towards, the consummation to come. This means that it always has new work to do and is always covering new ground. Life and context throw up new challenges, calling forth new discoveries about the possibilities, implications and richness of God's salvation, his work with us.<sup>66</sup> On this understanding a church might well have time-related objectives as well as a fundamental or ultimate calling. It is also called to exercise its agency, in communion with Christ through the Holy Spirit, in pursuing that vocation in time. By using the term "improvisation" above I deliberately make links with N.T. Wright's idea of the Shakespeare play mentioned in chapter three and refer forward to the concept of faithful improvisation which I will explore later in this chapter. I do so on the basis that resemblances and common themes are suggested, not on the basis that I am assuming any straightforward identity between very different thinkers.

It is worth noting that Healy's work was taken up with enthusiasm by proponents of the growing practice of bringing ethnographic methods to the study of the empirical church.<sup>67</sup> Healy himself developed reservations about the value of such approaches, which he recorded in an essay published in 2012. He describes the difficulties associated both theoretically and in practice in such ethnographic watching. First of all, decisions have to be made about what to

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<sup>64</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 52ff.

<sup>65</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 66.

<sup>66</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 52-75

<sup>67</sup> See, for example Ward, *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, to which Healy also contributes a chapter.

watch and how – these are decisions influenced by factors which are “contestable”.<sup>68</sup> Second – and this is the key point for my purposes – it is questionable how possible it is to describe church life empirically alone, in a way that is meaningful or coherent. The church,

considered with a focus on detail, particularity, and the exceptional, is arguably little more than a congeries of diverse forms of life, languages and meanings of the word “God”. We cannot then start with the church as it exists; everything slips through our fingers unless we shape and cement according to our construal of Christianity...<sup>69</sup>

I read this as a restatement of the other side of the sacramental argument: that if we neglect the churches’ existence as body of Christ, if we do not approach their empirical life within a theological framework, then something essential is lost. For all that I accept the emphasis on the concrete, pilgrim church in history, it seems essential to me to retain also its existence as divine mystery. The value of the emphasis on church in sacramental terms is that it allows us to do both.

#### *Ecclesiology from below*

I refer now, more briefly, to Roger Haight’s work to reinforce some of the ideas drawn from Healy’s ecclesiology and to add an emphasis on the historicity of the churches and their relation to the world, understood theologically. Haight’s three volume work with the overall title, *Christian Community in History*, offers what he calls an ‘historical ecclesiology’.<sup>70</sup> Haight understands church as “simultaneously a human, historical reality on the one hand and a theological reality on the other hand...constituted by a simultaneous twofold relationship, a relation to God, and a relation to the world”.<sup>71</sup> As a result ecclesiology can be approached “from above” – from the spiritual and explicitly theological – or “from below” – historically, as a plural reality, as a suffering body, as a human and concrete reality. This is an ecclesiology that rejects idealism in relation to church, either understood in the straightforward sense of overlooking a church’s fallibility, or in the more philosophical sense, of locating the reality of church in some invisible essence. This is a view that values the contingent, the particular, the concrete and sees a concern with them as properly theological. It is a perspective that allows the ecclesiologist to approach the churches bringing the disciplines associated with the study of these dimensions of

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<sup>68</sup> Nicholas M. Healy, "Ecclesiology, Ethnography and God: An Interplay of Reality Descriptions," in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2012), 188.

<sup>69</sup> Healy, "Ecclesiology, Ethnography and God," 189.

<sup>70</sup> Haight, *Christian Community in History 1*; Roger D. Haight, *Christian Community in History Volume 2: Comparative Ecclesiology* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014); Roger D. Haight, *Christian Community in History Volume 3: Ecclesial Existence* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014).

<sup>71</sup> Haight, *Christian Community in History 1*, 38.

human life to the study of the churches.<sup>72</sup> I suggest that it is important to be careful with the language of “from above” or “from below” because it might suggest a dualism that is far from Haight’s intention. It is not the case that one is “theological” and the other is not. I use these terms, as I think Haight does, to talk about different ways of approaching a single reality (church) from different perspectives, or emphasising different aspects of its existence – but it is not that one is theological and the other not. We are talking about different places from which to come at a theological question.

To sum up, I am using the insights offered by Healy and Haight to underline and reinforce an argument that the concept of church in sacramental terms can be, and should be, interpreted in a way that gives full emphasis to both dimensions of church life as human system and Body of Christ. Both dimensions are essential and, in practice, indivisible. I now further argue that if the emphasis found in Healy and Haight on the concrete, whole, historical church, which is of the world as well as of God, is, as I believe it to be, correct, then it offers a basis for describing the church theologically, in part, as an organisation, that is, as a human social structure with a purpose. This line of thinking also offers a powerful argument that the church needs to be managed if it is to retain its integrity and fulfil its mission, to deal with its vulnerability to the conditions within which it exists and on which it draws for its empirical life. At the same time, if the churches have a special role within the purposes of the creative and redemptive God, then the organisational dimension of the life of the churches must be a matter of theological concern. This has implications for the way the churches conduct their organisational life and for the question of if and how they engage with the ideas and practices of organisation theory. This a theme I shall return to in chapter five. First, however, I must consider whether the concept of church in sacramental terms as I have interpreted it can be applied within the Church of England.

#### **4.4 The Church of England as sacramental**

The Church of England has features which make it problematic to determine whether the concept of the church as sacramental is compatible with the Church of England’s ecclesiology.

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<sup>72</sup> Haight, *Christian Community in History 1*, 59-60.

In fact, that church has some unusual and distinctive features which make it challenging to speak confidently of it as a whole favouring any particular theological positions beyond its adherence to the apostolic faith as expressed in scripture, the creeds and the early councils.

*Diversity, reticence, identity*

One of those features is the Church of England's sheer diversity. Advocates for each of the possible ways of describing the nature of a church mentioned in this chapter and in chapter two can be found within it. All churches, of course, include those of differing opinions on relatively fundamental theological questions, but the Church of England is perhaps unique both to the extent and in the way these differences are found and expressed. The Church of England has parties representing different theological and ecclesiological points of view, supported by journals and societies. Andrew Atherstone calls them "a prominent and institutionalized aspect of Anglican life".<sup>73</sup> The principal parties may be described in the older language as 'high', 'broad' and 'low' or in the parlance more commonly used today 'catholic', 'liberal' and 'evangelical', though the latter set of terms do not map neatly on to the older terms. There are also many sub-categories, such as 'liberal catholic' or 'open evangelical'. Though the differences these labels represent go deep, and there is still a great deal of identification with the Anglican 'tribes', party differences are perhaps not as pervasive as they were. I was involved in an admittedly small scale research project that suggested many lay people have little theological awareness of the meaning of, or commitment to these positions, even if the habits associated with them persist and are sometimes much defended.<sup>74</sup> It is also the case that the fact that Anglicans are characterised by theological diversity is not the same as saying that the Church of England lacks formal theological positions, a point I shall return to below.

A second factor is what we might describe as the theological reticence of the Church of England. According to Paul Avis, the essential Anglican claim is to exist in continuity with, to be profoundly true to, the Catholic tradition in England, but to combine this with the key insights of the Reformation.<sup>75</sup> The Church of England sees itself as Reformed, yes, but still Catholic, an authentic 'branch' of the one holy, catholic and apostolic church. A feature of this combination is that, as Avis argues, the Church of England makes no novel or unique doctrinal claims. It

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<sup>73</sup> Andrew Atherstone, "Identities and Parties," in *The Oxford Handbook of Anglican Studies*, eds. Mark D. Chapman, Sathianathan Clarke and Martyn Percy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 77.

<sup>74</sup> I refer to the findings of a recent Theological Action Research project carried out by the Susanna Wesley Foundation with a parish in Guildford diocese. This is not yet published.

<sup>75</sup> Avis, *The Identity of Anglicanism*, 43.



emphasises its conformity with scripture and the ecumenical councils and creeds.<sup>76</sup> This rather minimalist approach combines with the lack of a formal founding confessional statement (of the kind sometimes associated with the continental reformers) and of a magisterial teaching authority, to leave the Church of England's theological character hard to read or grasp. The Anglican tradition has not, it appears, lent itself to the cultivation of the kind of systematic theology that we find in the Roman Catholic Church or in German Protestantism. The Church of England has an authoritative text concerning belief, the Thirty-Nine Articles, but this confines itself to the work necessary to secure the Church of England's status as a Reformed but still Catholic (not Roman Catholic) church in the sixteenth century.<sup>77</sup> Its other most authoritative texts, the Book of Common Prayer and the Ordinal, are liturgical rather than systematic in character.

It is also the case that the nature of the Church of England owes a great deal to contingent, historical factors beyond the direct control of that church itself. Once again, this is no doubt true of the churches in general, but the Church of England is at least unusual in being so shaped by very particular historical circumstances, those surrounding Henry VIII's divorce from Catherine of Aragon. Chapman points to this and to the absence of agreed sources and norms and formal magisterial teaching authority. He argues that "Anglican systematic theology will always relate to a particular context...Rather than being historicized in quasi-canonical texts, Anglican doctrine instead emerges from a strange combination of text, institution and practice, both ecclesiastical and secular".<sup>78</sup> I am particularly keen to note the emphasis on the influence of context and to make a link to the claims of both Healy and Haight noted earlier that the church is as much the product of context, history and "non-Christian specific factors" as of the divine gift and simply suggest that this perspective seems consonant with the development and self-understanding of the Church of England.

If we put the evident diversity, theological minimalism and influence of contingent, historical factors together we might conclude that the Church of England, taken as a whole, lacks a distinct theological character or identity. It is sometimes argued that the Church of England's distinctiveness is really found in its method or "temper"<sup>79</sup>. This approach tends to see

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<sup>76</sup> Avis, *The Identity of Anglicanism*, 39-40.

<sup>77</sup> Peter Toon, "The Articles and Homilies," in *The Study of Anglicanism*, eds. Stephen Sykes, John Booty and Jonathan Knight (London: SPCK, 1998), 144-154, 148-149.

<sup>78</sup> Chapman "The Church", 154.

<sup>79</sup> Avis, *The Identity of Anglicanism*, 28ff.

the claim to be both Catholic and Reformed as critical. That claim can be read as a notion of balance or moderation (the 'via media'), expressed, for example, in the Anglican retention of the traditional threefold order of ministry along with acceptance of the Reformers' emphasis on the priesthood of all believers. The *via media* can be presented as a way of steering a reasonable or balanced course but, drawing on the thought of F.D. Maurice, Alec Vidler saw something deeper at work:

Anglican theology is true to its genius when it is seeking to reconcile opposed systems, rejecting them as exclusive systems, but showing that the principle for which each stands has its place within the total orbit of Christian truth, and in the long run is only secure within that orbit or...when it is held in tension with other apparently opposed, but really complementary principles.<sup>80</sup>

This view has been roundly rejected by Stephen Sykes: "It must be said bluntly that it has served as an open invitation to intellectual laziness and self-deception", a preference for fudge and an excuse to be condescending about the work of non-Anglican theologians.<sup>81</sup> I am inclined to accept that Vidler's statement represents an aspect of Anglicanism at its best but also to accept that strengths and weaknesses are usually closely related and that the Church of England may frequently be guilty of a lack of rigour and reluctant to face up to the opposing views expressed in its thinking and practice. For Sykes theological reticence and a claim to prefer being practical to being theoretical are frequently better characterised as a willingness to accept the superficial.<sup>82</sup>

Nevertheless, though Anglican theology might not offer an unassailable basis for a specific ecclesiological 'model' such as church as sacrament, or any systematic doctrine of church, I do not accept that Anglican theology lacks distinctive content. In this I align myself with the arguments made by Sykes and endorsed by Avis.<sup>83</sup> Sykes argues, correctly in my view, that claims about method inevitably imply claims about content:

The subject matter of theological method is the explanation of how man (*sic*) can be said to have knowledge of God or come to understand divine revelation. But what man is is itself part of the content of Christian doctrine. Therefore any understanding of theological method implies a particular theological doctrine or doctrines.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Avis, *The Identity of Anglicanism*, 29.

<sup>81</sup> Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism*, 19.

<sup>82</sup> Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism*, 79.

<sup>83</sup> Avis, *The Identity of Anglicanism*, 40.

<sup>84</sup> Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism*, 72.

The absence of a theological position is itself a theological position, as is the willingness to accept disagreement on theological commitments:

The historic Anglican position is acceptance of the institution of the episcopacy and of the two Gospel sacraments, but toleration of disagreement on their interpretation; and it needs to be said that this toleration is itself a highly significant ecclesiological matter.<sup>85</sup>

Tellingly, for this enquiry, Sykes concludes that Church of England needs to keep working theologically to make sense of its unique traditions:

It is only the theological exploration of the significance of such an inheritance which will begin to establish Anglicanism on lines significant for the future of the world-wide church, not on the bogus grounds of its status as a so-called 'bridge church' but on the grounds of its capacity to submit its inheritance to a searching theological appraisal.<sup>86</sup>

This seems all the more important in a period which finds the Church of England facing a significant downturn in support and making efforts to address that state of affairs. In chapters seven and eight I will provide an analysis of the Renewal and Reform programme that provides both ecclesiological and organisational commentary: I shall be concerned to discover whether that programme takes full account of Anglican identity and engages with its particular theological heritage. This will be partly on the grounds that the maintenance of identity is a prerequisite of successful organisational change, a principle I will discuss in chapter six. In doing so I will keep in mind the possibility that the diversity of the Church of England may represent a challenge to a notion of identity in organisational terms. It will also be argued that the ability to inhabit and reinterpret one's distinct traditions faithfully is an essential component of the successful negotiation of change in the church. This principle can be observed in the history of effective ecclesiastical change as I will argue when giving initial attention to the concept of 'faithful improvisation' later in this chapter. I am prepared to accept that there is some truth in Percy's contention that the Church of England is "in a profound sense, a community of practice bound together more by manners, habits and outlooks than it is by doctrinal agreement. Indeed, one could argue that Anglicanism, at its best, is a community of civilised disagreement".<sup>87</sup> This can, however, be exaggerated and I am concerned that there may also be avoidance of inconvenient theological factors, a preference for politicking over

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<sup>85</sup> Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism*, 85.

<sup>86</sup> Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism*, 85.

<sup>87</sup> Percy, *Anglicanism*, 138.

theological debate and a tendency to deny or avoid engaging with claims which are central to Anglican identity.

*The Church of England in sacramental terms*

In sum, I accept some of the cautions and reservations described above but I wish also to affirm that some things can be said with confidence about the Church of England's character and theology. This is particularly the case in the arena of ecclesiology.<sup>88</sup> The history of the Church of England can be read, I suggest, as the story of the tensions created by the foundational conception of itself as the Catholic Church Reformed. The Church of England's ecclesiology emphasises (to different degrees at different times) both church as communion and church as institution, to use the terms associated with Dulles referenced earlier in this chapter. I argue that this distinctively Anglican theology is best served by a sacramental concept of church, one which holds these two perspectives together.

In the Elizabethan period the claim to be both Reformed and Catholic was linked to a distinct ecclesiological position. The early Church of England accepted the Reformers' emphasis on personal faith, stressing the importance of "individual confession".<sup>89</sup> Article XIX of the Thirty Nine Articles states that "The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men". Although the true nature of the church might be hidden the emphasis is on the church as a visible reality in the world – this is the emphasis of both the continental and English reformers.<sup>90</sup> According to Philip Thomas, the Church of England of the Elizabethan settlement affirmed "the concept of the Church as the mystical body of Christ...but never finally at the expense of the reality of the church in its temporal form".<sup>91</sup> This is very much the position adopted by the most influential exponent of Anglican ecclesiology, Richard Hooker. His argument is close to the one I have made so far in this chapter. As Avis puts it, quoting Hooker's terminology, "The Christian Church is both a 'politic society' (that is to say, a temporal, politically ordered society) and a 'society supernatural' (that is to say, a community with a divine origin and purpose)".<sup>92</sup> The polity of the Church of England was a 'thing indifferent' in the sense that its particular form was not seen as of the essence of its existence as church, but, nevertheless, as an essential aspect of its being. It was on this basis that the Church of England

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<sup>88</sup> Avis, *The Identity of Anglicanism*, 40.

<sup>89</sup> Jeremy Morris, *A People's Church: A History of the Church of England*, (London: Profile, 2022), 60.

<sup>90</sup> See Avis, *Anglicanism and the Christian Church*, 10.

<sup>91</sup> Philip H. E. Thomas, "Doctrine of the Church," in *The Study of Anglicanism*, Revised ed; eds. Stephen Sykes, John Booty and Jonathan Knight, (London and Minneapolis: SPCK Fortress Press, 1998) 249-262, 255.

<sup>92</sup> Avis, *Anglicanism and the Christian Church*, 33-34.

retained much of the order or polity of the pre-Reformation church, including the threefold order of ministry (bishops, priest and deacons) and at the same time regarded itself as in fraternal relationship with the continental, non-episcopal reformed churches.<sup>93</sup>

According to both Avis and the authors of the *Oxford History of Anglicanism*, the understanding of the Church of England as the Catholic Church Reformed (with the accent on the 'Reformed') was maintained, for the most part, through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>94</sup> A significant shift occurred with the advent of the Oxford Movement (from the 1830s onward). This created an influential strand in Anglicanism characterised by Catholic conceptions of the institutional church, dissatisfaction with the supremacy of the monarch and a rejection of many of the core ideas of the Reformation. According to Mark Chapman this "thrust the locus of authority away from the state to the supernaturally ordered visible independent Church...the visible order of the Church was itself instituted by God and persisted even in the contemporary Church...the novelty of the Oxford movement was to see the structures as of the very essence of the Church".<sup>95</sup> Whilst the more radical Tractarian positions became less influential, the Oxford Movement was part of a recovery of more Catholic ideas and (especially) liturgical practices that became accepted features of the life of the Church of England alongside its Protestant heritage.<sup>96</sup>

This is, of course a very brief account of a complex history but I use it to reinforce a contention that the Church of England has typically sought to find a way of expressing a view of its ecclesiology that accommodates both Reformed and Catholic tendencies, and which, in its original formulation, sought a careful and balanced relationship between the two. Of course I do not mean that all Anglicans have sought such a balance but rather that the long-term tendency of the Church of England is to avoid swinging too far for too long in one direction or the other. The Church of England remains defined, I suggest, imprecisely I accept, by a sense of its Reformed and Catholic origins and character. I submit that the notion of the Church of England as sacramental does justice to the Church of England's long-term, primary ecclesiological traditions. Further, it can engage with the Catholic emphasis on the institution as a divinely given reality which has been a feature of at least some forms of High Church Anglicanism since

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<sup>93</sup> Avis, *Anglicanism and the Christian Church*, 27.

<sup>94</sup> Avis, *Anglicanism and the Christian Church*, 59ff.; Jeremy Gregory ed., *The Oxford History of Anglicanism Volume II: Establishment and Empire, 1662-1829*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

<sup>95</sup> Chapman, "The Church," 165-166.

<sup>96</sup> Morris, *A People's Church*, 256-257.

the nineteenth century. I base this comment on, especially, more recent developments in Roman Catholic theology (as expressed in Vatican II reports) which, as I described earlier in the chapter, value but modify the ecclesiological emphasis on the institution, using sacramental terms.

The twentieth century has seen attempts to clarify these matters and to do so in the context of ecumenical discussion. The most significant of these for my purposes is the ARCIC talks between the Anglican churches and the Roman Catholic Church. ARCIC II concluded that sacrament is an appropriate way of thinking about the church that makes sense for both Roman Catholics and Anglicans:

The church...is therefore itself rightly described as a visible sign which both points to and embodies our communion with God and with one another; as an instrument through which God effects this communion; and as a foretaste of the fulness of communion to be consummated when Christ is all in all. It is a 'mystery' or 'sacrament'.<sup>97</sup>

This conclusion has not been endorsed formally by either the Roman Catholic Church or by the Church of England. In his commentary on the Vatican website Francis Sullivan expresses reservations about what he sees as the failure of ARCIC II to address the question of the distinctive and perhaps incompatible claims of the two communions about their status as church.<sup>98</sup> Murray speaks of the difficulties felt by Anglican evangelicals with some ARCIC conclusions, based on their belief that too much was conceded to Catholic perspectives.<sup>99</sup> Murray does not go into specifics but it seems likely that some Anglicans would have reservations not unlike those expressed by Healy in his account of blueprint ecclesologies: they may believe that a 'model' such as church as sacrament is unhelpfully systematising (and in a way untypical of Anglican method!) and risks fostering an idealism about the church. In particular, some Anglicans will suspect that church as sacrament idealises the institution itself and smuggles in an emphasis on the institution of the kind associated with the Roman Catholic Church after the Council of Trent and enshrined in the documents of the First Vatican Council. Further, there might be a concern that the idea of church as sacrament implies that a particular

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<sup>97</sup> The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, "Church as Communion," 17.

<sup>98</sup> Francis Sullivan, SJ, "Comment on the Church as Communion," *Information Service* 77 (1991/II) 97-102. <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/comunione-anglicana/dialogo/arcic-ii/1991-church-as-communion--commentary-by-revd-francis-sullivan--s.html>.

<sup>99</sup> Paul D. Murray "The reception of ARCIC I and II in Europe and discerning the strategy and agenda for ARCIC III.," *Ecclesiology*, 11 (2), (2015), 199-218, 203.

polity (that of the Roman Catholic Church) is part of the founding gift of God. Anglican tradition has usually resisted such a notion.

To all these concerns I respond with an insistence that the church described as sacramental should not be interpreted in these ways but, instead, and properly, with an emphasis on the concrete, pilgrim, historical church described by Healy and Haight. In particular, I reject the suggestion that the sacramental conception need or should imply perfectionism. Let me emphasise again that I am not arguing that the church is a sacrament in the sense that Christ himself might be described as a sacrament. *Lumen Gentium* specifically avoids that suggestion, stating that, "The church is in Christ as a sacrament" which has a sense of "like a sacrament" rather than as a statement of exact equivalence.<sup>100</sup> ARCIC II also insists that it is "in its weakness, suffering and poverty that the Church becomes the sign of the efficacy of God's grace".<sup>101</sup>

There is also no need to interpret the notion of church in sacramental terms in a way that implies the form of the institution is itself part of the founding will and intention of God. I am arguing for a sacramental conception of the church, held in such a way as to insist on the fallibility and imperfection of the visible church. I am arguing that a sacramental conception which insists on a holistic conception of the church as both Body of Christ and human society, yet which sees it all as held within the purposes of God, is an apt way of capturing the Catholic and Reformed balance in the Church of England's self-understanding. I reiterate that, according to Dulles, it is intended to do just that, to reconcile the understanding of church as a communion of believers with an understanding of it as a visible, corporate body.<sup>102</sup> Rowan Williams concludes his discussion of church as sacrament thus:

In sum, a proper understanding of what it means to think of the Church as sacrament leads not towards a static picture of the Church as a simple epiphany of the 'sacred', nor to an unreal model of it as a perfect spiritual entity (somehow detached from the compromised, historical communities and traditions which bear the name of church), but to a grasp of the fact that the Church is the sign of God's realised purpose, his will to come-to-be within the universe he has made...because this life is still in formation, still subject to change and suffering, his coming to be is sometimes obscured and betrayed; yet what is expressed when that history is retold in the light of hope is the groundedness of the church in an eternal truth, an eternal relation.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Second Vatican Council, "Lumen Gentium", 1.

<sup>101</sup> The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, "Church as Communion," 21.

<sup>102</sup> Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 55.

<sup>103</sup> Williams, "The Church as Sacrament," 12.

I accept that it is unlikely that any formulation will command support across the whole of the Church of England. Neither am I suggesting that the sacramental 'model' is the only legitimate way of conceiving that church. I do, however, argue that an understanding of church as sacramental, as I have expressed it, is consistent with the primary ecclesiological traditions of the Church of England and to the theological impulses behind its foundation. Further, as I indicated earlier, my associated insistence on taking fully seriously the human, contingent, historical nature of the Church of England means that we can treat it as, in part, an organisation, albeit one that exists within a particular framework of theological understanding.

#### **4.5 An Anglican approach to organisational adaptivity – “faithful improvisation”**

I have made an argument for seeing the church sacramentally. This allows me to see the Church of England, theologically and properly, as organisation as well as mystery. I have so far said little or nothing about the organisational character of the Church of England. In the next chapter I will offer an account of the main ideas of organisation theory and consider the Church of England organisationally in the light of these. Here, however, I do want to consider how the Church of England has achieved a certain adaptivity through its history, partly to set the scene for later discussion (in chapter six) and partly to reinforce the argument I have made in this chapter.

For this I draw on the recent report of the Church of England's Faith and Order Commission, *Senior Church Leadership: a Resource for Reflection*.<sup>104</sup> As the title suggests, the discussion focuses on the theory and practice of leadership in the Church of England but it does so recognising that it must do so “in relation to the ministry and mission of the church, the ministry and mission given it by God”.<sup>105</sup> The report acknowledges the history of constructive interaction between ecclesial theory and practice and that of the world. It affirms that there is no fixed biblical pattern to which we can appeal: “one of the first conclusions we can draw from the study of the New Testament is that church order is never static: it keeps evolving to fit the ever-changing needs and challenges of a changing world”.<sup>106</sup> The language used to describe church

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<sup>104</sup> Found in Alexander, *Faithful Improvisation?*.

<sup>105</sup> Alexander, *Faithful Improvisation?*, 16.

<sup>106</sup> Alexander, *Faithful Improvisation?*, 23.



leadership in the New Testament is as indebted to the secular world as the language of leadership today. The church is always contextual: “The negotiation took place between what Christians in any given place were *given*, and what they *found*”.<sup>107</sup> What is given is, for example, the commission to preach the gospel. This is brought to life in different ways in different social circumstances. It is in this way that the church of the New Testament combined catholicity with local specificity. According to *Senior Church Leadership* “in this process they borrowed...language, ideas, practices and even, forms of organisation from a wide variety of sources” including the household, the estate and the empire.<sup>108</sup> These are examples of what the authors call “faithful improvisation”. The church typically brings the tradition to the context and improvises new ways of “doing church”:

By improvisation we do not mean ‘making it up as we go along’ or ‘bodging something together from the materials available’. Rather we are...using the word in something like the sense it can have in a musical performance. Musicians who are trained in a particular tradition (who know its constraints and possibilities in their bones) draw on all the resources provided by their formation to respond creatively to new situations and to one another.<sup>109</sup>

The language and concepts here appear to me to have resonances with those of Healy as set out above, particularly in his use of the notion of the theodrama, as well as those of N.T. Wright concerning the notion of the five act Shakespeare play referred to in chapter three.<sup>110</sup> Within the drama improvisation is required, but it requires a deep immersion within the story to be done appropriately. The report goes on to trace evidence of this pattern of adaptation in the monastic movement, the Reformation and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the Church of England. In chapter six I will suggest how the pattern of faithful improvisation might be related to theories of the adaptive organisation found in organisation theory. For now, however, I want to underline how this product of the Church of England’s Faith and Order Commission affirms a characterisation of church as both Body of Christ and human community, in which the life, form and practice of church is the product of faithful engagement between the tradition and the human context. This is a depiction of a church as a pilgrim body, continuing God’s ministry and mission in history. I also note the emphasis on formation, the need to be

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<sup>107</sup> Alexander, *Faithful Improvisation?*, 54.

<sup>108</sup> Alexander, *Faithful Improvisation?*, 54.

<sup>109</sup> Alexander, *Faithful Improvisation?*, 10.

<sup>110</sup> The idea also appears to be closely connected to N.T. Wright’s characterisation of the Christian life in terms of the five act drama. Although he is a Church of England theologian he is not referenced in the FAOC’s report.

deeply connected to the tradition. This starts to raise the question of the need for discrimination and for discernment – a theme to which I will also return in chapter six.

#### 4.6 Conclusion

I have argued for what I am summarising as a sacramental view of church. My characterisation of this model of church allows me to understand the Church of England theologically as an organisation as well as the body of Christ. I suggest that this conception of church might prove acceptable to those most suspicious of ‘managerialism’. One of the most prominent of these is Martyn Percy. Early in the chapter, I discussed his objection to the term ‘organisation’ and suggested his opposition might be less complete than it at first appeared. It becomes clear in *Anglicanism: Confidence, Commitment and Communion* that Percy is mainly concerned that the richness of the Church of England’s ministry and mission should not be devalued and to ensure that the Church of England’s (necessary and appropriate) organisational life exists for the sake of “its final task: which is to be a source of blessing to God, society and creation”. The Church of England is characterised as a body travelling towards the eschatological future.<sup>111</sup> I share these perspectives as I hope is evident from the arguments I have made to this point.

The argument is not complete, however. I have made a case that theology is both legitimately and inevitably interdisciplinary, notably in relation to the social sciences. I have offered a credible basis for understanding the Church of England as both Body of Christ and human system, as divine gift and organisation. It remains possible, however, to accept these arguments and still reject the use of organisation theory on the basis that theories of management are (as Milbank and Shakespeare contend)<sup>112</sup> particularly and hopelessly reductive in their view of human beings and the world. It is that question to which I now turn. In the next chapter I will consider the nature of organisation theory and argue that it offers a rich resource of both practical and ecclesiological value for the Church of England.

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<sup>111</sup> Percy, *Anglicanism*, 205.

<sup>112</sup> Milbank, "Stale Expressions,"; Shakespeare, *Being the Body of Christ*.

## Chapter 5. Metaphors of organisation

### 5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I argued that the concept of church as sacramental offered a compelling basis for understanding the Church of England as both human system and Body of Christ. I emphasised the way that a church is both of God and of the world. This conception allows us to see the Church of England legitimately 'from below', as an organisation, but with the important caveat that the primary frame for considering that church remains theological: its organisational nature is an aspect of its ecclesiology. In this chapter I will address the question of whether (and how) organisation theory might offer legitimate, appropriate and helpful insights and practices that can help us to understand the Church of England better and govern it more effectively. I have already conceded that it might be possible that a church be seen as an organisation but that secular organisation theory be judged inadmissible on the grounds that it is a body of ideas and practice that is particularly antithetical to theology. I will argue that, on the contrary, organisation theory is a field that has much that it can offer to the Church of England which can be legitimately accepted. In fact, it can help us better to understand the dimensions of the concrete church. Furthermore, it offers practical and necessary ways of enabling the empirical church to "become a better sign of Christ than it has been" in the words of Dulles, quoted in chapter four.<sup>1</sup>

In this endeavour, I will first offer an account of one of the key trends in organisation theory over the period since much of the literature I reviewed in chapter two was written. From the 1980s onwards organisation theory became much more self-conscious and critical of its underpinning assumptions about knowledge, society and the nature of organisations.<sup>2</sup> I will argue that the result of this development is that the field has been opened up in a way that suggests the criticisms associated with Milbank and Shakespeare, that management is exclusively modernist and instrumental,<sup>3</sup> are, at best, inadequate. I will then explore the range of theoretical approaches now available to organisations, drawing heavily on the work of Gareth Morgan. His *Images of Organisation* remains a classic account of the field, opening it up

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<sup>1</sup> Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 66.

<sup>2</sup> Hatch, *Organization Theory*.

<sup>3</sup> John Milbank, "Stale Expressions,"; Shakespeare, *Being the Body of Christ*.

through an exploration of its key metaphors.<sup>4</sup> I shall use Morgan as a way of taking stock of the major ideas in organisation theory, those current at the time when Rudge, Granfield and Thung were writing and those that have been developed since. His presentation of the principal approaches to organisation theory within a scheme suggested by the leading images or metaphors used by organisational writers has been particularly influential and remains so.<sup>5</sup> My process is, inevitably, selective. I make no pretence of covering the latest developments in organisation theory and have chosen to neglect some theoretical work of considerable contemporary influence, such as new institutionalism,<sup>6</sup> social network theory<sup>7</sup> and organisational identity theory.<sup>8</sup> I acknowledge that all of these theories (and others) are likely have a great deal to offer to churches. My aim is to demonstrate that the field of organisation theory offers a range of helpful and apt possibilities for the Church of England, especially in relation to the question of adaptivity in the face of new challenges. This is better served by exploring the breadth of established theorising than by concentrating on the latest ideas. I will proceed by considering each of Morgan's "images of organisation" in turn, linked to some preliminary suggestions about application in the Church of England, along with some initial ecclesiological reflection and critical commentary. In drawing thus on Morgan's work I am not rejecting the theoretical work used by earlier writers on church and organisation (discussed in chapter two) but significantly augmenting it. I argue that there is now a much greater recognition of the various dimensions of organisational life and a more varied and critical range of approaches available, which may be used by a discerning and discriminating church.

## **5.2 The epistemology and understanding of society informing organisation theory**

I start by considering the growth of interest in the intellectual assumptions that have informed theorising about organisations. This development is usually traced to the work of Burrell and Morgan whose discussion of fundamental ideas underpinning organisation theory

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<sup>4</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Anders Örtengren, Linda L. Putnam and Kiran Trehan, "Beyond Morgan's Eight Metaphors: Adding to and Developing Organization Theory," *Human Relations (New York)* 69, no. 4 (2016), 875-889.

<sup>6</sup> Royston Greenwood et al., *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism*, 1. publ. ed. (GB: Sage Publications Ltd, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Charles Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks: Theories, Concepts and Findings* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Mary Jo Hatch and Majken Schultz, eds., *Organizational Identity*, 1. publ. ed. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004).

has had a profound influence on the field ever since.<sup>9</sup> Their suggestion that organisational theories could be categorised according to the epistemology and view of the nature of society employed by theorists, opened up both a debate and a new set of possibilities. I want to show that organisation theory is by no means limited to functionalist and instrumentalising assumptions but brings together a range of helpful and sometimes radical perspectives. I do not believe that organisation theory has ever been quite so limited in its outlook as critics such as Shakespeare and Milbank suggest but the diversification evident in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is notable. Burrell and Morgan's work played an important role in this process. They suggested four "paradigms" within which theories about organisation could be placed (see fig. 5.1).

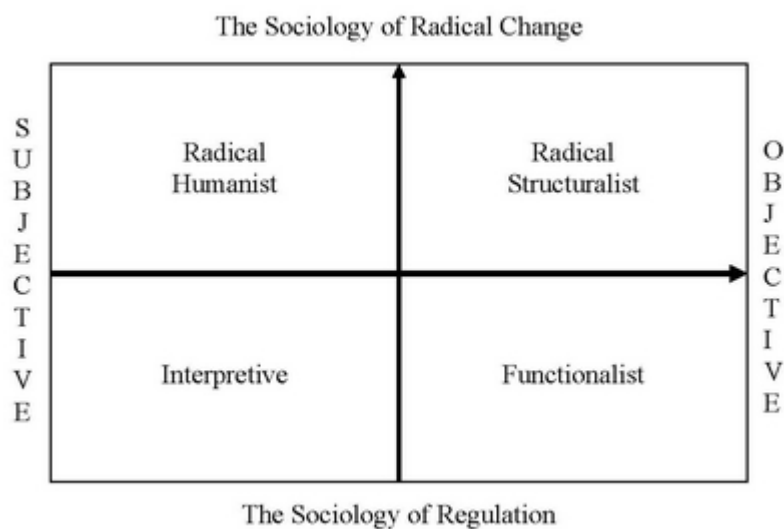


Fig 5.1 Burrell and Morgan's four paradigms of organisation theory.

Burrell and Morgan's framework offers a way of appreciating the nature or contribution of particular organisation theories according to their underlying assumptions about knowledge (emphasising objectivity or subjectivity) and about society (inclined to affirm/regulate or critique/change society). These two axes create four basic possible positions, seen in fig 5.1 above. The interpretive paradigm sees the world as an emergent social process and seeks to understand society as it is, as a subjective experience. Radical humanism is also subjective, but seeks to reform society, with special emphasis on the development of human potential. Radical structuralism wishes to change society with an emphasis on the influence of structure and power relationships. Functionalism tends to accept the status quo and to see organisations

<sup>9</sup> Burrell, *Sociological Paradigms*.

as mechanisms for achieving pre-determined organisational and social goals.<sup>10</sup> Organisation theories can be classified by being placed in one of these boxes, or paradigms. For example, Burrell and Morgan suggest that many of the most influential writers in the field of organisation theory had largely operated within the paradigm that they designate “functionalist”. This they describe as “characterised by a concern for providing explanations of *the status quo, social order, consensus, social integration, solidarity, need satisfaction and actuality*. It approaches these general sociological concerns from a standpoint which tends to be *realist, positivist, determinist and nomothetic*”.<sup>11</sup> Theorists working in this tradition tend to be confident that the organisation is a real entity, about which knowledge can be objectively and comprehensively gathered and analysed using approaches like those used in the natural sciences. This is, essentially, the modernist position.<sup>12</sup> In addition, Burrell and Morgan’s framework created a space in which it became possible to develop, place and receive theories with different underlying assumptions, such as those that were less inclined to see organisations as real entities or more hostile to the power claims made, explicitly or implicitly, by organisations and the societies that support them.<sup>13</sup>

If we approach ecclesial bodies using this framework it might, first, help them in the same way as it helps any organisation, that is, by highlighting and illuminating the question of the beliefs that lie behind theories that might otherwise be hard to discriminate between. To what extent might these assumptions limit the degree to which a church can engage with contemporary organisation theory, or find it useful and informative? On the question of the theological view of society, the tradition is somewhat complex and paradoxical. On the basis of the arguments I made in chapter three I suggest that theology may see society as at once good, sinful and the arena of God’s redemptive activity. Daniel Hardy has a particularly strong conception of this: he argues for the recovery of a sense that the gift of what he calls “sociality” is part of the created order, and justifies his argument by reference to a Trinitarian conception of God.<sup>14</sup> On this basis Christians can affirm the basic goodness of society as part of God’s creation, critique its failures as part of a theological recognition of the fallenness of the world, offer a vision of society renewed and whole based on the eschatological hope of the Kingdom of

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<sup>10</sup> Burrell, *Sociological Paradigms*, 22-37.

<sup>11</sup> Burrell, *Sociological Paradigms*, 26.

<sup>12</sup> Hatch, *Organization Theory*, 15.

<sup>13</sup> Hatch, *Organization Theory*, 15.

<sup>14</sup> Hardy, *Finding the Church*.

God, and work now, with others, towards the realisation of that hope in the present. As a result, the church both affirms and challenges aspects of the social order.

On the question of knowledge, the discussion in chapter three offered two linked but distinct perspectives. The first of these is explicitly theological and emphasises the limits placed on knowledge by human finitude and sin. We know truly, and our knowledge is rooted in the order in the universe created by God. Because of our creatureliness, however, we only know in part, and because of our disposition to sin our knowledge is distorted. The second is explicitly epistemological. Critical realism affirms epistemic relativism which avoids collapsing ontology and epistemology, with the effect that it affirms the reality which we seek to know but acknowledges the subjectivity which places limits on that knowledge. This theologically informed critical realism sees society as 'real' (as opposed to a purely subjective construct) but, at the same time, shares a sense of the limits on knowledge created by both human capacities and context/subjectivity.

Burrell and Morgan place approaches to organisation within their scheme, that is, according to their epistemological assumptions and beliefs about society.<sup>15</sup> The arguments I have made suggest that no single one of Burrell and Morgan's paradigms is a natural 'fit' for the churches or for theology. On the other hand, in principle, a church should be able to engage positively (though critically) with ideas emanating from each quarter of Burrell and Morgan's basic typology. This helps churchmen and women to address the concern they may feel to be able to understand the elements of ideology in organisation theory before engaging with its proposals. It also has the effect of opening up the range of organisational perspectives that might have relevance to the Church of England and of offering new dimensions or aspects of organisational life to consider when seeking to live out the sacramental vocation of that church. These include perspectives that go well beyond the concern for efficient operation, though I shall argue that this too has its place.

Another way of looking at this this would be to say that there is, perhaps, potential in this way of thinking about organisations to challenge assumptions which may be in play about the role of the Church of England in public life. The Church of England is an established church bound into the governance and law of the United Kingdom. Its role has, arguably, been to serve

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<sup>15</sup> Burrell, *Sociological Paradigms*, 30-31.

and maintain what has been assumed to be a Christian society. As we saw in the last chapter, according to Philip Thomas this has sometimes led the church to occupy a rather uncritical role in society.<sup>16</sup> If there is truth in the thesis that the UK is now “post-Christendom” (as Stuart Murray puts it)<sup>17</sup> perhaps that role needs to change and the Church of England become more critical of the society and establishment in which it is embedded and rediscover a ‘prophetic’ voice. On this understanding, the Church of England might find it useful to engage with organisation theories more inclined to challenge acceptance of the social status quo.

### 5.3 Different ways of viewing organisations: a metaphorical approach

The next step in my account is to consider how the differences between the perspectives opened up by the consideration of underlying assumptions came to both define and divide the field of organisation theory. According to Mary Jo Hatch, Burrell and Morgan’s work was followed by the so-called “paradigm wars”.<sup>18</sup> Some theorists were disturbed as their proposals threatened the common assumption that theorists were all doing similar work in compatible ways.<sup>19</sup> Some rejected the idea that theories could be boxed into paradigms or became concerned that the impact would be the proliferation of theoretical approaches that could not be compared because of their differences in basic assumptions.<sup>20</sup> Morgan went on to develop the typology into an exploration of the different metaphors typically employed across the range of organisation theory, by interpretivist and postmodern as well as more modernist thinkers. Ortenblad et al report one critique of Morgan’s work that it “homogenizes the ideological roots of different metaphors by treating them as optional lenses for viewing organisational reality”.<sup>21</sup> In other words, some suggest that Morgan’s work ignores the question of ideological incompatibility that may be held to characterise the theories behind the metaphors or images he uses. Another way of looking at it, however, and one I prefer, is to say that by presenting the range of approaches to and philosophies underpinning theories about organisation in metaphorical terms Morgan invites the reader not so much to consider which is most accurate

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<sup>16</sup> Philip H. E. Thomas, "Doctrine of the Church," 256.

<sup>17</sup> Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2018), 179.

<sup>18</sup> Hatch, *Organization Theory*, 325-328.

<sup>19</sup> Hatch, *Organization Theory*, 326.

<sup>20</sup> Hatch, *Organization Theory*, 327.

<sup>21</sup> Ortenblad, "Beyond Morgan's Eight Metaphors," 878.



or 'true' but to 'try looking at the organisation like this'. Having done so one may find a range of resources for illuminating and assisting with "problematic situations".<sup>22</sup> What is illuminating or useful may vary according to the particular problem or challenge facing the organisation.

Seeing the different theoretical approaches as a series of different ways of looking at organisations is also consistent with the critical realist stance I have adopted throughout in that it assumes that there is no vantage point from which the complexities of any organisation can be comprehended either entirely or objectively, even if there will be epistemological differences with the theories of organisation in some cases. Further, there is no single philosophical underpinning that provides an adequate response to every situation: organisations are multi-faceted, stratified realities.<sup>23</sup> Metaphors offer us a way of working with and thinking about an organisation, whilst acknowledging the incompleteness of the perspective.<sup>24</sup> In a somewhat similar way perhaps, the New Testament does not offer a comprehensive ecclesiological model, as we saw in the earlier discussion of the work of Healy and Haight but instead employs metaphors (e.g. "Body of Christ", "People of God") which have value in similar terms, in that each discloses something essential about a church but none is capable of summing up a church on its own.<sup>25</sup>

I am arguing that one way of looking at the range of organisational metaphors proposed in the organisational literature and gathered by Morgan is to see them as additions to the existing range of possible ways of viewing, exploring and theorising about the nature of church. These images do not have the sacramental dimension associated with more explicitly theological metaphors, but nevertheless organisational metaphors may perhaps still illuminate the nature and working of churches as embodied, concrete phenomena. Each of these metaphors has strengths and weaknesses and, on their own, offer a valuable but partial view of the organisation. My intention here is not to suggest that Morgan's account of these metaphors is, or is not definitive, but simply to use it as a framework for considering what organisation theory might have to say to and about the Church of England – as an embodied, concrete phenomenon – through its principal concepts. Morgan's work was reassessed recently by Ortenblad et al in a special edition of *Human Relations* in which a number of organisational

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<sup>22</sup> Robert L. Flood and Michael C. Jackson, *Creative Problem Solving: Total Systems Intervention*, Repr. ed. (Chichester: Wiley, 1993), 2.

<sup>23</sup> Collier, *Critical Realism*, 131.

<sup>24</sup> Flood, *Creative Problem Solving*, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 34.

theorists were invited to suggest additional metaphors to Morgan's list and/or to investigate the use, development and relative importance of metaphors already in his list.<sup>26</sup> The results, for example, suggest that Morgan's list is almost certainly not exhaustive,<sup>27</sup> that some of the metaphors are more influential than others<sup>28</sup> and that some operate at deeper levels than others.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, Morgan's account remains a "seminal" text, a powerful and influential "comprehensive overview of organisation theory and a set of diverse perspectives to aid research".<sup>30</sup> It is worth noting also that two of the images ("psychic prison" and "instrument of domination") are more pejorative than the others, a fact which reflects the ethical corrective intended in those images.

Morgan offers eight metaphors through which he is able to tell the story of most of the main ideas found in organisation theory and which I will explore in turn, with a concern to set out the main perspectives and ideas; indicate strengths and weaknesses; make some preliminary suggestions about relevance to the contemporary Church of England; and provide some initial ecclesiological commentary. I want, overall, to provide a sense of the range of organisational perspectives available to the Church of England. As I do so I will gather material which will allow me to reflect on choices actually made (implicitly or explicitly) by those engaged in the Renewal and Reform process in the analysis of empirical data which will be presented in chapters seven and eight. Ortenblad et al provide a useful summary of the eight metaphors:

1. The **machine** metaphor encompasses such theories as Taylor's scientific management, Weber's bureaucracy and views of organisations that emphasize closed systems, efficiency and mechanical features of organisations.
2. The **organism** metaphor depicts organisations as open systems that focus on the human relations and contingency theories.
3. The **brain** metaphor focuses on the cognitive features of organisations and encompasses learning theories and cybernetics.
4. The **culture** metaphor emphasizes symbolic and informal aspects of organisations as well as the creation of shared meanings among actors.

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<sup>26</sup> Ortenblad, "Beyond Morgan's Eight Metaphors,".

<sup>27</sup> Ortenblad, "Beyond Morgan's Eight Metaphors," 878.

<sup>28</sup> Ortenblad, "Beyond Morgan's Eight Metaphors," 879.

<sup>29</sup> Ortenblad, "Beyond Morgan's Eight Metaphors," 884.

<sup>30</sup> Ortenblad, "Beyond Morgan's Eight Metaphors," 876.

5. The **political system** metaphor encompasses stakeholder theories, diversity of interests, and conflict and power in organisations.

6. The **psychic prison** metaphor draws from psychoanalytical theories to examine the psyche, the unconscious, and ways that organisations entrap their members.

7. The **flux and transformation** metaphor emphasizes processes, self-reference and unpredictability through embracing theories of autopoiesis, chaos and complexity in organisations.

8. The **instrument of domination** metaphor draws from Marxist and critical theories to highlight exploitation, control and unequal distribution of power performed in and by organisations.<sup>31</sup>

### *Machine*

Machine is the metaphor associated with what is elsewhere called classical theory<sup>32</sup> and is usually regarded as modernist in its assumptions, or functionalist, in Burrell and Morgan's terms.<sup>33</sup> Associated with the rise of large scale manufacturing industry and the development of government departments, the machine metaphor typically refers to a concern for order, hierarchy, division of tasks, process improvement, impersonal, professional management, overseen by committees and a preoccupation with efficiency. The organisation is viewed as a mechanism which must be kept running smoothly, according to a pre-determined purpose, in which cost must be minimised and profitable output maximised. It is concerned with the development of efficient, repeatable and predictable processes.<sup>34</sup> Another common term for organisations of this type is bureaucracy.

This is the model that Rudge rejects for the church<sup>35</sup> and that Weber saw as an "iron cage" for humanity<sup>36</sup> but which has been and remains highly influential in the way organisations are conceived, structured and managed, often with the apparent assumption that its precepts are unquestioned organisational norms, which, in a sense they are. Modern franchised fast food chains are excellent examples of the continuing influence of this model. It is hard to imagine an organisation of any scale without an organisation chart, functional departments, a set of job descriptions and a budget. This, of course, only highlights the success of this model.

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<sup>31</sup> Örtenblad, "Beyond Morgan's Eight Metaphors," 875. My emphases in bold.

<sup>32</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 18.

<sup>33</sup> Burrell, *Sociological Paradigms*.

<sup>34</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*; Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management*; Max Weber and Stephen Kalberg, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 9. print. ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>35</sup> Rudge, *Ministry and Management*.

<sup>36</sup> Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

The goal of efficient operation remains an understandable preoccupation of most organisations. It is an approach that works well where the tasks are straightforward; where the environment is stable; where the human parts are compliant and when the ability to keep producing the same product is important. It has been criticised, however, from its earliest days, chiefly for its disregard of the human membership of the organisation, but also for its difficulties in responding to changing circumstances and the tendency to reduce initiative and de-skill individuals. The difficulty with managing change is exacerbated by the fact that such organisations are so divided by function that it is difficult for anyone in them to see the whole. Problems are missed or seen through departmental lenses only and the desire to specify what people are expected to do has the tendency to ensure also that anything not in the specified task-list is ignored, as 'not my job'. In organisations heavily under the influence of this metaphor change usually requires an additional bureaucracy created for that purpose and there is a tendency either to respond to large scale problems by replacing or tinkering with the parts of the machine or by creating a set of special initiatives that run alongside 'business as usual'.<sup>37</sup>

According to Rudge ideas associated with the machine metaphor found a considerable place in the Church of England.<sup>38</sup> This observation was made some time ago but still seems apt because of the growth of bureaucracy in that church. According to Andrew Chandler, the Church of England became much more centralised in the 20<sup>th</sup> century through the creation of central institutions.<sup>39</sup> This has given the national church an equivalent of the civil service in the form of the 'national church institutions' (NCIs), also divided departmentally. The pattern is replicated in dioceses where there are support bodies that are structured functionally and which operate through committees. It at least appears that attempts to change the Church of England so as to address problem situations often take the form of re-structures and initiatives led by specially created bodies – the Church of England's Renewal and Reform programme with its specially created national directorate may be an example. One question for the Church of England would be the extent to which the influence of the thinking and practice associated with the machine metaphor restricts the capacity of that church to respond appropriately and in timely fashion to changes in its environment. Management in the style of the machine metaphor, with its departmentalised structure and mindset, depends on a strong and unified

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<sup>37</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 11-31.

<sup>38</sup> Rudge, *Ministry and Management*, 35ff.

<sup>39</sup> Chandler, *The Church of England in the Twentieth Century*.

command and control structure at the top of the organisation to provide coordination and direction.<sup>40</sup> This is not readily available in the Church of England which has the bureaucracy associated with the machine metaphor but lacks the clear lines of responsibility, accountability and control which often accompany it. The power relations between the central organisations of the Church of England are remarkably unclear. Bishops have a high degree of independence and so, in turn, do parishes. In the 1990s the Turnbull Report expressed concern that the complicated and bureaucratic organisational form of the Church of England prevented the church from responding to contemporary challenges and made desirable change difficult.<sup>41</sup> It recommended the formation of the Archbishops' Council as a body to bring coherence and direction to the structures and systems of the national church. It is not clear that the subsequent formation of that body has provided the intended results. Hardy, for example argues for a more radical reassessment of the role and shape of Anglican polity.<sup>42</sup>

When those theologians sceptical of the value of organisational thinking complain about managerialism it appears that it is this metaphor of organisation and its associated principles and practices that they are principally rejecting. Shakespeare makes a number of criticisms of the way that "technique-oriented and missional-focused organisational concepts are used in the church".<sup>43</sup> He assesses whether they are "true to the nature and character of the church" and finds them reflective of

assumptions that correlate with the emergence of a bureaucratic or instrumental managerial rationality through the increase and proliferation of training and manuals that map means to predetermined ends...through the implementation of particular rationalized strategies.<sup>44</sup>

This does read as a summary of some aspects of the thinking and practice associated with the machine metaphor. In the light of my exposition of my theological position and understanding of church in earlier chapters I concede that the de-humanising aspects of the practice associated with this metaphor do, indeed, seem a poor fit for churches. The metaphor seems less than apt if the churches are to act as a sign of God's intent for human sociality in the world,<sup>45</sup> and reflect the relationships at the heart of the Trinity. As I argued in chapter three,

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<sup>40</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 19.

<sup>41</sup> The Archbishops' Commission, *Working as One Body*.

<sup>42</sup> Hardy, *Finding the Church*, 151.

<sup>43</sup> Shakespeare, *Being the Body of Christ*, 38.

<sup>44</sup> Shakespeare, *Being the Body of Christ*, 38.

<sup>45</sup> Hardy, *Finding the Church*.

however, efficiency and good process can be understood as desirable features of a church for those it serves and, in several respects, for those who serve it: those who work for a church usually prefer to be paid the correct amount, on time, every time. It seems hard to imagine any organisation sustaining itself over time without at least some of the structure, efficiency and process associated with this approach. It seems likely that the influence of the ideas and practices associated with this metaphor have contributed to the stability of the mainstream churches and helped to rescue them from some of the follies perpetrated by some churches more vulnerable to the influence of charismatic individuals or local eccentricities (for example, the so-called “new churches”).<sup>46</sup> It may have contributed to the notable degree of continuity and quality in the ministry still recognised as being provided by the Church of England.<sup>47</sup> Elements associated with the machine metaphor may well be necessary aspects of organisational life, and part of an inevitable “routinization of charisma” in Weber’s terms.<sup>48</sup>

### *Organism*

The organism metaphor begins by considering organisations as living systems, existing in a wider environment on which they depend for the satisfaction of various needs.<sup>49</sup> Some types of organisation are better adapted to certain environments than others: bureaucratic organisations are more effective in stable environments. Morgan sees the simple move away from mechanistic metaphors to biological metaphors as the most significant influence on organisation theory over the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, “guiding our attention toward the more general issues of survival, organisation-environment relations and organisational effectiveness. Goals, structures and efficiency now become subsidiary to problems of survival”.<sup>50</sup> This suggests that organisations either have, at least for themselves, intrinsic value, or possess a kind of instinctual urge to maintain themselves, irrespective of their value to others or to society with some risk of consequent loss of a sense of the organisation as the product of human intention with a role in society.

According to Morgan organisations began to be seen as organisms following the Hawthorne Studies, led by Mayo in the 1920s and 30s, in which the importance of social needs and informal interactions in organisational life were identified. The first impact of this was the

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<sup>46</sup> Andrew G. Walker, Andrew D. Kinsey and William J. Abraham, *Notes from a Wayward Son: A Miscellany* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015).

<sup>47</sup> Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain*.

<sup>48</sup> Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

<sup>49</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 33.

<sup>50</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 34.

development of what is usually called human relations theory, that is, a concern with creating an environment in which individual and organisational needs are integrated.<sup>51</sup> This remains an influential idea, captured in such common organisational aphorisms as the assertion that 'people are our greatest asset'. The human relations aspect of this metaphor has a clear resonance for churches. The notion of church as sacrament is, according to both Dulles and ARCIC II, closely linked to, perhaps dependent on, an understanding of the church as communion.<sup>52</sup> A church is the community of those brought into relation to Christ and to one another. These concepts are closely linked to the notion of church as Body of Christ, in which all play a part according to the gifts of God (1 Corinthians 12):<sup>53</sup> the thinking associated with this metaphor should be able to help a church understand this aspect of its life and increase its quality. A weakness of human relations theory, however, is that it can militate against the notion of the organisation as a construct that serves a distinct purpose, larger than the concerns of individual members.<sup>54</sup> This leads me to question whether there is the right balance today within Church of England churches between the needs of individuals and groups within its membership and those of the larger mission of that church, particularly to those outside it. Hardy argues that the Church of England needs to match a greater "intensity" in its "understanding and following of the gospel" with more concern for what he calls "range", "affinity" and "mediation".<sup>55</sup>

The preference for biological metaphors led also to the development of the idea of the organisation as an "open system", that is, as a phenomenon that exists as a bounded entity, yet in a relationship of dependence with its environment.<sup>56</sup> In open systems thinking the organisation is composed of a complex network of relationships in which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts: systems have emergent properties, like the human body, or the climate. Organisations are open systems that have "negative entropy": they both give and receive resources to and from the wider environment: this interaction is necessary to counter entropy. Organisations are not static, but need to be in a state of dynamic equilibrium, always adapting to change without and within. Organisations need "requisite variety", that is, the

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<sup>51</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 36.

<sup>52</sup> Dulles, *Models of the Church*; The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, "Church as Communion".

<sup>53</sup> Rudge, *Ministry and Management*, 43.

<sup>54</sup> Beckford, *Quality*, 50.

<sup>55</sup> Hardy, *Finding the Church*, 148.

<sup>56</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 38.

capacity to match the range and number of “states” found in the environment with internal “states”.<sup>57</sup>

The strengths of the “open system” concept include the recognition of the importance of the environment, and of meeting organisational needs. Weaknesses include a tendency, implicit in the biological metaphor and the notion of interacting parts working together for survival and adaptation, to understate the nature of organisations as socially constructed phenomena and to reduce the emphasis on human agency. Open systems approaches can emphasise the notion of alignment and working together to the extent that elements of conflict or disagreement or individual interests can be underplayed or ignored. There is some risk that the biological metaphor introduces a kind of Darwinian determinism.<sup>58</sup>

Despite these dangers, however, the open systems aspect of this metaphor has much resonance for the church. I connect it with the view offered by Percy of the church as a living organism organically embedded in its context.<sup>59</sup> The open systems approach also raises questions for the contemporary Church of England. For example, on the open systems view the healthy organisation is focused on a relationship of giving and receiving with the world outside. There are voices in the Church of England today concerned that this perspective is being lost or insufficiently emphasised and suggesting that the Church of England is too focused on its internal concerns.<sup>60</sup> Another question might be, where should the Church of England look for renewing energy? On the open systems view energy and resources are found outside the system itself, in the wider environment. This perspective has resonance with the theological idea explored in chapter three that a Trinitarian understanding of God leads to a conviction that God might offer resources for the churches from outside of their own boundaries. There will be Christians, such as John Milbank, who doubt the value of the products of the secular world and emphasise the opposition between Christ and the world’s intellectual traditions.<sup>61</sup> I accept that the resources of the world (including organisation theory) affected as they are by sin, should always be used with discrimination. The principal argument of this thesis, however, has been that because “all things are ‘in Christ’, then this must relate to social and cultural expressions”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 40-41.

<sup>58</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 69.

<sup>59</sup> Percy, *Anglicanism*, 201.

<sup>60</sup> Donald McFadyen and Michael Turnbull, *The State of the Church and the Church of the State: Re-Imagining the Church of England for our World Today*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2012), 67; Hardy, *Finding the Church*, 148.

<sup>61</sup> Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*.

<sup>62</sup> Ward, *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, 3.



and that it follows from this that the challenge to find resources outside the church has theological warrant. In chapter three I argued for the proposition that we find God at work in the world in and through a range of apparently secular 'products' on the basis of the incarnation and the doctrine of the Trinity. In chapter four I argued that churches have, in fact, been influenced by and influenced other organisations and made use of what their context has offered. Sometimes when the church does seek such external help criticism follows. The Renewal and Reform programme contains an example, in *The Green Report*,<sup>63</sup> which drew on ideas and language drawn from the world of business but was heavily criticised by some for doing so.<sup>64</sup> I shall consider the report in my account of the R&R documents in chapter seven.

### *Brain*

It would seem that organisations all require some mechanism of control if they are to remain organised and not become chaotic and ineffective. They also need to be able to adapt appropriately to changes in the environment if they are to remain viable. The brain metaphor emerged as a way of thinking about how these tasks might be achieved in a way that differed from the command and control ideas associated with the machine metaphor. Instead, organisations might be managed through a focus on the sharing and processing of information (employing concepts such as negative feedback and homeostasis) and subsequent learning, creating a kind of organisational intelligence.<sup>65</sup> Cybernetics is the study of how organisations manage "processes of information exchange through which machines and organisms engage in self-regulating behaviours that maintain steady states".<sup>66</sup> The main concern is the question of how organisations can manage change through learning.

This is a development in open systems thinking and it emphasises change in a way uncharacteristic of the machine metaphor. We have seen how the organisation, if seen as an open system, cannot be understood as unchanging, but as constantly adapting to its environment. This can, at first sight, seem hard to reconcile with the idea of the organisation retaining a distinct purpose and identity, but it is important to understand that the systems concept is of dynamic equilibrium, that is of changing whilst retaining essential identity. The thinking associated with the brain metaphor challenges the organisation to consider whether it is

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<sup>63</sup> Green, *Talent Management for Future Leaders*.

<sup>64</sup> Martyn Percy, "It's Not an Organization, it's the Body of Christ,".

<sup>65</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*; Beer, *Diagnosing the System for Organizations*; Beckford, *The Intelligent Organisation*.

<sup>66</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 81.

organised in such a way as to routinely facilitate learning, change and growth. An additional feature of this metaphor is that those in management understand their core activity to be the negotiation of change: this is a far different emphasis in the conception of leadership from that found in the Weberian traditional model of authority, where change is not expected<sup>67</sup> and in the machine metaphor, where change requires special structures and specialist management.<sup>68</sup>

Systems theories associated with the brain metaphor, such as the Viable Systems Model, develop distinct approaches to the task of management.<sup>69</sup> I will discuss these ideas much more fully in the next chapter, but I will note now (referring to Beckford's development of Beer's ideas)<sup>70</sup> that organisational cybernetics provides a kind of 'map' of how the organisation works, not in the terms of the 'org chart' but in terms of the activities that are required to create the desired outcomes. This is as much a mental map as a guide to structural design or reform, though the latter might be required. The cybernetic notion of homeostasis and organisational control through learning implies an organisational hierarchy, and accepts concepts such as management, but emphasises role rather than status and task over notions of heroism or charisma. It is based on a concept of the type of management required at different 'levels' in the organisation, a type of management closely related to the type of information available to the managers at those different levels. Those in roles further 'up' the organisation are, in the terms associated with the brain metaphor, chiefly distinguished by having better access to information about the wider organisational landscape. Change is at least partly achieved by the management approach shifting to a focus on what the knowledge available to managers at different levels best enables them to contribute to the fulfilment of organisational purpose: this is a behavioural change first and foremost. The swift application of learning gleaned through feedback is the primary managerial task. This is best served by autonomy: those who work in the organisation should have as much autonomy as is consistent with the maintenance of common purpose in the organisation.<sup>71</sup>

Morgan argues that a weakness of this model is that it is somewhat idealistic – organisational leaders find it difficult to “let go” of command and control in the way suggested.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Rudge, *Ministry and Management*, 23-24.

<sup>68</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 11-31.

<sup>69</sup> Beer, *Diagnosing the System for Organizations*.

<sup>70</sup> Beckford, *The Intelligent Organisation*.

<sup>71</sup> Beckford, *The Intelligent Organisation*.

<sup>72</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 114.

He also suggests that it is not always clear what or whose purposes are being served by the learning accrued within the organisation. Furthermore, it can feel somewhat impersonal: how does the model accommodate the quirks, aspirations and shared or contested beliefs of actual human beings?

One question these conceptions raise for the Church of England is how it conceives its polity and how its leaders conceive their role. I argued, in the last chapter, that in the Anglican tradition, the church's polity is neither regarded as fixed nor understood to possess a form that is part of the gift of God in founding the church. It does not, however, always seem like that in practice. Hardy agrees that its polity is not part of the essential identity of the Anglican church and goes on to argue that it must be developed to meet the demands of maintaining an effective Christian witness in today's world.<sup>73</sup> Bishops should understand themselves as having a strategic role in ensuring the church is able to maintain the required intensity, range, affinity and mediation to sustain Christian witness in today's world.<sup>74</sup> The question is raised as to whether Church of England clergy and other leaders understand their role as being, at least in part, to help that church to adapt to changes in the world around. It seems likely that the current emphasis on change, exemplified in Renewal and Reform, has raised awareness of the need to 'lead change' but I am not sure there is a widely accepted concept of this as a basic, essential and recurrent element in the management task.

The thinking associated with this metaphor presents a challenge to the notion of hierarchy as status which is a common feature of organisational life. That thinking also raises ecclesiological questions. The Church of England sees the roles of those occupying formal positions of responsibility in ways which differ significantly from those in secular management roles. Ordained ministry is seen as a gift of God, an extension of the divine work and ordination as a sacred trust rather than as a management role accompanied by a job description.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, the overt accountability to God (distinguished from other "stakeholders") is described as a distinctive feature of the church by Torry.<sup>76</sup> The Christian tradition is of leadership as service, a concept originating in the life and sayings of Jesus (e.g. Mark 20.25-27).

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<sup>73</sup> Hardy, *Finding the Church*, 147ff.

<sup>74</sup> Hardy, *Finding the Church*, 152.

<sup>75</sup> *Common Worship Ordination Services*, (London: Church House Publishing, 2007).

<sup>76</sup> Torry, *Managing Religion*, 12.

In practice, however, leadership roles in the churches can be interpreted as reflecting a notion of a God-given hierarchy of status and, with it, a fixed view of social order.<sup>77</sup> I suggest that the thinking associated with the metaphor of the brain can serve as a way of emphasising and operationalising for the churches' ministers, lay or ordained, the notion of service and of all playing a role in the fulfilment of God's dynamic purposes. It has the potential to reinforce an understanding that leadership roles are part of the means by which a church acts as one body in the pursuit of a common purpose.<sup>78</sup> The Church of England is organised in a way that offers a high level of autonomy to its officers and church bodies at all levels. Reflecting on the diversity and political division found within the Church of England discussed in the previous chapter, we might wonder what level of 'common purpose' might or could be expected of that church. This is a theme to which I will also return in chapter six.

### *Culture*

A corrective to the weaknesses of the brain metaphor may be provided by the metaphor of culture. Culture is described by Schein as the way that fundamental (and sometimes, unconscious) assumptions about the world are then reflected in practice and artefacts within organisations.<sup>79</sup> Organisation itself may be seen as a culturally constructed phenomenon; organisations operate within larger cultural and social contexts and individual organisations can be seen as socially constructed realities.<sup>80</sup> Organisations, as mini-societies, may differ from each other quite markedly. These differences can be classified: for example, as clans (close-knit groups valuing belonging) or hierarchies (more formal, valuing responsibility) or "adhocracies" (flexible and valuing innovation) or markets (focused externally, valuing competing in the market-place).<sup>81</sup> It is usually considered very difficult to make fundamental changes in these cultures, because they are not only the product of human interaction over a period and thus part of what people value about organisations,<sup>82</sup> but they present as a kind of inter-subjective reality that transcends the individuals involved: the individuals involved come and go, but the culture does not. Schemes that classify cultures may have some value, but it is also interesting to consider the extent to which organisations have unique cultures.

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<sup>77</sup> Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 91.

<sup>78</sup> Hardy, *Finding the Church*, 152.

<sup>79</sup> Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 3. ed. ed. (San Francisco, Calif: Jossey-Bass, 2004).

<sup>80</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 118ff.

<sup>81</sup> Kim S. Cameron and Robert E. Quinn, *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture: Based on the Competing Values Framework* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1999).

<sup>82</sup> Selznick, *Leadership and Administration*.

I referred above to Schein's argument that cultures reflect underlying values and beliefs. He is clear also that there is frequently a gap between what is espoused and what is actually valued. This can create a situation where an organisation is claiming to be something it is not and deluding itself in the process. Schein speaks of the need to identify the gap between the espoused and actual values of an organisation if it is to be able to change constructively, or in ways that allow it to meet changing circumstances effectively and he develops a process designed for that purpose.<sup>83</sup> Argyris developed a similar theory of the need to uncover organisational assumptions, indicated by the gap between beliefs as espoused and those practiced. This gap is maintained through the adoption of "defensive routines" which prevent organisational learning and change.<sup>84</sup> Organisational culture is remarkably persistent in the sense that it can become a serious obstacle to new ways of thinking and operating even when it seems obvious that the old model is no longer working as intended. If the underlying assumptions and contradictions of the culture can be brought into the light, members of the organisation have choices they may not have felt they had before about what they wish to maintain, and what they might change or discard.

The culture metaphor's strengths include the recognition of the symbolic significance of nearly all aspects of organisational life, from the design of meeting rooms, to the presence of pews in churches and the recognition of the importance of shared schemes of meaning. Morgan observes that the idea can be used negatively: to simplify that which is highly complex, and to manipulate values and loyalties in a way that pays lip service to the idea of genuinely shared meaning, through the creation of organisational "buzz" words and phrases. Once again, it is important to ask whose interests are being served when the concept of culture is evoked.<sup>85</sup>

A key question, perhaps, for the contemporary Church of England is the extent to which its culture and sub-cultures, so long in the making and, in many ways, so distinct, help or hinder in its current situation. Culture is so pervasive that it is difficult to see clearly, which is why Schein and Argyris develop processes for revealing it.<sup>86</sup> Anglicans might ask about the degree to which there is an unrecognised gap between the Church of England's espoused and actual values. Turnbull and McFadyen saw something like this behind the difficulty and confusion felt by the

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<sup>83</sup> Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*.

<sup>84</sup> Chris Argyris, *Inner Contradictions of Rigorous Research*, 1. printing ed. (New York: Acad. Press, 1980).

<sup>85</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 146.

<sup>86</sup> Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*; Chris Argyris and Donald A. Schön, *Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness*, 1. ed., 8. print. ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1982).

Chapter of St Paul's Cathedral in responding appropriately to the appearance of Occupy London protestors outside the cathedral in 2011.<sup>87</sup>

Within this metaphor the key to working with culture productively is seeing it more clearly, and in particular, to understand how assumptions and historic practices have come to ossify some organisational cultures. Through such processes it can become possible to see how the values that underpin cultures might be re-expressed in more positive ways.

From an ecclesiological perspective there may be value in considering the extent to which organisational culture is a means of understanding or talking about the way in which the church takes an embodied form with both a theological and human, contextual identity.<sup>88</sup> If this is the case then it emphasises how culture is at best a great strength of the churches, and at worst, a necessary evil. It suggests that a key move for any attempt to create productive change in the Church of England is to understand and work positively with the culture and sub-cultures within it. Culture change is a complex challenge involving "the mind-sets, visions, paradigms, images, metaphors, beliefs and shared meanings" that sustain organisations.<sup>89</sup> A question for Renewal and Reform might be the extent to which it recognises this consideration with sufficient depth.

#### *Political system*

I have mentioned the question of whose interests are being served in organisations a couple of times. The recognition that organisations are arenas characterised by power, interests and conflict informs the metaphor of organisations as political systems. Traditionally organisations have tended to assume a right to exercise authority over members or employees, exercised through practices which could be characterised as an abuse of power, such as wage slavery. It is not obvious how such practices can be considered compatible with the notion of a free, democratic society.<sup>90</sup> Organisations typically employ a system of 'rule' which is analogous with styles of civil government: autocracy, bureaucracy, direct or representative democracy and so forth. Within organisations people may exercise power and influence for political reasons rather than because of their expertise or other qualifications. Organisational life may be marked

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<sup>87</sup> Michael Turnbull and Donald McFadyen, *The State of the Church and the Church of the State: Re-Imagining the Church of England for our World Today*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2012), 64.

<sup>88</sup> Healy, "Ecclesiology, Ethnography and God," 198-199.

<sup>89</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 138.

<sup>90</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 150.

as much by the need to balance or arbitrate between a range of interests as by objective consideration of the needs of the organisation.

The value of this metaphor is that it allows us to accept and address an inevitable aspect of organisational life and “explode the myth of organizational rationality”.<sup>91</sup> It acknowledges that organisations are not in fact what the machine or organism metaphors can lead us to imagine: groups of people wholly aligned around a common purpose.<sup>92</sup> Organisations may seek to be rational and effective – but rational and effective for whom? A weakness of the metaphor is the tendency to see everything in political terms, and to attribute Machiavellian intent to everyone. The political metaphor itself can become less a way of better understanding the truth than itself a political tool, serving interests. The metaphor can also suggest that organisational divisions can be susceptible to a political solution when, in fact, organisational survival may depend on a solution less orientated towards protecting the range of interests involved.<sup>93</sup>

The Church of England, as an established, national church, operates more clearly than most within a political environment. It is seen by others as a political force in society, and its actions do not only have religious significance. When the church published the *Faith in the City* report<sup>94</sup> it received considerable criticism from the government of the day for its perceived adoption of left-leaning sentiments.<sup>95</sup> In addition, the Church of England holds civil power and continues, for example, to play a part in the British legislative process. The political metaphor might invite the Church of England to consider, for example, the extent to which its exercise of political power has contributed to the decline in churchgoing in an age characterised by suspicion of institutional authority.<sup>96</sup> If Renewal and Reform is to be seen as a response to this decline it might be asked how that programme engages or otherwise with this key characteristic of the Church of England.

In addition, the Church of England is itself, as described in the previous chapter, a body deeply affected by internal political divisions, to the point that it could be described less as a single body of Christians and more as a coalition of competing political groups in the form of its

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<sup>91</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 203.

<sup>92</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 204.

<sup>93</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 205.

<sup>94</sup> Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas, *Faith in the City - A Call for Action by Church and Nation: Report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas* (London: Church House Publishing, 1985).

<sup>95</sup> Nigel Biggar, *Theological Politics: A Critique of 'Faith in the City'*, (Oxford: Latimer House, 1988).

<sup>96</sup> Davie, *Religion in Britain*.

Catholic, Liberal and Evangelical parties, each with their own societies and networks. These interests play out informally, but also through the Church of England's representative democratic body, General Synod. The creation of elected, representative bodies at every level of the church was a key feature of the twentieth century church. The impulse to bring democracy to the Church of England and, with it, greater accountability, seems admirable, but at the national level in particular, it has provided an arena in which that church's longstanding political divisions can be played out. The nature of the Church of England as a body characterised by different political interests is matter of great theological and practical significance. In chapter four I mentioned the challenges to clarity of identity posed by the political divisions within the Church of England. When reporting the empirical investigation into Renewal and Reform in chapters seven and eight I will refer to the way the political divisions within the Church of England affected the development of the R&R programme. I suspect that these issues are rarely faced or addressed directly and that that it might be both possible and productive than it is usually thought to do so.

From an ecclesiological perspective the political metaphor highlights another crucial way in which a church is a human system as well as body of Christ – that it is composed of people with interests and disagreements and agendas. These can be recognised, honoured and managed well (through constructive approaches to conflict, for example) or brushed under the carpet. To ignore these realities of church life and focus on the idealised, spiritual church, is to risk a serious disconnect between the ecclesiological rhetoric and the visible reality. I continue to argue with Healy for an approach that takes more seriously the empirical reality of the concrete church,<sup>97</sup> and suggest that drawing on the insights and practices associated with this metaphor is one important way of doing so.

### *Psychic prison*

The metaphor of the psychic prison explores the extent to which organisations become places where only a limited or favoured view of the world is available or acknowledged.<sup>98</sup> Favoured systems of thought can become a trap, preventing those in organisations from recognising threats or seeing the value of new ideas. Socially constructed worlds can become subject to groupthink.<sup>99</sup> The practice associated with this metaphor explores the psychological

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<sup>97</sup> Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*, 37.

<sup>98</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 209.

<sup>99</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 211.



factors that may support this phenomenon, whether seen in Freudian, Jungian, Kleinian or other terms. The metaphor adds richness to a concept already introduced in considering the metaphor of culture, that organisations are driven by only partly understood and recognised assumptions.<sup>100</sup>

Like the political system metaphor, that of the psychic prison makes us more aware of the limits of organisational rationality and adds to our understanding of the psychological or other factors behind attitudes and decisions. It also helps us to appreciate the importance of symbolic factors that seem irrational. Weaknesses of the metaphor include a danger of ignoring the power structures and ideologies that may be the most significant factor in the formation of attitudes; the danger that voices of opposition are dismissed as groupthink rather than engaged with objectively and the risk that we become preoccupied with exploring the contents of each other's minds – an activity that would appear intrusive, and perhaps, also, distracting from other priorities.<sup>101</sup>

The question, I suggest, for the Church of England, is similar to that asked of it by the culture metaphor: how aware are its members of the influence of underpinning assumptions and related practices on its life? This metaphor also adds questions about ways in which, processes by which, church members become effectively trapped in patterns of thought and behaviour that serve neither them nor the church. There can be reluctance to engage with new ideas, or to face facts. Turnbull and McFadyen note the way that “struggling communities will make great sacrifices to keep their parish church intact and will eventually fail” rather than “reimagining the use of the church buildings”.<sup>102</sup> Perhaps it is also true that sometimes old models and assumptions are confused with theological principle (a point made by Rudge and noted in chapter two) and thus cherished beyond their usefulness.

### *Flux and transformation*

Here organisations are conceived as being like natural phenomena such as weather or ecological systems in which there are multiple systems of interaction, characterised by both order and chaos, subject to random disturbances and able to generate novel patterns of change. Such systems are susceptible to small changes in initial or local conditions and to

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<sup>100</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 212ff.

<sup>101</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 238.

<sup>102</sup> Turnbull, *The State of the Church*, 138.

“attractors” within the system.<sup>103</sup> This understanding places less emphasis on the impact of the external environment and more on that which is internally determined and on the capacity of the organisation, through the concept of autopoiesis (self-recreation), to generate emergent states through its own internal interactions.<sup>104</sup> This has the impact that organisations see the world and their own performance in self-referential terms, viewing the environment as an extension of their own identity. This then has the further implication that the primary task for the organisation is not so much to understand the environment as its own identity and the extent to which its concept of itself shapes everything it does. It is also necessary to avoid the potential for the autopoietic function to become “pathological”,<sup>105</sup> that is, to enter a state where the organisation is only interested in itself and its perpetuation, and unable to recognise the perspectives of those outside its boundaries.

This perspective prompts some questions or suggestions for the Church of England. It might suggest that its first concern might need to be to understand its identity ahead of adopting initiatives and programmes. It raises the question as to whether Renewal and Reform is rooted in such a clear perspective on identity. It also suggests that churches, as bodies perhaps more conscious of possessing clear and distinct beliefs than most, might need to be careful about the possibility that their strong sense of themselves as an organisation might have the unintended consequence of obscuring or undermining their mission. Hardy is concerned that the Anglican church is insufficiently ordered to pursue its missionary task and asks, “is the Church too preoccupied with its own frame of reference?”<sup>106</sup> The church has, I submit, been slow to respond to the decline in numbers and influence that characterise the last sixty years.<sup>107</sup> It seems worth considering the extent to which this represents a confidence in God and to what extent this might represent an example of pathological autopoiesis at work.

Another feature of the thinking associated with this metaphor is a tendency to be cautious about the human capacity for prediction and control. In systems thinking organisational outcomes are usually seen as probabilistic and subject to the notion of emergence, i.e. the parts working together in such a way as to produce unexpected effects in the whole.<sup>108</sup> This

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<sup>103</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 251; Jean G. Boulton, Peter M. Allen and Cliff Bowman, *Embracing Complexity: Strategic Perspectives for an Age of Turbulence* (Oxford, UK: Oxford Univ. Press, 2015).

<sup>104</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 244.

<sup>105</sup> Beckford, *The Intelligent Organisation*, 61.

<sup>106</sup> Hardy, *Finding the Church*, 148-149.

<sup>107</sup> Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*; Woodhead, *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*.

<sup>108</sup> Michael C. Jackson, *Systems Thinking: Creative Holism for Managers*, Repr. ed. (Chichester: Wiley, 2010).

perspective is strongly reinforced by the proponents of systems ideas associated with the flux and transformation model, that is, the ideas associated with the term 'complexity'. From this perspective control is a redundant concept, for no human being is in a position to provide it, whatever position in the system they might occupy. Change can only be 'managed' through nudges to the system, through changes in initial conditions or by use of attractors. From a systems perspective, processes of organisational change cannot be controlled and to embark upon such a process is, at least some extent, to trust to the process and those involved to produce an appropriate outcome. A weakness of this metaphor, however, may be the failure to recognize that organisations are, in fact, composed of human actors rather than natural forces, which allows more 'control' than complexity theory is inclined to concede (because people can be influenced to, or choose to, or even forced to, work together in common cause or to a particular agenda).<sup>109</sup>

In the previous chapter I argued for a notion of shared agency between God and his people. Nevertheless, the caution about human agency associated with this metaphor may have resonance with a theological caution about over-emphasising that agency. The metaphor may serve to invite churchmen and women to consider planning and change management as primarily an exercise in discerning the will of God. This, in turn, has resonance with those who emphasise the object of the church as to pursue the *Missio Dei*. The purpose of the church is to find God at work in the world and join in.<sup>110</sup>

### *Instrument of Domination*

There is plenty of evidence to support the idea that organisations have had a malign influence on society, whether it is through the encouragement to consumerism, environmental damage or the exploitation of those that work in them. Given the proliferation of organisations, this is a feature that might concern us greatly. Organisations exercise what might be considered an unhealthy and unreasonable influence on our lives, constantly exerting what we may see as inappropriate demands, and giving rise to conditions such as workaholism, whilst, at the same time, also subjecting us to the stress of potential redundancy or unemployment.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Jackson, *Systems Thinking*, 129.

<sup>110</sup> Patrick R. Keifer and Nigel Rooms, *Forming the Missional Church: Creating Deep Cultural Change in Congregations*, (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2014).

<sup>111</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 329ff.

The issues raised by the ideas associated with this metaphor will most likely be a recurrent feature of organisational life and require constant remedial attention. The metaphor also suggests the possibility of developing an organisation theory that explicitly identifies with the interests of the exploited.<sup>112</sup> The weaknesses of the metaphor might include a tendency to see conspiracy or systemic failings where in fact there are only individual shortcomings: this may encourage defensive attitudes. The thinking may also be dismissed as left-wing ideology or it may create an unhelpful assumption that all organisations must be exploitative.<sup>113</sup>

Can the Church of England be seen as an instrument of domination? The recent Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) suggests it can.<sup>114</sup> The Inquiry investigated a series of cases in the Anglican Diocese of Chichester where safeguarding failures appear to have allowed child sexual abuse, a failure further exacerbated by subsequent cover up and the refusal to deal adequately with perpetrators. These were all characterised as institutional failures. The fact that the churches are not the only institutions to have made egregious errors of this kind only emphasises that they are as vulnerable and liable to sin as other organisations. The issue emphasises the inter-dependence of theology and organisation in a church's life when it comes to practising what one preaches. It highlights how the challenge of managing power is no less an issue in a church than in other organisations. This makes the concern at the heart of the thinking associated with this metaphor highly relevant to the contemporary Church of England.

If the Church of England is in no position to doubt that it, too, is capable of acting as an instrument of domination it would do well to build awareness of such possibilities and mitigations for them into its routines – as is currently happening with safeguarding policy. The discussion of the machine metaphor suggested that the Church of England might be overly bureaucratic. This usually means overly focused on process and procedure. Good safeguarding depends, however, in part, on good process. We might learn from the story of safeguarding and the Church of England that one way in which a church avoids becoming an instrument of domination is by managing itself more efficiently. At the same time, it requires greater transparency, a feature which is not always found in bureaucratic organisations. That

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<sup>112</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 331.

<sup>113</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 329ff.

<sup>114</sup> Inquiry Panel, Independent Inquiry Child Sexual Abuse. *Interim Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse*. UK Parliament, 2018, <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/key-documents/5368/view/full-interim-report-independent-inquiry-into-child-sexual-abuse.pdf>.

difficulty is magnified in the Church of England by a lack of clear lines of responsibility and accountability and the independence of that church's key units, diocese and parish. It appears that the moral and legal requirement to adopt good safeguarding practice (which comes to a large extent from outside the Church of England) is doing more to create the practice of accountability and transparency than any purely internal or theological driving force. This is another area, perhaps, where the Church of England would gain from seeing itself as an organisation, at least in this respect, like others. If it wishes to be the liberating and joyful model for human community to which it aspires and to which it is called,<sup>115</sup> it would do well to do more to be aware of and manage its persistent sinfulness with more honesty, transparency and humility.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

The presentation of Morgan's metaphors in this chapter provides an initial indication of the rich and varied range of ideas associated with organisation theory. It is my hope that my presentation demonstrates the inadequacy of the way organisation theory is sometimes presented by theologians and the limitations of such stereotypical concepts as 'managerialism'. More practically, the presentation illustrates the dangers of employing only the frame of reference and methods suggested by any one metaphor. Each offers only partial insights into organisations and the situations facing them and to exclude other perspectives carries the risk of distorting our understanding of the organisation or our response to the problem situation facing it – and of producing responses to change that are insufficiently well-grounded to be effective. At the least those responsible for managing change in organisations need to know which approaches they are drawing on and why those insights and methods provide a good 'fit' for the problem situation faced.

I have argued that taking the realities of the Church of England's organisational life seriously is a prerequisite of bringing to empirical life its sacramental vocation, not merely in general terms, but in today's specific cultural and historical context. Speaking of the "Godly wisdom" entrusted to the Church of England Hardy remarks:

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<sup>115</sup> Hardy, *Finding the Church*.

The means by which this multi-faceted wisdom is brought to bear on the Anglican communion is by its polity. This polity is the means by which it is formed for its life and mission, which are effectively inseparable.<sup>116</sup>

In the previous chapter I suggested that the Church of England's understanding of its polity was shaped by seeing it as a 'thing indifferent'. This does not, of course, mean 'unimportant' but that the church was not given a particular form as part of the founding gift of God. In fact the Church of England largely simply adopted and continued the polity that it inherited from the Roman Catholic Church. This was defended on the grounds that what had proved valuable to the church in the past should not be discarded if it did not contradict scripture. It also demonstrated the sincerity of the claim to be a Reformed but still Catholic church.<sup>117</sup> Thereafter changes have sometimes, if not usually, been driven by factors which are not strictly ecclesiological: for example, the twentieth century centralisation arose, in large part, from the desire to rationalise the Church of England's finances.<sup>118</sup> I am not suggesting any of these are bad things. I argued in chapter four that a church is formed from below as well as from above. It uses what it finds; it is shaped quite appropriately by context. I do wonder, however, whether the Church of England's polity or organisational form and practice has been given enough ecclesiological attention and whether contextual ideas and influences have always been adopted with sufficient theological awareness and intent. This is a question which I will have in mind in considering the R&R programme.

I suggest that the preceding exposition of Morgan's metaphors offers an indication of the potential of organisation theory to support such an endeavour. It is an exposition that has suggested a number of ways in which the body of organisation theory asks searching questions of the contemporary Church of England – questions which are likely to require theological as well as practical or organisational answers. Notably, we see a church that seems ill-equipped for managing change, especially the kind of transformation that may be required to respond adequately to the passing of Christendom. The Church of England's hierarchical, stable structure has probably contributed to its longevity; but I note also that the bureaucratic tendencies in that church combine with a lack of clear lines of authority and responsibility to render organisational change procedurally and culturally problematic. The embedded political

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<sup>116</sup> Hardy, *Finding the Church*, 149.

<sup>117</sup> Avis, *The Identity of Anglicanism*, 39ff.

<sup>118</sup> Chandler, *The Church of England in the Twentieth Century*.

divisions of the Church of England create real difficulties in finding new ways of being church in the future that can command support. Those divisions might militate against the discussion on that subject taking place in constructive fashion or at all. I note the challenge to address the darker elements of the Church of England's life with transparency, honesty and realism: I do not think anyone can expect that church to win support in the anti-institutional atmosphere of contemporary Britain unless it is willing and able to do so. Taking all this into account I want to question whether R&R is sufficiently rooted in an understanding of the range of perspectives that need to be taken into consideration to produce an effective strategy for positive change. Drawing on the material set out in this chapter, this question will be a key component of my analysis of the data collected in the empirical phase of this project and reported in chapters seven and eight.

I do not want, however, only to emphasise hard questions. The exposition also suggests a wide range of possible approaches which can be explored and which bring with them a range of practical methodologies and techniques. In particular, I find the possibilities of open systems theory helpful in relation to the question of the Church of England's adaptivity. This is partly because open system theory reframes the conception of change in a way that offers an alternative to the cumbersome processes of bureaucracy and opens the Church of England up to a range of resources beyond its own boundaries. I also take this view because the concept of dynamic interchange between system and environment has resonances with the depiction of the pilgrim church offered in chapter four. I am aware, of course, that Thung, Rudge and Granfield favoured systems approaches, as we saw in chapter two, but there is a great deal more recent work in that area of organisation theorising. I will explore these thoughts in much more depth in the next chapter.

To sum up, I believe the exposition of key metaphors of organisation offered in this chapter amply demonstrates the necessity of attending to the Church of England as organisation, and the range of considerations that come into play when taking the empirical, organisational life of that church seriously. Further it offers an insight into the variety of resources available in the field of organisation theory for those who wish to take the church's organisational life fully seriously. As I explore R&R empirically I will seek to understand to what extent an understanding of the nature and variety of organisation theory has informed what at least presents as an organisational change programme. Finally, the account I have offered

provides an ecclesiological enriching indication of important aspects of the church's sacramental, empirical life. In the next chapter I will go further and offer a particular model of adaptivity for the Church of England, drawing on systems thinking brought together with the notion of faithful improvisation introduced in chapter four. The model thus developed will form a part of the framework for theological reflection on the empirical data treated in subsequent chapters.



## Chapter 6. Research design and a model for theological reflection

### 6.1 Introduction

I have presented my arguments for the permissibility of seeing the Church of England as an organisation as well as the Body of Christ, and for the ecclesiological and practical value of making use of organisation theory in that church. I turn now to the empirical research into Renewal and Reform which is a key focus of this investigation. The chapter will be in two distinct parts.

In the first part I will describe the research design, methods and the process of data collection and analysis. For this I will make use of a version of the pastoral cycle developed by Swinton and Mowat.<sup>1</sup> Their framework will guide the overall content and process of the investigation. The project will be shaped by theological categories and perspectives but, in the manner I have advocated in previous chapters, will be interdisciplinary in nature. This has two dimensions. The empirical investigation will employ research methods derived from the social sciences. The project will also draw heavily on organisational ideas and practices, understood from within an ecclesiological perspective. In this endeavour I will be making use of the ideas and arguments set out in the previous two chapters.

In the second distinct part of the chapter I will develop the ecclesiological-organisational material further than I have so far in order to provide a particular interdisciplinary model, the 'Theological Trialogue', to support the phase of theological reflection (as described in Swinton and Mowat's version of the pastoral cycle).<sup>2</sup> The rationale for the development and use of this model is that it will offer a way of thinking about ecclesial adaptivity which will draw on theological, ecclesiological and organisational concepts in an integrated fashion. This will provide a powerful and credible lens for reflection upon what we can at least provisionally characterise as an ecclesiastical change programme. This model will be developed drawing on the theological and ecclesiological material already set out. In particular it will be derived from the organisational concept of cybernetics (which I will describe and explore further than in

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<sup>1</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology*.

<sup>2</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology*, 96.

previous chapters) and on the Church of England's Faith and Order Commission's concept of "faithful improvisation" (to which I referred in chapter four and describe further here).<sup>3</sup>

## 6.2 Research design and process

I have chosen Swinton and Mowat's model for "practical theological reflection" (see fig 6.1 below) for several reasons. Firstly, though it is hard to speak of a typical version of the pastoral cycle (there are many variations)<sup>4</sup> Mowat and Swinton include some distinctive features. In the first instance Swinton and Mowat present the exploration of the 'experience'<sup>5</sup> or 'the situation'<sup>6</sup> in a particular way. The first phase is concerned with "current praxis" and with identifying a situation as requiring reflection and challenge. This makes sense for me as it acknowledges the part played by "pre-reflective" appreciation of the situation and the questions it raises. In my own case I approached R&R with questions and concerns reflecting my existing experience of the church and my work as both a priest and organisational consultant. I wanted to know if my sense that something did not quite add up was justified or not. This is the phase that provides the impetus and interest on which projects like this depend if they are to be carried through to a conclusion, but, equally, as it recognises implicitly the part played in the process of research by the researcher, it highlights the need for reflexivity if the project is to be carried out as fairly as possible.

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<sup>3</sup> Alexander, *Faithful Improvisation?*.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*; Cameron, *Talking about God in Practice*; Thompson, *Theological Reflection*; Richard Robert Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan ; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008; Paul Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 2006); Helen Collins, *Reordering Theological Reflection: Starting with Scripture* (London: SCM Press, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, 98.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Pattison, "Some Straw for the Bricks".

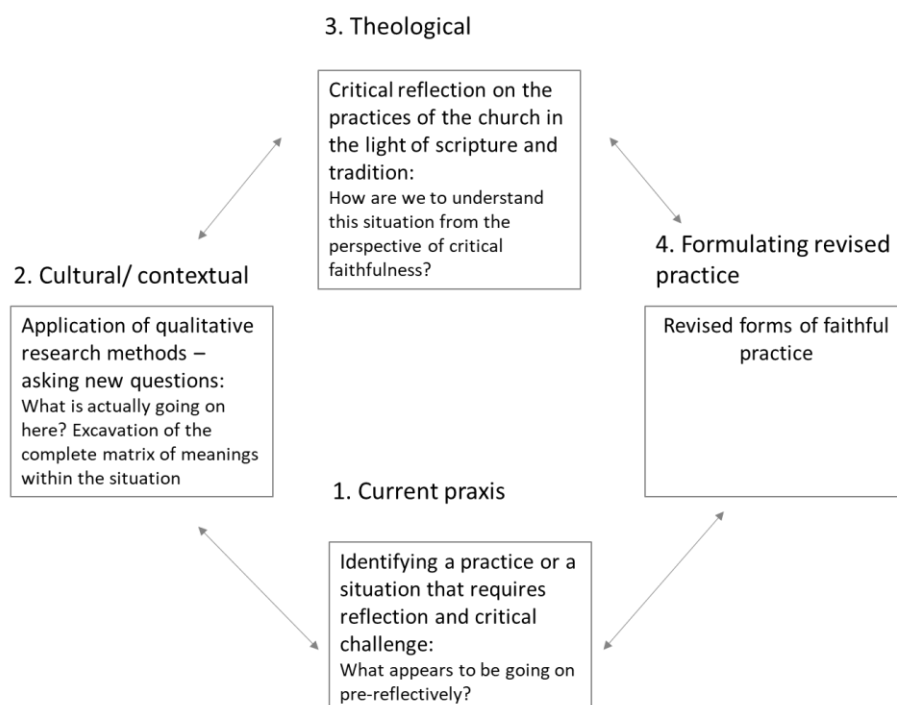


Fig.6.1: A model for practical theological reflection by Swinton and Mowat<sup>7</sup>

The second phase, “cultural/contextual”, focuses on understanding the situation, using qualitative research methods with the focus on finding out “what is really going on”. That describes very well the shift from my own initial thoughts to the desire to get to the bottom of my questions about R&R and my intention to use qualitative research methods to do so. The third phase, “theological”, involves reflection on the data in the light of Christian theology derived from “scripture and tradition”. In line with the discussion of the Anglican triad in chapter three, I explicitly add ‘reason’ (or human wisdom) to my theological resources. I am aware that in this thesis I have not moved directly from the pre-reflective identification of the situation (chapter one) to the application of qualitative research methods. This is because I needed to develop the material required for theological reflection in phase three. I have taken the view that the model should not be read as a set of entirely distinct, consecutive stages, but as a more iterative process in which the researcher moves back and forth. This means that the theme of theological reflection has an influence, entirely properly, on phases two and three. I understand this to be the nature of theological reflection, that it cannot be confined to a single stage in the research process. I will say more about the iterative nature of the process below.

<sup>7</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology*, 95.

As I have already explained, I intend to bring normative theological sources into conversation with organisation theory. It is true that in Swinton and Mowat's model the only explicit mention of an interdisciplinary dimension to the research process lies in phase 2, where the use of qualitative research methods is noted. As I plan to use organisation theory to inform reflection upon data collected there might appear to be a difficulty. My response comes in three parts. In the first I note that, in an example of a project researching pastoral issues, Swinton and Mowat, describing the phase of theological reflection, bring into the discussion social and psychological theories of the emerging theme of "disconnectedness".<sup>8</sup> In other words, they are content to use the human sciences in the service of theological reflection. Secondly, the process should not be understood in neat, linear terms. "Of course in reality the circle is not followed through step by step. There is movement in various directions as new insights raise fresh questions and enable us to see things differently".<sup>9</sup> The model works cumulatively, not merely stage by stage and while the acknowledged role for the social sciences is found in phase 2 it may be assumed to be influential throughout. Finally, as part of the work done to date, I have addressed the particular difficulties that might be considered to be associated with organisation theory in an ecclesial context.

The emphasis on "critical faithfulness" is very helpful. I take it to mean, first, that reflection recognises the fallibility of our theological interpretations and the possibility that they may need to be re-evaluated in the light of new evidence (in the critical realistic manner). I understand it, second, to mean also that such re-evaluations are made in a spirit of Christian faithfulness. It is this that allows the fourth phase – "formulating revised practice" – to be carried out in a spirit of constructive engagement rather than one of fault-finding. I understand this to be part of the commitment to "faithful performance" which is a key focus of Swinton and Mowat's approach.<sup>10</sup>

### *Reflexivity*

I engaged in theological reflexivity in chapter three. I now take the theme of reflexivity further. I recognise my need to be aware of the perspectives and biases I bring to the research as they influence not just the interpretation of data but every stage of the project from its

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<sup>8</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology*, 217.

<sup>9</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology*, 97.

<sup>10</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology*, 9-10.

conception to its conclusions. These biases are the often unconscious result of a range of cultural and situational factors which shape the way the I look at the world.

Practical theological researchers try consciously to notice and explore the features of their own world views, to become critically aware of habits, objects, beliefs and practices of the world-views that guide perception and action...in this reflexive mode, researchers are changed by their own research as the form and content of what we believe we know is exposed to the critical scrutiny of evidence and arguments, of information gained and conceptualisations born.<sup>11</sup>

As I write this I am conscious of how the research process has challenged me in this way, and at a deep level. I am also aware that in addition to all the normal human biases I have a particular relationship to the subject of investigation which I need to understand and attend to. It was for this reason that I offered considerable space to describing my own interest in the project in chapter one and I have tried to keep that in my mind throughout. I am especially aware that I am an Anglican priest which gives me a particular stake in the Church of England and a management consultant with a history of particular allegiances and practices within that field who has sought to contribute this knowledge to the Church of England. I start, therefore, with a range of feelings, assumptions and concerns which I must be aware of. All research, of course, has to deal with factors like these and objectivity is not possible, but I can act in such a way as to at least enhance the reader's awareness of my location and commitments. I will include reference to how I sought to maintain a reflexive posture in practice below.

### **6.3 Data collection and analysis**

I will now describe how I put the process described above into action. I include a table that sets out the main phases described below in this chapter, for clarity and as a reference point (Table 6.1). As part of the commitment to reflexivity I will set out the process whilst acknowledging what happened in the actual flow of events. I recorded my pre-reflective assessment of the situation in chapter one when describing my initial assessment of Renewal and Reform. It was this that led to the formulation of the research questions set out in that chapter. In chapters two to five I have prepared the ground for the empirical research phase, that is, readied myself for an "excavation of the complete matrix of meanings within the

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<sup>11</sup> Bennett, *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*, 30.

situation”.<sup>12</sup> This has been achieved by building on the work of other scholars on the theme of applying organisation theory in church contexts. Specifically, I have developed the argument for a particular interdisciplinary approach, that is, one which sees the church as an organisation (as well as the Body of Christ) and organisation theory as a legitimate partner for theology.

Phase	Content
Data collection	Gathering and reading of R&R documents Identification of interviewees Development of interview protocol/questions 15 semi-structured interviews one hour each
Data analysis	Thematic analysis: Initial reading of documents, making marginal notes Initial reading of interview transcripts, marginal notes Second reading of interviews, thematic coding Second and third readings of documents leading to thematic coding
Theological reflection	Reflection on all the material using theological, ecclesiological and organisational material developed in previous chapters plus the Theological Triologue (to be described later in this chapter).
Writing up	First draft: single account based on themes (captured in Excel spreadsheets) and theological/organisational commentary Re-reading of reports and interviews Account separated into two chapters: the documents followed by the interviews.

Table 6.1 Summary of the process of data collection, analysis, theological reflection and writing up.

*Application of qualitative research methods: data collection*

In the second principal phase I used qualitative research methods<sup>13</sup> to collect data about R&R. The collection of data had two dimensions which are both distinct and closely related. The first was to review and analyse the principal documents associated with R&R. The second was to interview senior figures in the Church of England associated with the development and implementation of R&R – and some of its critics. I chose these sources of data because the reports that comprise the R&R documentation are the principal official expression of the rationale of the programme. I understand that formal reports are created for specific purposes and may not, therefore offer the full story, and as texts, are subject to interpretation. They have also attracted considerable criticism and commentary which itself needs exploration. It is for

<sup>12</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology*, 95.

<sup>13</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology*, 95.

this reason that I sought the views of those involved in the creation and management of R&R and those critical of it.

A question might be raised by the characterisation of the R&R documents as empirical data and its collection as part of the fieldwork. My response is that such an approach is characteristic of practical theological research. I am not treating these documents as I would standard literary sources but analysing them for the insight they offer into practice and its associated theology. I am treating them as the “formal assertions” described by Swinton and Mowat, that is, as official sources of what they call “Leadership identity-claims”. I am treating the R&R documents as they do, for example, sermons and websites, when conducting congregational research.<sup>14</sup> Another way of putting it would be to say that I am reading the documents in search of what Watkins and others call the “espoused” theology of the R&R programme, that is, the official theological claims of R&R, so that I can compare them with what practice in fact implies about the programme’s theology.<sup>15</sup> Further, the analysis of official organisational documents as a component of empirical fieldwork is a standard method of social research.<sup>16</sup>

My purpose in collecting this data was to explore the theological and organisational rationale of the R&R programme. The criticisms of the programme have been largely theological in nature (as I described in chapter one). I wished to understand the theological content of the programme as it appears in the documents and as it is amplified and perhaps extended by the interviewees. In order to understand the programme theologically, it was necessary, I suggest, to understand how it was intended to work organisationally. What was it intended to achieve for the Church of England and how was it intended to do that? I want to relate these two areas of exploration so that the organisational objectives can be understood in the light of the programme’s theological character. In particular I sought to understand how the Church of England was understood organisationally and ecclesologically and how the R&R programme was intended to work as a response to that church’s current situation.

Theologically the project is an exercise in interdisciplinary theological reflection and of discernment in which I hope to be guided towards an understanding of the R&R programme

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<sup>14</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology*, 138-139.

<sup>15</sup> See the discussion of the “Four Voices of Theology” in Cameron, *Talking About God in Practice*, 53-56; Clare Watkins, *Disclosing Church: Generating Ecclesiology through Conversations in Practice*, Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical theology, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 39ff.

<sup>16</sup> Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 522

with the aid of the Holy Spirit. Epistemologically my project can be understood as an exercise in critical evaluation, of judgemental rationality, in the critical realistic terms I introduced in chapter three. I take the view that by engaging a number of the key players in an exploratory, qualitative research process I am more likely to come closer to a true account of the situation and its meanings. In other words, I am more likely to overcome some of the limitations of my own subjectivity and that of others.

The R&R documents consist of a set of key reports and presentations submitted to General Synod and formally adopted by that body between 2015 and 2017.<sup>17</sup> They present proposals for action with an accompanying rationale. I will provide a detailed account of the history and content of these documents in chapter seven, along with an account of my findings from my review of the documents. I will present the findings of my interviews with persons associated with R&R in chapter eight. I carried out fifteen substantial (hour long), semi-structured interviews with senior Church of England figures. I had to develop a process for finding out who knew about/was sufficiently involved in the R&R process.<sup>18</sup> The interviewees were identified as follows. I began by approaching two or three individuals I knew to be associated with R&R. These individuals introduced me to others they knew to be managers or architects of R&R and these referred me to others. In other words, I allowed myself to be led to relevant individuals by those more knowledgeable about the programme. I also identified two individuals I knew to hold theological criticisms of R&R, one from an essentially supportive position, one much more hostile to R&R. My intention in operating this way was not only to identify those associated sufficiently closely with R&R but also to maintain reflexivity and avoid the bias that would likely attend making only my own choices about who to interview. Several of the interviewees are bishops, others hold or held senior clerical positions and others are lay men and women who hold (or held) senior posts in national church institutions, including the Archbishops' Council and the Church Commissioners. The Church of England, especially at this senior level, is a relatively small world and I cannot say much more without revealing identities and compromising my commitment to maintain anonymity in a project addressing matters of considerable sensitivity. I want the reader to understand, however, that the

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<sup>17</sup> *The Green Report* was not presented to Synod: I will set this out in detail in chapter seven.

<sup>18</sup> Cameron, Helen and Catherine Duce, *Researching Practice in Mission and Ministry*, (London: SCM Press, 2013), 84-85.



interviewees included most of the figures responsible at a senior level for the development and management of R&R.

The interview protocol was designed so that I approached interviewees using a consistent agenda (to aid comparability), but at the same time in a fashion that allowed for exploration, listening and dialogue. The agenda was constructed in a way that distinguished between those interviewees I understood to be identified with R&R and those I believed to have more questions about R&R on the basis of discussion in the church press and insights gleaned from people I know. This resulted in two question sets which are included as appendix C.

My use of the term “agenda” is intended to convey the reality that I by no means followed these questions rigidly or always asked them all or in the order indicated in appendix C. I did seek, however, to cover the ground suggested by these questions. I wanted to approach the interviews in the spirit of conversation. I did not simply want to know what interviewees already thought happened and why, but to create an environment in which interviewees could make new connections and voice new perspectives on their experience and thinking. I used active listening skills to allow interviewees to describe and reflect on their ideas with a view to surfacing assumptions and principles not previously recognised.<sup>19</sup> I made audio recordings of the interviews so I could attend fully to the flow of discussion. These were subsequently transcribed and analysed in a way I will describe below.

#### *Further application of qualitative research methods: the analysis of the data*

I wanted to understand better the thinking that has influenced the R&R programme. I was, therefore interested primarily in the content of the literature and the interviews, that is, the views expressed therein (as opposed, for example, to the feelings or psychology of those involved). As a result, even though there is some consideration of how things were said, my main concern was to highlight the ideas and preoccupations in the data. In consequence, I opted for a relatively straightforward thematic analysis. Bryman regards this approach as particularly suitable when the chief emphasis is on understanding “what is said rather than on how it is said”.<sup>20</sup> Bryman’s approach is consistent with that of Swinton and Mowat. They invite the researcher to consider:

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<sup>19</sup> Wilson Ng and Elayne Coakes, *Business Research: Enjoy Creating, Developing and Writing Your Business Project* (London: Kogan Page, 2014), 64-65.

<sup>20</sup> Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 553.

1. The main categories derived; 2. The themes that emerge from the main categories; 3. Code the themes into sub-themes; 4. Give meaning to the themes and sub-themes through interpretive and reflective work; and 5. Reflect on the interpretation.<sup>21</sup>

I was also aware of the need for reflexivity. This was helped by adopting an iterative approach to my analysis of the data. By coming back to the material several times I was able to ask myself at each stage whether I was finding what I wanted to find and give myself a chance to notice things I might otherwise have missed. It might help to give an example of how this worked. One of the insights to emerge from the interviews concerned the influence on the R&R content and process of a relatively small group of senior clerics and lay officers. This group appears to have used its position to shape the R&R programme and 'push' it through General Synod. According to one interviewee, a member of this group, this was all about speed and involved minimal consultation. It did not accord with the principles and practices associated with the model of adaptivity I develop later in this chapter. My initial response, therefore, was to offer a straightforward commentary pointing that out. As I went back to the interviews and as I continued to develop my ecclesiological and organisational thinking about the Church of England I became much more aware of the factors affecting those seeking change in the church – especially the organisational constraints and political environment that make change slow and difficult. This helped me to appreciate more sympathetically how the sense of urgency felt by the senior clerics and lay officers led them to act as they did.

Returning to my analysis of the data, I made an initial reading of the documents, noting broad themes and questions (these informed the interview questions) with as few preconceptions as possible. Having carried out the interviews and had them transcribed I carried out an initial reading, making marginal notes reflecting themes as I noticed them. This was the start of a basic coding procedure. I then commenced a second stage analysis of the interviews. This time I read more explicitly with the research questions in mind and organised my observations into identified themes, with sub-themes linked to relevant passages and quotations. The themes and quotations were captured in a table created in an Excel spreadsheet.<sup>22</sup> Although this was not complete when I turned back to the R&R reports the initial thematic analysis of the interviews informed my second reading of the reports – what I was looking for, what I wanted to compare and check. At this stage I simply noted broad themes

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<sup>21</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology*, 68.

<sup>22</sup> Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 555.

and passages of interest in marginal notes. A third reading of the reports followed which identified and captured themes and sub-themes linked to specific passages and quotations and recorded them in table form in an Excel spreadsheet.

### *Theological reflection*

It was at this point that I turned more explicitly from the analysis of the situation to theological reflection upon what I had found. With the two Excel tables before me I wrote a first draft describing and illustrating the themes, adding commentary based on the theoretical material discussed in chapters four and five and the theological-organisational model of adaptivity, the development of which I will describe in the second half of this chapter. I opted at this stage to organise the draft account by themes (as opposed to an account first of the reports and then of the interviews) weaving together material drawn from R&R documents, the interviews, plus commentary and critique. My aim in doing so was to avoid repetition (the themes of both reports and interviews were similar) but also to create more of a sense of a 'conversation' between the different points of view that seemed to be found in the material. At this stage I was still trying to make sense of the material and to continue my thinking through writing. I next mapped the material on to the 'Theological Trialogue' (the theological-organisational model to which I referred above and which I will describe in detail below). This was an attempt to capture and summarise the main insights derived from the data collection and analysis together with my reflection upon what I had discovered.

I then re-read all the reports and all the interviews. I did so looking especially for omissions from and for counter-examples to the account offered in my draft chapter. I distilled from my first draft and notes on my subsequent review of the data a more complete and refined plan of my findings. As I did so I re-separated the account of the documents and the interviews as I had concluded by then that by telling the story of the documents and then the story of the interviews in turn I did more justice to the basic rationale of the research – that is, to understand the content and rationale of R&R through its documents and then probe that understanding by interviewing its architects and critics. This I did, organised into two chapters (seven and eight), one on the documents, one on the interviews, without, I hope, losing a sense of conversation between the documents and the interviews. Those chapters will follow this, but first I will set out the development of the 'Theological Trialogue' which played a key role in the reflection upon the data.

#### 6.4 Developing a model for theological reflection: The Theological Trialogue

Having described both the thinking and the activity associated with the collection, analysis and reflection upon data concerning R&R I turn, in the second distinct part of this chapter, to the model I developed and used as a means of theological reflection, the Theological Trialogue. The need for such a model might be questioned. It is true that I have already gathered a great deal of both organisational and theological/ecclesiological material on which to draw in the process of theological reflection and I will certainly make use of it for that purpose. I am, however, committed to the idea that the theological and organisational material can and should be integrated and the organisational material used to illuminate and serve theology and ecclesiology. In other words, I want to explore and demonstrate the value of an organisational ecclesiology through the development of a particular example of the concept. I do not think this has been done before (I believe the level of integration I intend is rare in the interdisciplinary work carried out by practical theologians more generally), so I offer it as an experiment. I am confident, however, that it will prove productive for this project. The model concerns the adaptivity of the Church of England and this is particularly apposite in this examination of a programme to effect change in the Church of England. The Theological Trialogue will function as a theoretical model of the activities and functions required for the Church of England to change in a way that is appropriate and sustainable and I will use it as a lens through which to view the empirical data collected in the process of theological reflection.

The model includes material derived from normative theological sources – scripture and tradition – in a way I believe to be consistent with the approach recommended by Swinton and Mowat,<sup>23</sup> but brings these into dialogue/relationship with material drawn from contemporary social sciences (specifically, organisation theory). In developing the model I am building further on the arguments made earlier in this chapter about how I intended to interpret Mowat and Swinton's version of the pastoral cycle with regard to interdisciplinarity. Throughout I seek to enact the concern for critical faithfulness which Swinton and Mowat argue is required in practical theological research.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology*, 95.

<sup>24</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology*, 95.

As I said above, the model I wish to use is offered in the service of theological reflection and is framed theologically. Its account of church reflects and relies upon the essentially trinitarian argument, made in chapter four, that understands the Church of England as a sacramental whole existing in history. Its understanding of ecclesial adaptivity is framed by the theological concept of faithful improvisation described in chapter four. I will return to these themes later (further exploring the concept of faithful improvisation in particular) and in the final part of the chapter I will describe how the theological and organisational concepts are brought together in a single, integrated model, the Theological Trialogue. In this model the key theological questions raised by R&R, such as, “to what is God calling us?”, are named and related to/supported by organisational concepts and activities. I will now turn, however, to a description of the particular organisational concepts I wish to employ in the integrated model.

*The Trialogue*

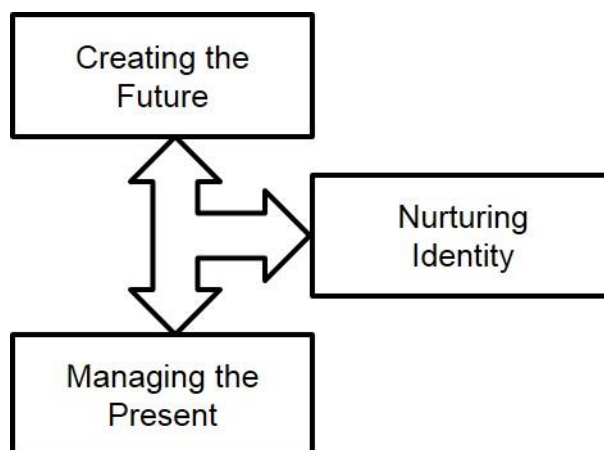


Fig. 6.2 The Trialogue by Pete Dudley

I intend to make use of a specific model of organisational adaptivity, “The Trialogue” a product of the open systems approach to organisations and the ideas and practices associated with the metaphor of the brain (see fig.6.2).<sup>25</sup> The model describes the essential functions of the adaptive or viable organisation. These are the capacity to simultaneously manage the present, create the future and nurture identity. Managing the present involves ensuring that what is done or produced makes the best and most efficient use of resources and creates the desired outcome in the world. This activity is best managed as closely as possible to the activity itself – that is locally, with maximum exploitation of the self-organising possibilities characteristic of

<sup>25</sup> Dudley, “Quality Management Or Management Quality?”; Beckford, *The Intelligent Organisation*.

systems. Creating the future involves the recognition that in a changing world it is necessary not just to maintain and improve what is currently done or produced, but to build in the capacity to develop new products, services or other activities more fit for new circumstances. This activity is best led by those whose “higher” position in the organisation gives them a better view of what is going on in the wider world. Nurturing identity is the most fundamental activity of all, both determining what the organisation is aiming to achieve in the present and what choices it may legitimately make about the future.

I could proceed from here to describing how I intend to use this model in conjunction with the theological concepts I intend to employ but I think it is necessary first to indicate the intellectual background to the Trialogue and to offer an account which indicates its value and credibility. It is a product of the management concept of organisational cybernetics (which has already been introduced, in chapters two and four) and, in particular of the Viable Systems Model developed by Stafford Beer.<sup>26</sup> I will begin by describing and making the case for employing cybernetics as a credible source of wisdom on organisational viability. I will proceed from there to a discussion of Beer’s Viable Systems Model, both as a leading example of cybernetics applied to organisations and as the immediate source of the ideas contained in the Trialogue. The next step will be to address some concerns that may arise about cybernetics (as a rather technical concept perhaps, for example). This will lead me to offer a brief introduction to the ideas of ‘soft systems’ as part of the recognition that no single organisational model can ever be wholly adequate, and as an influence on the development of the Trialogue. All these steps serve to explain and give substance to the range of concepts that are brought together in the Trialogue remarkably simply and elegantly. I will continue to offer theological and ecclesiological commentary on the organisational ideas discussed.

### *Cybernetics*

I want to begin by adding substantially to the remarks I made about cybernetics in the previous chapter. The term appeared in my discussion of the brain metaphor (according to Morgan’s scheme) and is also strongly connected to the organism metaphor and the concept of open systems. ‘Organisational cybernetics’ is, as this might imply, the study of methods of management and control appropriate to the organisation understood as an open system.<sup>27</sup> I

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<sup>26</sup> Beer, *Diagnosing the System for Organizations*.

<sup>27</sup> Beckford, *The Intelligent Organisation*, 12.

have already suggested reasons why the conception of the organisation as an open system is attractive. Its emphasis on the interdependence of system and environment has significant affinities with the sacramental conception of the church as the body of Christ taking a social form according to its context. The idea of the church-as-system depending, in an organic fashion, on its relationship with the environment for the fulfilment of its purpose and for resources seems congruent with an understanding of church as sustained by the triune God who is active in and through the things of this world. I noted also the emphasis on giving autonomy to sub-systems of the organisation. This makes cybernetic approaches seemingly suitable for organisations, like the Church of England, in which power is relatively widely distributed; in which, that is, both bishops and parishes have a high degree of independence of operation.

In chapter two I depicted Patrick Granfield's proposal to make use of cybernetics in the Roman Catholic Church as not wholly successful.<sup>28</sup> I suggested that he encountered difficulties in relation to the relative inflexibility of Roman Catholic ecclesial structures. As I argued in chapter four, the Church of England is (at least in theory) more open in this respect. Furthermore, cybernetics has been developed considerably as an organisational concept since Granfield wrote, notably in the form of Beer's VSM.

There are other reasons to consider cybernetics a promising area of exploration. According to Mike Jackson, organisational cybernetics, in the form of Beer's VSM, "integrates the findings of around 50 years of work in the academic discipline of organization theory".<sup>29</sup> For example, it retains the concern for efficiency characteristic of the machine metaphor but combines it with a determination to build into the life of the organisation the capacity for a dynamic, two-way relationship with the environment and for change in the organisation in response to changes in the environment. The emphasis of the thinking and practice associated with the machine metaphor is on establishing a mechanism for delivering a pre-determined function, one that is not expected to change. This is likely to lead to organisational failure in a world that does, in fact, change, no matter how well you carry out the pre-determined function. So, for example, one could produce the best typewriters, in the most efficient manner possible, but the organisation would still fail because no-one wants typewriters.

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<sup>28</sup> Granfield, *Ecclesial Cybernetics*.

<sup>29</sup> Jackson, *Systems Thinking*, 106.

John Beckford (the president of the UK Cybernetics Society, professor of management science, and consultant with experience of working on large scale, contemporary public change projects) suggests that organisational cybernetics offers a credible response to a range of persistent and growing problems in the organisational life of the west in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These include the reluctance to change away from bureaucratic forms, especially in the public sector: organisations are slow, lacking agility and dependent on tools and processes built for an earlier age. Thinking is still rooted in mechanistic, deterministic mental models. Beckford goes on to argue that organisations today are insufficiently focused on the customer, and on the outcome. They fail to create the combination of cohesion across the organisation and autonomy in its parts which the VSM deems critical to success: typically employees are more likely to be given responsibility without power or suffer some form of coercion.<sup>30</sup> Organisations are not, on the whole, in a position to respond with sufficient speed to the challenges of a fast-changing world.

Although the churches are unique examples of organisation I have argued that they are part of the world of organisations, influenced by them and influencing them. I suggest that some of Beckford's concerns might be applied to the Church of England with credibility. In the previous chapter I noted the bureaucracy of the national church and synodical system. I do not think anyone could describe the synodical system and the national church institutions as 'agile'. I also noted the evidence related to the notion of 'decline' that reinforces the idea that the world around the church is changing fast, perhaps faster than the church can cope with. The thought that the church might be insufficiently focused on the 'customer' is, perhaps, more contentious, but worth considering. Brown and Woodhead argue that the Church of England's decline is related to a tendency to focus on its own concerns and not on meeting the needs of the public.<sup>31</sup> Brown and Woodhead's work is a popular rather than academic text but the point nevertheless merits attention. Beckford's point about the need to focus on the customer and the outcome highlights the possibility that the Church of England might be guilty of finding ever more refined ways of doing what is now the wrong thing, that is, seeking to improve its performance in activities that require a more radical reassessment, like the manufacturer of typewriters mentioned earlier. I realise that a concept such as salvation or the call to follow Christ cannot be presented as if it were an organisational product, susceptible to a kind of rebranding or

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<sup>30</sup> John Beckford, "Why Cybernetics Still Matters," *The Cybernetics Society*, 15 July 2020. <https://beckfordconsulting.com/intelligent-organisation/why-cybernetics-still-matters/>

<sup>31</sup> Brown, *That Was the Church That Was*.



replacement. But Beckford's argument might serve to encourage the Church of England to consider that, just as the organisation may be forced to consider what it is offering, the ecclesial community might also be so challenged by a changing world to reassess what it is in fact presenting to the world.

### *The Viable Systems Model*

I want now to offer a brief account of Stafford Beer's VSM, as it is the primary example of organisational cybernetics<sup>32</sup> and the immediate background to the Dialogue. I said in the previous chapter that organisational cybernetics typically maps the activity of the organisation in a way that focuses on how it uses its resources to fulfil its purpose. In order to do that, it focuses on the system's inputs, how they are 'processed' and turned into outputs. It offers a 'model' of the organisation in these terms, rather than in those of the organisational departmental and management structure one would typically find in classical theory.<sup>33</sup> By 'model' I mean, in this instance, a simplified representation of a much more complex reality – the organisation – rendered in such a way as to make it possible to understand certain aspects of the real thing. Individual organisations can be 'modelled' in this way.<sup>34</sup> The process of modelling is, however, influenced by a kind of ideal model, the VSM itself, which can be applied, or so Beer thought, to all organisations.<sup>35</sup>

Beer wanted to enable complex organisations to achieve viability. This could not be based, as in the machine metaphor, on a concentration of power and knowledge at the 'top' of the organisation and on discrete remedial interventions from the top when things went wrong or the world changed. It is not only that the world is changing too fast. It is also that the concentration of knowledge and insight necessary to manage the system's interactions with the environment cannot be comprehended or sustained by a small group of senior managers. In the language of cybernetics, the world has too much "variety" to be managed by a small group of people in command and control roles.<sup>36</sup> Organisations are too complex for discrete interventions by senior management to work: in a complex, open system everything affects everything else and you cannot work by removing and replacing the parts as you could with a simple system like an engine. The organisation must become self-regulating, as the human

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<sup>32</sup> Jackson, *Systems Thinking*, 88.

<sup>33</sup> Beer, *Diagnosing the System for Organizations*, i.

<sup>34</sup> Beer, *Diagnosing the System for Organizations*, 1-2.

<sup>35</sup> Beer, *Diagnosing the System for Organizations*, xii.

<sup>36</sup> Beer, *Diagnosing the System for Organizations*, 26.

body is, by the brain working with a highly distributed nervous system.<sup>37</sup> This is where the demand for autonomy comes from: problems with the existing process should be understood and addressed locally. At the same time there is a need for an overall coordinating function and for the capacity to see the whole.<sup>38</sup> The characteristic approach of cybernetics, as with all systems approaches, is to diagnose and treat problems not susceptible to local solution in terms of the dynamics of the system as a whole. Finally, organisations are composed of a recursive, 'nested' combination of systems in which the sub-systems take the same form as the systems in which they are set.

All organizational systems exhibit the same organizational characteristics...[this] allows elegant representations of organizations to be constructed and acts as a great variety reducer...The same viable system principles can be used to model a subsystem (a division) in an organization, that organization and its suprasystem (the system of which an organization is a part).<sup>39</sup>

Beer developed the full VSM (see fig. 6.3 below) in his 1985 work, *Diagnosing the System for Organizations*.<sup>40</sup> The organisation is mapped in terms of five sub-systems connected by feedback loops and information flows. The five systems are 1. Operations (where the inputs are processed into outputs); 2. Local management (where those activities are managed); 3. Operational control (where the operational whole is managed); 4. Development (where the needs of the future are considered in the light of changes in the environment) and 5. Policy (where the direction and identity of the whole enterprise is managed).<sup>41</sup>

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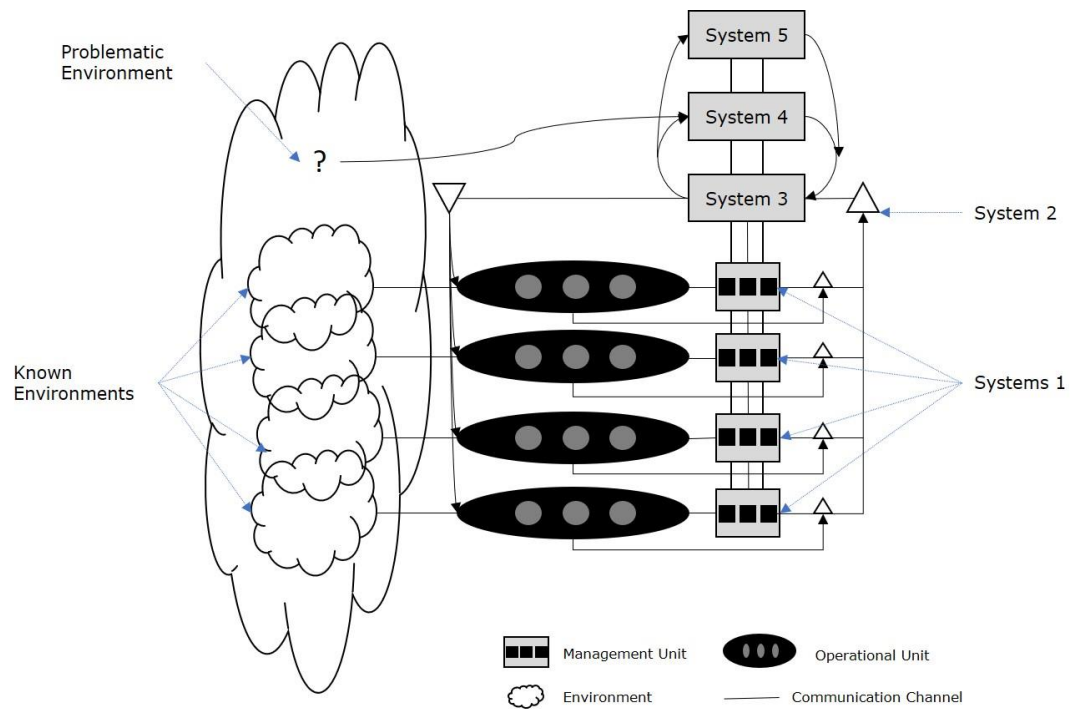
<sup>37</sup> Beer, *Diagnosing the System for Organizations*, ix.

<sup>38</sup> Jackson, *Systems Thinking*, 86.

<sup>39</sup> Jackson, *Systems Thinking*, 87.

<sup>40</sup> Beer, *Diagnosing the System for Organizations*.

<sup>41</sup> Jackson, *Systems Thinking*, 92-95.



The Viable System Model

Key:  
 System 1. Operations  
 System 2. Local management  
 System 3. Operational control (where the operational whole is managed)  
 System 4. Development (where the needs of the future are considered in the light of changes in the environment)  
 System 5. Policy (where the direction and identity of the whole enterprise is managed).

Fig.6.3 The Viable Systems Model by Stafford Beer

The Triologue is Pete Dudley's development of Beer's systems 3 (operational control, assumed to contain systems 1 and 2, local control and operations), 4 (development) and 5 (policy).<sup>42</sup> Operational control, development and policy become 'managing the present', 'creating the future' and 'nurturing identity', respectively. Before I return to the Triologue and its integration with theological concepts I want to offer some theological and ecclesiological commentary on the VSM.

I reiterate that the VSM assumes that systems are nested or 'recursive', that is, the parts and the whole have the same structure. If we apply these conceptions to the Church of England we may use the same model to consider that church at its various 'levels'. If we look at the Church of England as a whole and apply the principle that the primary 'work' of the system is carried out in its operational units, we might credibly conclude that it is in the dioceses, and,

<sup>42</sup> Dudley, "Quality Management Or Management Quality?"

'below' them, the parishes, that the primary productive activities of the Church of England take place. These activities do require higher level coordination and resourcing. This should not however, become interference: the relative autonomy of the operational systems should be respected. The task which is more appropriately undertaken by those 'higher' in the system is to take the lead on the broader questions of the Church of England's development and policy. This suggests, at least, in outline, a view of what the national bodies of the Church of England (notably, the House of Bishops and the Archbishops' Council) should be focusing on. One could offer a similar analysis of the system viewing it a level 'down', that is at the level of the diocese. Applying the VSM, the bishop and her team are required to coordinate and resource the activities of the diocese as a whole (the parishes), but to devote considerable attention to policy and the future of the diocese as a unit.

Reflecting on this I relate the principles embodied in the VSM to certain contemporary controversies in the Church of England. Most of the Church of England's mission and ministry takes place in and through its parish churches. Most 'sector' or chaplaincy ministry is carried out in and for local settings. One of the anxieties one finds in the contemporary Church of England is that the focus on local ministry is being overtaken by initiatives and attempts at control from the national church. The concern has prompted the formation of a new movement whose aim is to 'Save the Parish'.<sup>43</sup> I am not (here, at least) going to try to judge how justified or otherwise this anxiety is. We might note that the VSM offers a considerable challenge to the Church of England to maintain the autonomy of its sub-systems and to avoid a situation where the national hierarchy is attempting to solve problems that can only be solved locally. Those in the Church of England's systems 4 and 5 (where development and policy are the key functions) should be focusing on the question of the future of the church, on understanding and responding to changes in the environment and on determining how to respond to those changes. The responses to change should not usually involve an attempt to develop discrete solutions to perceived problems but a re-orientation of the system as a whole. I would like to know how R&R relates to this line of thinking because I find the logic here compelling.

#### *Critique of organisational cybernetics and VSM*

Before I return to the Trialogue and its integration with theological ideas in the Theological Trialogue I want to offer more background which I believe to be important in establishing the

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<sup>43</sup> "Save the Parish," accessed 18 March, 2022, <https://savetheparish.com/>.

credibility of the model to be proposed. At this point I want to acknowledge questions which my presentation of cybernetics and the VSM raises and offer a response.

In the first place, organisational cybernetics may appear, and has certainly been criticised for being 'technocratic' and vulnerable also to being "corrupted into an autocratic management tool".<sup>44</sup> On the latter point I acknowledged in the last chapter that a weakness of the open systems understanding of organisations is the possibility that it subordinates the humans in the organisation to the demands of the organisation. It is true the VSM does not have much to say about the people aspect of organisations, or about those phenomena that depend on organisations being an arena of human interaction, such as culture, power and politics, or organisational psychology.<sup>45</sup> It would though, be more accurate to say that the model does not comment on human dynamics rather than it rejects them as proper matters of concern.<sup>46</sup> It is certainly the case that Beer himself understood the VSM as an attempt to describe scientifically or technically what makes organisations adaptive.<sup>47</sup> We might note, however, that, having done so, "the VSM offers a scientific justification for empowerment and democracy in organisations. The parts must be granted autonomy so they can absorb some of the massive environmental variety that would otherwise overwhelm higher management levels".<sup>48</sup> Beer himself believed that the model depended on genuine cooperation and participation, especially in determining and agreeing the purpose of the system and was personally committed to equality and democracy.<sup>49</sup>

Another factor worth noting is the implications of the recursive nature of systems thinking. This means that every organisation has a metasystem, but so do each of its sub-systems. In fact, so does every individual. This means that every part of the organisation, down to the individual, has to work through the same process of developing a future that is consistent with its identity. The implication of this is that an organisation which does not respect and engage the individuals within it is likely to be significantly weakened or undermined in making a collective effort.

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<sup>44</sup> Flood, *Creative Problem Solving*, 112.

<sup>45</sup> Jackson, *Systems Thinking*, 109

<sup>46</sup> Flood, *Creative Problem Solving*, 110-111.

<sup>47</sup> Jackson, *Systems Thinking*, 87.

<sup>48</sup> Jackson, *Systems Thinking*, 107.

<sup>49</sup> Flood, *Creative Problem Solving*, 112.

All this accepted I nevertheless concede that there is a degree of functionality about the model which means it should be handled with care in an ecclesial context. I accept that the VSM does not offer a complete solution. No single theory does. Part of the beauty of the model, however, is that it can be happily combined with insights from other areas of organisation theory, including those relating to culture, politics and organisational psychology in order to provide a much richer and more human picture.

It is not just, however, that, on its own, the VSM lacks a strong sense of the human dimension. In its original formulation at least it also seems somewhat functionalist, in the specific terminology used by Burrell and Morgan,<sup>50</sup> or modernist in that of Mary Jo Hatch.<sup>51</sup> By this I mean that it appears to see the organisation as an entity that can be viewed objectively.<sup>52</sup> I have, however, argued throughout this thesis that we have no vantage point that would allow us to view anything so fully and clearly. In the light of these criticisms, notably the lack of content in the area of human dynamics and the modernist objectivity – I want to bring another form of systems theory into the picture.

### *Soft Systems*

I am still providing what I believe to be essential background to the concepts brought together in the Trialogue before attempting an integration with explicitly theological ideas to produce the Theological Trialogue. A further development in systems thinking provides an important corrective or counterpoint to the VSM and other 'hard' systems theories. The theory to which I refer now is 'soft systems', a term associated especially with Peter Checkland.<sup>53</sup> His approach is based on the recognition that organisational systems are composed primarily of human actors with a range of subjective perspectives. He argues that no-one in the organisation has the vantage point from which to achieve the objectivity implied in the (typically) more modernist hard systems theories such as the VSM. This means that, in practice, there is often a lack of clarity or agreement about organisational purpose which clouds attempts to solve organisational problems. In addition, the problems faced by organisations are often more 'messy' than other theorists appear to assume. Checkland argues that both ends and means cannot be regarded as 'given' and that there are multiple views which need to be taken into

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<sup>50</sup> Burrell, *Sociological Paradigms*.

<sup>51</sup> Hatch, *Organization Theory*, 259.

<sup>52</sup> We might assume from this line of criticism that Beer was a conservative figure. This is far from the case. He saw his work as socially liberating – as a way of "designing freedom" into organisational life. The biggest project of his career was helping Allende to design the Chilean political economy. See Jackson, *Systems Thinking*, 86-87.

<sup>53</sup> Peter Checkland, *Systems Thinking, Systems Practice*, (Chichester: Wiley 1981).

account if a problem is to be properly understood and solutions identified that are workable in the sense of being technically sound but also, crucially, able to command support. It may be, for example, that there is no clear or shared understanding of what the problem is, or even concerning the purpose of the organisation. This gives rise to an approach that emphasises the need to achieve maximum participation of all the system actors in interventions designed to solve problems.

This thinking has resonances with the theological understanding outlined in chapter three, of the Christian life as embodied and always existing in practical form, sometimes in tension with inherited and more abstract theological conceptions. It is certainly the case in practice that important aspects of the churches' beliefs, traditions and concept of purpose and mission are contested. Checkland offers a complement or corrective to the VSM – one which arises from a related basic organisational conception and may thus be considered to have some value in the context of my argument. It is also a concept that has played a role in the development and use of the Trialogue, especially as it is taken up by Beckford.<sup>54</sup> Notably, the term “nurturing identity” acknowledges the soft systems insight that identity (understood to include purpose, core values, beliefs and other essential characteristics) is a concept that requires constant attention.

From a theological perspective it might be objected that the purpose of the body of Christ is given and unchanging. I have argued already, however, that the purpose of any church is always expressed contextually and subject to a range of subjective interpretations and challenges posed by circumstances. Core convictions become entangled with custom and previously successful strategies over time. If the organisation is to keep learning and to change in tandem with its environment, but to do so in a way that retains integrity and allows growth, the realisation of potential, it must have the capacity to disentangle what is essential from the accretions of habit. For the organisation faced by change, the Trialogue, reflecting the thinking expounded in this section, suggests that the key question is “what can we, what may we legitimately, *become?*”

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<sup>54</sup> Beckford, *The Intelligent Organisation*, 82

## 6.5 The Theological Trialogue

My purpose in the second half of this chapter is to develop a particular model of adaptivity which can be helpfully and appropriately applied in the Church of England and used as a part of the theological reflection on the data gathered in the empirical enquiry, the findings from which follow in chapters seven and eight. As I have suggested, I intend to do this by bringing together an organisational model, the Trialogue, with an ecclesial model of adaptivity, “faithful improvisation”, all of it informed by the interdisciplinary ideas set out in chapter three and the ecclesiological ideas set out in chapter four. The result will be an integrated model of ecclesial adaptivity which I entitle (in convenient shorthand) the Theological Trialogue.

### *Faithful improvisation and the Trialogue*

In this section I first return to the concept of faithful improvisation as developed by the Church of England’s Faith and Order Commission.<sup>55</sup> This takes an explicitly theological and also historical approach to the theme of change in the Church of England. As we saw in chapter four, it argues that where the Church of England has managed change successfully, it has done so through a process of faithful improvisation. Faithful improvisation denotes the notion that the characteristic method of the Church of England has been to respond to new circumstances by reinterpreting that church’s core traditions in the light of the particular challenges or opportunities evident to which the new circumstances give rise. The report gives particular attention to how the Church of England related in this way to key Reformation ideas and to new circumstances arising in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>56</sup> I noted in chapter four when describing the basic ideas of faithful improvisation that this is about the improvisations made by those deeply embedded in the tradition, in a way that resembles the improvisations of skilled musicians deeply embedded in the tradition of jazz, for example. The argument is that the Church of England took

the themes and norms of the New Testament and Apostolic age and sought to remain true to them, while at the same time adapting the methods, scope and organization of church leadership to ensure that it served the Christian community effectively in changed conditions...the church...works creatively with the materials that it finds to hand, as it seeks to be faithful to what is inherited. Precisely through this process, however, the Spirit can guide the church into a deeper discovery of the nature of what it has received...the

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<sup>55</sup> Alexander, *Faithful Improvisation?*

<sup>56</sup> Alexander, *Faithful Improvisation?*, 67-75.



process...can...become a means by which the church is shown the deeper structures of its faith.<sup>57</sup>

My first comment on this passage is that it raises the question as to how the theological concept of received tradition (the “themes and norms” referred to) relates to the organisational concept of identity, understood in the terms of the Trialogue. My answer is that I understand identity in organisational terms to be an expression of the embodied nature of a church, as that which is given by God, the Body of Christ, in a particular, concrete form. The second comment is that both the report on senior church leadership and the Trialogue emphasise the idea that change is not only about responding to new, and perhaps threatening developments in the environment, but also concerns the realisation of potential, and a deeper discovery and understanding of the richness of both the theological and organisational heritage. My third comment is that both the organisational and theological themes under consideration take the Church of England beyond the question of maintenance and survival into the hope of flourishing in new ways in the future. I have argued throughout that theology understands the world to be held within the activity of the triune God, who is at work for good within his creation. A perspective which sees the Church of England’s current situation as one characterised primarily by failure or threat would appear to be deficient in the light of that church’s faith. With change comes the opportunity to discover or rediscover deeper truths about God and his world and to discover or recover important aspects of the Church of England’s vocation. Organisationally, this takes the form of a process by which changes in the environment are modelled and brought into a ‘dialogue’ with a reconsidered model of identity in order to produce new mental models and new activities that allow the organisation to remain true to itself whilst finding an apt response to changing needs and circumstances.<sup>58</sup>

This process may perhaps be seen as a complement to the traditional, theologically grounded activity of spiritual discernment in which the Church of England tries to identify what God is revealing through changes in the world, in the voice from outside that church, as well as in the nature and content of the received tradition. The aim is to find new riches in the ancient body of wisdom, allowing renewed forms of contextualised faith and practice. I argue that both of these perspectives are theologically significant and treat of a single reality which exists within the economy of the triune God. One, the organisational perspective, uses a theology that draws

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<sup>57</sup> Alexander, *Faithful Improvisation?*, 54-55.

<sup>58</sup> Beckford, *The Intelligent Organisation*, 69-71.

on language and categories that are not themselves explicitly theological. The other uses more traditionally or explicitly theological categories. I suggest it is possible to conceive of these two movements as two sides of a single, integrated set of activities in which the employment of organisational ideas and practices becomes a means of theological or spiritual discernment. This leads me to offer a model (see fig.6.4 below) which is shaped more, perhaps, by the perspective from organisation theory, but which nevertheless attempts to bring together theological and organisational categories.

### *The Theological Trialogue*

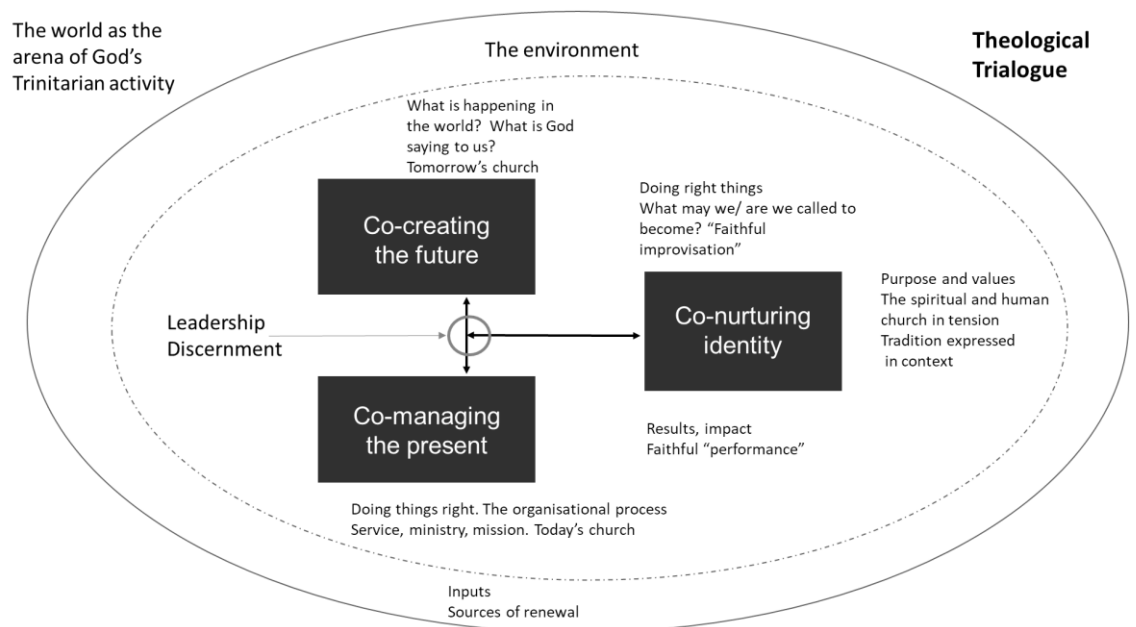


Fig.6.4 The Theological Trialogue.<sup>59</sup>

The model above (fig.6.4) is based on the Trialogue in the sense that it takes its concept of the key functions required for viability or sustainability as its starting point. It attempts to integrate theological and organisational conceptions of adaptivity in the Church of England. I have indicated where the two languages may be employed in tandem to develop a richer concept of the factors influencing the adaptivity of the Church of England or the 'church-system'. The "output" of the church-system (a product of the Church of England's present ministry and mission, or, put in the other language, the right or efficient carrying out of the core organisational process) can be described as 'success' or as 'results' in one language or as 'faithful performance' in the other. These outputs are conditioned by the understanding of the

<sup>59</sup> Derived by me from "The Trialogue" by Pete Dudley after Stafford Beer; informed by faithful Improvisation from the Faith and Order Commission.

identity of the church-system which determines what a good outcome or faithful performance is. The future is co-created by attending to what is happening in the world, the environment, speaking organisationally, and what God is saying to us in and through what is happening in that environment, speaking theologically. This is brought into conversation with a renewed understanding of the identity of the church-system, that is, with the purpose of the Church of England, to use the organisational terminology, and the understanding of the Church of England as a the product of a tradition of faith and practice, existing in a particular context to use more theological language. The process of what the organisational language characterises as leadership is understood theologically as discernment: the aim of the whole process is to assist the church-system to discern what God wants of it.

I recognise that this is not just a matter of different languages: each language brings with it nuances, implications and preconceptions. This must be handled in practice with care and I am clear that it is the explicitly theological categories which are decisive and which, where necessary, qualify the organisational. To complete the picture, there are two oval rings around the Theological Trialogue: the inner ring represents the environment in which the church-system is set and on which it depends for resources. The outer ring represents the dependence of the whole on the life of the triune God, a concept I have borrowed from Fiddes' description of the practical theological process.<sup>60</sup>

Thus the integrated model sets the question of the church and its adaptivity within the frame of God's activity in the world. In line with the argument made in chapter four I assume that the Church of England should be seeking God's will rather than its own future. At the same time, the arguments I have put forward for approaching the church primarily in sacramental terms, that is, as a concrete, historical phenomenon through which its more mysterious, spiritual nature is embodied, depend on a partnership between God and human beings, between divine initiative and context. As a result, I have assumed a significant degree of shared agency as well. It is for this reason that I have opted to characterise managing the present, creating the future and nurturing identity as cooperative ventures between God and his people. The complete model assumes that, as an organisation that wishes to be effective and adaptive, the Church of England seeks efficiency in the present, that is, it hopes to perform faithfully, well and

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<sup>60</sup> Paul Fiddes, "Ecclesiology and Ethnography", 25.

ever better its regular mission and ministry. Further, it seeks to “read” the environment, that is to understand what is happening in the world and, at the same time, to discern what God is doing, and what God is saying through the events and movements around us. The church continually nurtures its identity in order to understand how it might legitimately change in order to respond to changes in the environment. It continually asks, through this process, ‘what is God calling us to do, be and become?’ in order to better serve him in its vocation as a pilgrim church.

I now want to indicate what the Theological Trialogue might suggest about change in the Church of England and allow space for further theological reflection about the kind of questions that arise when we apply organisational models to a church.

### *Co-managing the present*

We have seen that the Church of England’s situation in the present is usually characterised as one of decline, understood as dramatic reduction in the numbers of churchgoers and of perceived influence on society. Russell Ackoff, a soft systems theorist, invites organisations to consider “the future they are currently in”, that is, the consequences that will follow from the continuation of current trends.<sup>61</sup> Overall, these trends might suggest that the Church of England is managing the present poorly, in the sense of delivering a poor performance. The systems perspective in general, and the Trialogue in particular, however, highlight the extent to which it is possible to do things well and fail at the same time because the things done in the present are no longer matched to the needs of the environment. The Church of England’s situation raises the question of whether it is doing the right things, that is, whether, its current activities match the requirements of the world in which it is set.<sup>62</sup> This comment further raises questions about what may, from a theological perspective, be changed in the practice of the church, to which I will return in the discussion of ‘co-nurturing identity’ below.

### *Co-creating the future*

The first step in creating the future involves examining what is happening in the wider environment, and working to understand its needs, character and dynamics. Applied to the Church of England, this must include some account of why the church is where it is, that is, that church must explore the factors that have influenced the reversal in its fortunes and therefore

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<sup>61</sup> Russell Lincoln Ackoff, *Creating the Corporate Future* (New York: Wiley, 1981).

<sup>62</sup> The Trialogue defines “right things” as those activities which meet the needs found in the environment whilst retaining the integrity of the organization. “Rightness” is defined according to the organization’s core purpose and beliefs and by the activity described as “nurturing identity”.

require a response. The change in the religious landscape in Britain has been so profound that it is frequently referred to as a 'paradigm shift'. The phrase is used here to denote the replacement of one model or set of theoretical structures that guide and reflect practice with another.<sup>63</sup> If this is correct, by the nature of such shifts, what this will mean is hard to predict, but it seems likely, by the internal logic of the proposition, to require that the churches develop new models, new theoretical structures and new practices to meet the new circumstances in which they find themselves.

It is in this phase of the Theological Dialogue that the question of agency becomes particularly relevant. The objective of the Church of England is to find God at work in the world, to hear the voice of God, to discern and respond, albeit with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. If cybernetics is to be used practically in the churches, or as a way of understanding the nature of the churches, it would, from a theological perspective, appear to need to be managed in a way that explicitly recognises this partnership between the divine and the human and acknowledge a primary reliance upon the direction provided by the Spirit. This means two things in practice. The first is that the organisational process involved – e.g. consideration of the church's situation and current performance, investigation of the environment – should be understood as one in which God is involved, rather than simply a technical activity. The second is that the process of change should be framed and accompanied by the more traditional forms of discernment, notably prayer.

#### *Co-nurturing identity*

The Theological Dialogue is built on the conviction that an organisation can only sustain itself in a changing environment by reinterpreting its identity in a way that allows it to meet changing needs. To put it more theologically, in the manner of faithful improvisation, when a church seeks to adapt to changes in the environment, it does so by reimagining how its traditions might be expressed in different practices and concrete forms, in order to be relevant whilst retaining integrity. This activity is time-consuming and difficult because – naturally enough – people give their loyalty to the complete, embodied identity of a church as they know it, and do not easily distinguish between practices which continue to serve the larger purpose of a church in the changing world and those that do not.

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<sup>63</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*.

This process may be particularly difficult for the Church of England because of the reluctance of that church to clarify the theological commitments which lie behind particular forms and practices. I suggest it is, however, possible to identify core commitments and do so on the same basis that I argued for a distinctive Anglican approach in chapter four. By this I mean a particular approach to authority (the Anglican triad); a sacramental conception of the church; an emphasis on the faith received in scripture, the creed and councils, expressed in context; and a sense of the church as both Catholic and Reformed. The Church of England's combines its status as a sacramental reality, with a lack of dependence (in theory) on a particular order or polity. In practice, of course, the Church of England may be considered to be irrevocably committed (for good or ill) to such features as the threefold order of ordained ministry and the parish system. Further, the contentious political character of the Church of England may make agreed and strategic change difficult in practice, especially when considered at the national level. At lower levels of the church, in the parish, it may be easier to focus on the common characteristics of the Church of England, expressed in a particular Anglican tradition, worked out in a particular place.

#### *How I will use the Theological Trialogue*

I offer the Theological Trialogue not as 'the answer' but as a useful, powerful and well-grounded model for thinking about the Church of England in change and as a credible and useful framework for interpreting theologically the thinking and practice encapsulated in R&R. It might be objected that because the Theological Trialogue embodies a particular theoretical approach its adoption as a lens for theological reflection effectively pre-judges the data. My response to this is that any choices I make about hermeneutical approaches condition the investigation in a particular way and that this cannot be avoided. I accept, however, that the Theological Trialogue is an experiment in interdisciplinary theological reflection and, because of that, I will use it as part of my approach and not rely upon it exclusively. In the chapters that follow, setting out the findings from my empirical research, I will provide theological reflection drawing upon all the theological and organisational material gathered in the thesis, including some reference to the Theological Trialogue. At the end of each chapter I will offer a summary reflection on the data explicitly according to the categories suggested by the Theological Trialogue. I recognise that the exploration of R&R may well, at the same time, highlight weaknesses of the model, or suggest improvements.

What follows is a set of questions which the Theological Trialogue leads me to ask of the data.

- What is the understanding of the present performance of the Church of England?
- How well is what is happening in the Church of England's environment understood or taken into account?
- How deep or clear is R&R's consideration and presentation of the identity of the Church of England: what it believes and stands for?
- What consideration has been given to what the Church of England might become (future model of the Church) – either to meet threats or to realise its potential?

## **6.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter the notions of hospitality and critical faithfulness suggested by Swinton and Mowat have been crucial concepts. It is on the basis of the notion of hospitality that I described a research process that is framed theologically but draws on social science research methods. The element of theological reflection suggested in Swinton and Mowat's version of the pastoral cycle employs, in this project, elements of organisation theory (described in chapter five) to ecclesiological ends. It makes particular use of a model of ecclesial adaptivity which I term the Theological Trialogue and which I have developed in this chapter. I believe the Theological Trialogue provides a credible and powerful model of adaptivity for the Church of England but I recognise that there may be tensions which arise in its application to the R&R data. In particular, for all my emphasis in chapter four on the distinctiveness of the Church of England's ecclesiology, it is possible that the focus on identity in the Theological Trialogue might prompt questions that are difficult for that diverse church to answer. This will be a theme of chapters seven and eight and I will return to it in the concluding chapter, chapter nine.

The concept of critical faithfulness has allowed me to develop a positive approach to the empirical investigation of R&R. It is one that shares a concern for the health and well-being of the Church of England, for the priority of the gospel of Christ and the Kingdom of God, and for the flourishing of Christian faith and Christian communities. It is also one which is critical in its

approach to the Church of England's practice but in a way that is intended and designed to offer insights that might improve that practice. In what follows there will be critical comment, on the basis of the theological, ecclesiological and organisational material explored and developed (including the Theological Trialogue) but it is offered emphatically in the spirit of enabling the Church of England to more faithfully live out its vocation.

In the next part of this thesis, chapters seven and eight, I will offer an account of my empirical research into the thinking behind the Church of England's R&R programme. The first element in the empirical research is an attempt to understand the nature, aims and rationale of R&R as expressed in its key documents.



## Chapter 7. The story of the documents

### 7.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will set out the first part of the findings from the empirical data collected as part of this project according to the process suggested by Swinton and Mowat and described in the last chapter. Specifically, I will offer a critical account of the key R&R documents. The account is shaped by theological reflection upon the data collected. In line with the proposal set out in chapter six, this reflection drew on the theoretical (ecclesiological and organisational) framework developed in previous chapters. I will make use of the Theological Trialogue as a model of ecclesial adaptivity: this will be referenced particularly in a section bringing together the fruits of theological reflection near the end of the chapter.

All organisational practices imply some kind of understanding of how the organisation works. Its change practices imply some understanding of how change is managed effectively. Organisation theories provide theoretical accounts of such understandings, allowing them to be tested and scrutinised and for best practice to be identified. I have developed a theoretical approach to the question of adaptivity in the Church of England which I believe to be useful, credible and well-founded. R&R makes no claim to have been based explicitly on any particular organisational approach. In the absence of any such explicit theoretical framework I will analyse the R&R documents to see what implicit understandings are at work and then to evaluate them in the light of the theoretical approaches I have explored and developed. I will group the R&R documents according to common themes and interests, describe their content and offer commentary as I go.

It will become evident that the account offered in this chapter tends to raise questions and identify gaps rather than provide answers. These questions involve the scope and intent of R&R, the understanding of the Church of England informing the programme, the theological and organisational rationales for the programme, and the interdisciplinary relationship between ecclesiological and organisational concepts. The result is that this chapter identifies a number of matters (summarised in a separate section before the chapter's conclusion) that require further elucidation and exploration. The interviews with senior figures in the Church of England

which I conducted provided an opportunity for such further investigation. I will offer an account of these in chapter eight. There will, however, be some reference forward to the findings from the interviews in this chapter when doing so helps to make sense of the material. It is intended that the two chapters should together tell the unfolding story of what the empirical research has discovered.

## 7.2 An introduction to Renewal and Reform and its documents

As I indicated in chapter one, in February 2015 the archbishops of Canterbury and York (Justin Welby and John Sentamu) introduced a programme of ‘Reform and Renewal’ to General Synod. This was how the programme was described at this early stage. Quite soon the programme changed from ‘Reform and Renewal’ to ‘Renewal and Reform’. According to Jeremy Worthen “The adjustment in order of the two terms that took place in the summer — from ‘Reform and Renewal’ to ‘Renewal and Reform’ — seems...to be an acknowledgement of the need to affirm the priority of grace in this context; the risen Christ making all things new, and that newness being known in the life of the Church.”<sup>1</sup> The substance of the programme was contained in a number of task group reports which were presented for discussion and formal approval. The programme as a whole was introduced and summarised in a paper entitled *In Each Generation (IEG)*.<sup>2</sup> At this stage the programme included the proposals made by four reports: *Simplification*,<sup>3</sup> *Resourcing the Future (RTF)*<sup>4</sup> and *Resourcing Ministerial Education (RME)*<sup>5</sup> plus *The Green Report (Green)*<sup>6</sup> (see table 7.1 below for a summary of the documents). *Green* was not to be discussed at Synod because formally it did not require either discussion or synodical approval. *Developing Discipleship (DD)*<sup>7</sup> is not named as such, but Welby and Sentamu state that a report on “missionary discipleship” provides important context for the larger aims of the programme.<sup>8</sup> *DD* was discussed and accepted at this Synod, on the same day as the reports named by the archbishops, so my reading is that it is to *DD* that they refer.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Worthen, “Renewal and Reform: Does it have a Theology?” *The Church Times*, 9 December, 2016. <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2016/9-december/comment/opinion/the-theology-behind-renewal-and-reform>.

<sup>2</sup> Welby, *In Each Generation*.

<sup>3</sup> Task Group, *Simplification*.

<sup>4</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing the Future*.

<sup>5</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing Ministerial Education*.

<sup>6</sup> Green, *Talent Management for Future Leaders*.

<sup>7</sup> Task Group, *Developing Discipleship*, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Welby, *In Each Generation*, 5.

*Church Commissioners' Funds and Inter-Generational Equity (CCF)*<sup>9</sup> was also presented at the General Synod of February 2015 and appears to have been seen as integral to the programme since then. General Synod approved the programme and the recommendations of the various reports.

Further documents followed. In 2016 William Nye, the Secretary General of Synod produced another core R&R document, *A Vision and Narrative for Renewal and Reform*.<sup>10</sup> In 2017 Synod approved a report from the Archbishops' Council (based on the work of a task group it had appointed) which made recommendations concerning the development of lay discipleship and ministry. This was *Setting God's People Free (SGPF)*.<sup>11</sup> This completed the list of the main documents underpinning the R&R programme, though there is also a short document setting out a strategy for mission on housing estates (written by Philip North) and a digital strategy (for promoting and offering access to the Church of England online) which does not appear to be supported by public documentation in the same way as other elements of R&R. That these are the primary R&R documents is indicated by their formal reception as part of the Renewal and Reform programme at General Synod and the way the R&R themes are presented on the Church of England website.<sup>12</sup>

As I subsequently discovered in interviews, Renewal and Reform became established as a formal activity of the Church of England in 2015, with its own office and its own director. The first director was Mike Eastwood, also Diocesan Secretary of Liverpool, in a part-time role. Subsequently he was succeeded by Debbie Clinton who manages a dedicated team and is still in post at the time of writing.

I will now look more closely at the documents and their contents and will do so by grouping them in a way that reflects differences in focus, purpose and style. *IEG* and *V&N* both offer overviews of and rationales for the programme as a whole so I will start with them. *RME*, *RTF*, *Simplification*, and *CCF* are grouped because they provided the content for the programme as launched, and all concern institutional reforms and share a certain style of presentation. *DD* and *SGPF* are both concerned with the formation and ministry of the Church of England's lay members and include more explicitly theological content. *Green* will be treated

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<sup>9</sup> Whittam-Smith, *Church Commissioners' Funds*.

<sup>10</sup> Nye, *A Vision and Narrative*, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Archbishops' Council, *Setting God's People Free*.

<sup>12</sup> "Renewal and Reform," accessed 19 April, 2022, <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/renewal-reform>.

separately not because it was authorised differently, but because of its focus on leadership, the development of senior clergy and its presentation of material in the form of combined theological and organisational or management discourses. Before I embark on an account of the documents in more detail I will make a general reflection upon them. The R&R reports are diverse in many ways (including their written style) but share a certain character reflecting their origins and purpose. Several of them are the product of work and discussion by task groups. The reports offer each group's conclusions but do not offer much by way of an account of the process or discussion. This means that the link between evidence and proposals is not always clear or is quite briefly treated. My reading is that this is the nature of reports like these. If my account raises questions about their content it should not be assumed that this constitutes a criticism of the documents themselves, or the work they represent. These are all political documents by which I mean that they are designed to present ideas and win support from a quasi-parliamentary body representing the spectrum of Anglican opinion. In other words, they are designed for a specific, procedural purpose. This means that that one can expect them to have a rather careful, pragmatic and functional character.

For ease of reference I include a table which sets out the main R&R documents and a brief summary of their principal content.

Table 7.1: The principal R&R documents in chronological order. These documents are all the work of task groups except *IEG*, *CCF* and *V&N*. I have indicated the individuals who authored those reports.

<b>Item</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Description</b>
<i>Talent Management for Future Leaders and Leadership Development for Bishops and Deans: A New Approach (Green)</i>	2014	Proposals for: A new leadership development programme for bishops, another for deans of cathedrals and a “talent pool” for potential senior leaders.  N.B. Produced by a task group set up by the archbishops and the Development and Appointments Group. Did not require synodical approval.
<i>Resourcing Ministerial Education (RME)</i>	Feb 2015	Proposals to: seek an increase in the number of vocations to ministry, particularly the ordained ministry; increase funding accordingly; give more influence to dioceses in the commissioning of ministerial education and ensure that theological education enables candidates to be more responsive to and effective in meeting the needs of the church today.
<i>Resourcing the Future of the Church of England (RTF)</i>	Feb 2015	Proposals to: abolish the existing formula for distributing funds from the Church Commissioners to dioceses; targeting of funds to support growth and areas characterised by poverty and deprivation; suspend the principle of “inter-generational equity” to support the “Strategic Development Fund” in meeting the cost of innovative projects in dioceses aimed (broadly) at church growth and for which dioceses would bid.
<i>Simplification</i>	Feb 2015	Proposals to: Reform legal and other procedures to make it easier for dioceses and parishes to be flexible and innovative in their mission.
<i>Developing Discipleship (DD)</i>	Feb 2015	Identified discipleship as the calling of all Christians and argued that strengthening discipleship is a critical factor in the growth of the church in numbers and influence for good. Proposed the creation and adoption of a new catechism and a new “theological conversation” on the theme of discipleship between bishops, theologians and educators.
<i>Church Commissioners’ Funds and Inter-Generational Equity (CCF)</i>	Feb 2015	Set out a basis on which the Church Commissioners would be able to make additional funding available to support proposals above. Involves a one-off suspension of the principle of inter-generational equity, that is, a suspension of the principle that the real value of the Church of England’s assets should be maintained into the future. Includes full account of the history of the Church Commissioners distribution of funds, errors and reforms. Author: Andreas Whittam-Smith.
<i>In Each Generation: a proposal for Reform and Renewal (IEG)</i>	Feb 2015	Statement made by the archbishops when introducing the initial task group reports to General Synod in February 2015, setting the above (esp. first four reports) in the context of a reform programme. Authors: Archbishops of Canterbury and York.
<i>A Vision and Narrative for Renewal and Reform (V&amp;N)</i>	2016	A high level rationale and account of R&R. Author: William Nye
<i>Setting God’s People Free (SGPF)</i>	2017	Proposals for: a series of measures designed to encourage lay ministry by enabling lay people to be active disciples in all parts of their lives and to create a new partnership in ministry with clergy based on a sense of mutuality and complementary vocations.  N.B. Written by a task group set up later and brought to Synod in 2017 as a proposal for action by the Archbishops’ Council

### 7.3 Scope and intent: *In Each Generation* and *A Vision and Narrative for Renewal and Reform*

I turn first to the documents (*IEG* and *V&N*) that provide overviews of the programme as I want to understand the scope and intent of the programme as a whole. *IEG* appears to understand R&R to be a relatively limited programme of specific reforms which would support and enable the dioceses. *V&N* appears to understand R&R as an attempt to achieve a much more far-reaching reform of the Church of England. My reading of these documents suggests that the aims of R&R either developed or were clarified in the period between the publication of these two documents, though I note also that the single authorship of *V&N* might have allowed a bolder tone.

Both these documents are short, only three pages each. *V&N*, as the name suggests, focuses more on the larger ‘story’ or thinking that informs R&R. In *IEG* the archbishops offer an introduction to R&R which provides information about the rationale and content of the programme. *IEG* begins with a reference to the Church of England’s vocation to obey “the commission that Jesus gave his disciples...to proclaim the good news afresh in each generation”.<sup>13</sup> It affirms the way the Church of England “continues to have a significant impact in all kinds of positive ways in the life of the nation...through community ventures, food banks, credit unions and many other initiatives”.<sup>14</sup> However, “the urgency of the challenge is not in doubt”.<sup>15</sup> The programme is presented as a response (though not a “sufficient” response) to negative trends in the Church of England: attendance at services of worship has “declined at an average of 1% per annum over recent decades”. Regular worshippers are “significantly older”.<sup>16</sup> Clergy numbers are also falling: “[the] age profile...[is] increasing...[with] 40% due to retire over the next decade”.<sup>17</sup> The archbishops invite Synod to receive and approve the measures proposed in the reports of various task groups, that is, in *RTF*, *RME* and *Simplification*. The work of these groups should be “approached against the background” of the “quinquennial goals” (goals for the five year period of that General Synod) adopted in 2010.<sup>18</sup> These goals were developed from a statement in the Presidential address to Synod in 2010:

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<sup>13</sup> Welby, *In Each Generation*, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Welby, *In Each Generation*, 7.

<sup>15</sup> Welby, *In Each Generation*, 8.

<sup>16</sup> Welby, *In Each Generation*, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Welby, *In Each Generation*, 9.

<sup>18</sup> Welby, *In Each Generation*, 6.

- (i) To take forward the spiritual and numerical growth of the Church of England – including the growth of its capacity to serve the whole community of this country;
- (ii) To re-shape or reimagine the Church's ministry for the century coming, so as to make sure that there is a growing and sustainable Christian witness in every local community; and
- (iii) To focus our resources where there is both greatest need and greatest opportunity.<sup>19</sup>

In a 2011 document these were summarised as three key themes that would guide the Church of England for the quinquennium: “contributing as the national Church to the common good; facilitating the growth of the Church; reimagining the Church’s ministry”.<sup>20</sup> These goals were intended to provide an agenda and reference point for all the activities undertaken by “The Synod, the House [of Bishops], the [Archbishops’] Council and the other National Church Institutions...over the next five years”.<sup>21</sup> *IEG* thus positions R&R as a programme to realise these goals. It is questionable, however, whether in fact R&R has placed much focus on the growth in capacity to serve: I will discuss the question of growth below in section 7.5, with reference to what is meant by the term, its legitimacy as a priority and, more particularly, the approach to achieving it.

*V&N* begins with an affirmation that R&R “builds on the three goals articulated and embraced by General Synod in 2010”, that is, the quinquennial goals.<sup>22</sup> Its purpose is evidently to provide a more general, more explicitly theological rationale for the programme. I will comment a little later on the question of why such a rationale was added after the content of the programme had already been published.

*V&N* begins with reference to Luke 10.2: “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field”.<sup>23</sup> The exposition and application which follows seems to understand the “harvest” as the realisation of the Kingdom of God in the world and the “workers” as church adherents. Because the numbers of these adherents are diminished, workers must be recruited from those currently without faith

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<sup>19</sup> Report of the House of Bishops and Archbishops' Council, *Challenges for the New Quinquennium* (London: Church of England, 2011), ii.

<sup>20</sup> House of Bishops, *Challenges for the New Quinquennium*, 2.

<sup>21</sup> House of Bishops, *Challenges for the New Quinquennium*, ii.

<sup>22</sup> Nye, *A Vision and Narrative*, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Nye, *A Vision and Narrative*, 1.

or church allegiance: “As the church now seeks to nurture new generations of leaders we too will need to look in unexpected places. We may need to focus on the fringes where people are finding faith, meeting Jesus and committing themselves to the work of the Kingdom”.<sup>24</sup> On this basis it is asserted that “Renewal and Reform offers a message of hope through changed lives and transformed communities as people of faith and people finding faith also discover their vocation to love God and serve others”.<sup>25</sup> The document goes on to describe what this might mean for the Church of England in the future: “followers of Jesus” as “faithful witnesses”; churches “equipped to make and sustain disciples across the generations”; all forms of church “to have the leadership they need”; dioceses with senior leadership “better equipped for God’s mission”; the church able to “confidently communicate our faith in a digital age”; the Church of England “focussing greater energy on our participation in God’s mission”.<sup>26</sup>

This is followed by an acknowledgement of the challenges faced including “a significant and continuing decline in and ageing of church attendance” and “a significant decline in the number of stipendiary clergy which is due to accelerate in the next ten years”.<sup>27</sup> This is consistent with the presentation in *IEG* but to this *V&N* adds what might have been implied but was not clearly stated in the account of the task group reports in *IEG*: “the unsustainability of certain patterns of ministry; the lack of capacity...in some dioceses...to envision, develop and implement strategies for a more hopeful future; the lack of leadership capacity in some places” and “the legal and cultural constraints and the institutional inertias that impede necessary change”.<sup>28</sup> The next section describes how the Church of England is to become “a growing church”,<sup>29</sup> building on “our rich inheritance” of prayer, worship and pastoral and prophetic ministries.<sup>30</sup> The document concludes with “A Lutheran prayer for courage”.<sup>31</sup>

#### *A limited programme or a strategy for the whole Church of England?*

As I consider what these two documents tell us about the purpose and scope of R&R I notice that the documents appear to offer differing accounts. *IEG* talks of “renewing and reforming aspects of our institutional life” as “a necessary but far from sufficient response to the

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<sup>24</sup> Nye, *A Vision and Narrative*, 1.

<sup>25</sup> Nye, *A Vision and Narrative*, 1.

<sup>26</sup> Nye, *A Vision and Narrative*, 2.

<sup>27</sup> Nye, *A Vision and Narrative*, 2.

<sup>28</sup> Nye, *A Vision and Narrative*, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Nye, *A Vision and Narrative*, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Nye, *A Vision and Narrative*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Nye, *A Vision and Narrative*, 4.



challenges facing the Church of England”.<sup>32</sup> *V&N* appears to go rather further, explicitly characterising R&R as a response to these trends and an attempt to “reverse the decline”.<sup>33</sup> *IEG* presents as offering a set of organisational changes of the kind that the national church is able to make: how its monies are allocated, how ministry training is organised, what training is offered to senior clergy, how regulation is managed. These reforms are all designed, of course, to enable dioceses and parishes to better respond to the challenge of the times, but the report seems cautious about any suggestion that it might be making demands on the Church of England as a whole or proposing a programme for dioceses. *V&N* retains some of that caution, but the tone is noticeably bolder and the content much more explicit about the intended impact across the Church of England. I note again that the boldness of tone could be linked to the fact that the document has a single author, but maintain that the aims set out in the document are nevertheless notably more ambitious than those in *IEG*. The programme is to “give renewed voice and hope to the people of God and the communities they inhabit”.<sup>34</sup>

If one goes back to the document which expounded the quinquennial goals (*Challenges for the New Quinquennium*) it is simply assumed that the goals will be pursued in a way that supports the dioceses rather than aims to influence or direct them.<sup>35</sup> *IEG* has a more deliberate tone allied to more specific objectives and suggests that the programme is giving bishops and dioceses what they asked for when consulted.<sup>36</sup> I assume the consultation referred to is the one described in *RTF* in which bishops and senior staff were involved.<sup>37</sup> *V&N* speaks much more confidently of outcomes in dioceses and parishes and has much more of the rallying cry about it. It looks quite like an attempt to provide a vision, if not a strategy, for the whole Church of England. This raises the possibility that what began and was presented relatively modestly developed into something with far greater scope. This might not be unreasonable in itself but it might have a negative effect on its reception among those who see an intervention of one, more limited kind, turn into another with more ambition and, as it could be seen, ‘intrusive’ intent – an unwelcome, ‘top-down’ process. Many in the Church of England would probably not be aware of this shift, nor of the programme as a programme at all perhaps, but there would be many others

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<sup>32</sup> Welby, *In Each Generation*, 2.

<sup>33</sup> Nye, *A Vision and Narrative*, 3.

<sup>34</sup> Nye, *A Vision and Narrative*, 3.

<sup>35</sup> House of Bishops, *Challenges for the New Quinquennium*

<sup>36</sup> Welby, *In Each Generation*, 15.

<sup>37</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing the Future*, 2

who would, because they read about such matters in the church press or follow Synod debates. The question of the scope and ambition of R&R is one I shall return to in the interviews.

*Why is the vision and narrative published after the content of the programme?*

The timing of V&N is curious and relates to this question of what R&R is trying to do organisationally, with what effect, and how it is understood by those responsible for it. The obvious time to publish a paper describing a “vision” is before one publishes the detail of the strategy (or at least, with it) in order to provide a higher level rationale and “narrative” for the proposed programme.<sup>38</sup> I was told by one of my interviewees (one who is emphatically in a position to know) that this retrospective overview was written expressly in response to a criticism that the R&R lacked such a “vision and narrative”. This raises some questions. Firstly, is V&N an account of a view held from the beginning (if not precisely articulated) or is it a *post hoc* rationalisation of a process that was developed without any such overall rationale? If this is the case it might be further suggested that the programme was put together from a set of initiatives rather than conceived holistically. The fact that the programme is composed of multiple documents loosely connected might support such an interpretation. If this is correct it might further suggest that the programme was conceived in the manner associated with the machine metaphor, as discussed in chapter five, rather than in the systemic fashion typical of the organisation theory and practice associated with the metaphors of the organism and brain. A weakness of the approaches associated with the machine metaphor is that they tend to treat symptoms rather than causes. A second question concerns whether what reads like an organisational change programme (“renewing and reforming aspects of our institutional life”)<sup>39</sup> was thought through sufficiently in those terms before it was launched. Even less ‘linear’ and conventional approaches to change such as those associated with the view of organisations as complex adaptive systems prefer to explore the future character and shape of the organisation and of the landscape in which it operates before getting down to specifics.<sup>40</sup> My point here is not to suggest an alternative approach but to characterise the approach that appears to be influencing the programme as it is presented in the documents and indicate some of the issues which follow upon that choice.

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<sup>38</sup> This observation is based on commonplace organisational change practice but if justification is required it can be found in Kotter’s standard work: Kotter, *Leading Change*.

<sup>39</sup> Welby, *In Each Generation*, 2.

<sup>40</sup> E.g. Boulton, *Embracing Complexity*, 155; Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Futures as it Emerges*, 2nd ed. Berrett-Koehler, 2016), 188-191.

There may be another way of looking at it. Change cannot be managed perfectly and most change processes develop iteratively. It is not so important that things happen in the 'right' or ideal order as that all the important ingredients of a change process are included. Sometimes later work highlights the inadequacy of earlier work and it becomes necessary to go back a stage before going forward again.<sup>41</sup> On this basis it might be argued that there are times when, if those in leadership roles believe a situation places the organisation in imminent danger, it is right to start the change process with urgent action and provide the other elements of the process later. The stronger theological content of the later R&R documents might support such an interpretation. Approaching change in this way involves considerable risk, however. If the urgent action is inadequately considered it may be misconceived. It may then so condition the course of change that no amount of retrospective thinking can redeem the programme. It is hard to draw conclusions about which of these alternatives is closer to the truth about R&R from the documents alone and so I will pursue the question in the next chapter, in my account of the interviews I conducted.

Whatever the actual history of the development of R&R and the methodology involved I cannot help but observe that, considering that I have been examining the two principal expressions of the overall nature and rationale of R&R, they do appear to offer surprisingly brief and sketchy accounts. This may be the consequence of the pragmatic and political nature of the R&R documents but, even granting that, I am still left feeling that a programme of the apparent ambition of R&R requires a more complete and coherent ecclesiological and organisational introduction. I will set out in detail the matters which do not seem to be adequately explicated later in this chapter (using the framework developed in earlier chapters). Now I will turn to the task group reports which provided the initial content of the programme and explore both their content and any further clues which might be provided about the overall nature and methodology of the programme.

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<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Checkland, *Systems Thinking*, 212.

## **7.4 Core content: *Resourcing Ministerial Education, Resourcing the Future, Simplification and Church Commissioners' Funds and Inter-generational Equity***

### *Resourcing Ministerial Education*

*RME* reports on the work of a task group “appointed by the Ministry Council to develop proposals for the most effective use of resources for ministerial education”.<sup>42</sup> It states that its work has been carried out “in collaboration with the four other Task Groups” and “seeks to align the resources given to ministerial education...with the three goals for the quinquennium”.<sup>43</sup> The report adds that “we recognise the particular moment of opportunity presented by the Task Groups to bring more resources to bear on the key task of ministerial education. We recognise the sense across the Church that significant change is required”.<sup>44</sup> No direct evidence is offered to support this rather generalised assertion, but it is suggested that it is based on feedback from dioceses gathered in the “Resourcing the Future exercise”. This is described in the *Resourcing the Future* report itself as a process which involved consulting bishops, diocesan secretaries and “senior diocesan colleagues”.<sup>45</sup> The consultation sought “a significant increase in the number and quality of ministerial leaders, lay and ordained”.<sup>46</sup> *RME* also understands its proposals in the light of the claim that “we face a significant net decline in the number of stipendiary ministers and alongside this further decline in congregations and hence our capacity to serve every community”.<sup>47</sup> Here is how the task group describes its objectives:

Our vision as a Task Group is of a growing church with a flourishing ministry. We hope therefore to see

- every minister equipped to offer collaborative leadership in mission and to be adaptable in a rapidly changing context
- a cohort of candidates for ministry who are younger, more diverse and with a wider range of gifts to serve God’s mission
- an increase of at least 50% in ordinations on 2013 figures sustained annually from 2020
- the rapid development of lay ministries
- a continued commitment to an ordained and lay ministry which serves the whole Church both geographically and in terms of church tradition.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing Ministerial Education*, 1.

<sup>43</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing Ministerial Education*, 1.

<sup>44</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing Ministerial Education*, 1.

<sup>45</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing the Future*, 2.

<sup>46</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing Ministerial Education*, 2.

<sup>47</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing Ministerial Education*, 2.

<sup>48</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing Ministerial Education*, 2.

These objectives will require “a significant increase in resources”<sup>49</sup> but also a change in the way resources are managed: “it is not clear that the present arrangements ensure value for money. They are perceived to discourage innovative and flexible forms of ministerial education which are responsive to the needs of dioceses”.<sup>50</sup> Again, little specific evidence is offered to support this claim, though there is an account of research into how ministers perceive the effectiveness of ministerial education. This finds that “62% of ministers who responded perceived their initial formation in college or course positively” though there were “a significant number of qualitative responses about the lack of preparation for the practice of ministry”.<sup>51</sup> It is suggested (without substantiation) that “there is clear evidence that high quality provision during IME 2 [training for curates] and then in Continuing Ministerial Development [continuing learning post-curacy] make a demonstrable contribution to the numerical and spiritual growth of congregations”.<sup>52</sup> This is a bold claim considering how notoriously difficult it is to demonstrate the link between leadership learning and organisational outcomes.<sup>53</sup> The report seeks an increase in resourcing and “greater power to dioceses in making decisions about forms of training, a new stream of funding for lay ministry and measures to improve quality in selection and at all stages of ministerial education”.<sup>54</sup>

The report continues with a consideration of the additional resources required to fund the proposals (£10m per annum: we are not told how this will be divided between clergy and lay training), an account of the measures required to increase the effectiveness of “vocations work” and twelve proposals to improve the quality of selection and training.

### *Resourcing the Future*

*RTF* begins with the claim that, rather than a time of crisis or decline, “this is a moment of great opportunity for the Church of England”. The situation is characterised this way because the adoption of the quinquennial goals “heralds a new direction for the Church, after many decades of steady decline”.<sup>55</sup> The Church of England’s resources must be aligned with these

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<sup>49</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing Ministerial Education*, 3.

<sup>50</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing Ministerial Education*, 3.

<sup>51</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing Ministerial Education*, 4.

<sup>52</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing Ministerial Education*, 4.

<sup>53</sup> James D. Kirkpatrick and Wendy Kayser Kirkpatrick, *Kirkpatrick’s Four Levels of Training* (Alexandria: ATD Press, 2016).

<sup>54</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing Ministerial Education*, 4.

<sup>55</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing the Future*, 1.

goals and a shift made from the “management of decline” to “investment in the ambition of growth”.<sup>56</sup> As *V&N* suggested, growth is a major theme of R&R and I shall address that theme a little later in this chapter. In *RTF* the primary mechanism to enable this shift away from decline and towards growth is to be a change in the way that the Church of England distributes those funds made available by the Church Commissioners, from “current formula systems which provide mechanical, ineffective subsidy” to “investment focused on fulfilling dioceses’ strategic plans for growth, and with a strong bias to the poor”.<sup>57</sup> This will include the allocation of resources to support the aspiration to increase the number of lay and ordained leaders: the report offers evidence which suggests, persuasively, that the existing aspirations, expectations and plans of dioceses concerning the recruitment of stipendiary clergy are unrealistic and inconsistent.<sup>58</sup> The report believes the then current “Darlow Formula” to be defective. That formula tended to distribute the Church Commissioners’ money to parishes that ‘needed’ it – that is, to those with least funds. *RTF* argues that this approach is misguided: “across the Church considerable amounts of resource are being channelled to support parish churches for the simple reason that they are declining, not because they are in deprived communities or are serving large populations”.<sup>59</sup> This claim is supported by research, which apparently investigated a single diocese in depth, though we are told nothing about the basis, location and nature of the investigation involved. The research output rates parishes according to “mission strength” (measured by attendance growth or decline) and “financial strength”.<sup>60</sup>

To understand the claim that follows it should be noted that the Darlow formula provided only a portion (and a relatively small portion) of the funding available to parishes and dioceses. The bulk is provided by a combination of giving in parishes and historic diocesan resources and these may not be accounted for separately by dioceses. In other words, dioceses may well not be able to say where they have spent Darlow money as distinct from locally generated funds. As *RTF* notes “one cannot know where the Darlow funding is being spent as there is very little accountability over its expenditure or impact”.<sup>61</sup> Because the use of the Darlow allocation cannot be accounted for directly a proxy measure is identified by the research in order to form a view about the ends to which Darlow money is being directed. As an indicator of what is

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<sup>56</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing the Future*, 2.

<sup>57</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing the Future*, 4.

<sup>58</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing the Future*, 13.

<sup>59</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing the Future*, 16.

<sup>60</sup> This appears to be the only research available.

<sup>61</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing the Future*, 19.

happening, therefore, *RTF* notes that the research finds that the Darlow formula is “putting the same amount of money as the Darlow funding [i.e. an amount equivalent to the total Darlow funding for that diocese]” into parishes which are low on both “mission strength” and “financial strength” and on that basis argues that the funding is not being used to support mission and growth.<sup>62</sup> On the basis of the information provided by *RTF* it is difficult to be confident about the strength of the research and evidence behind this verdict. I also find myself wondering whether its logic rests on an assumption that those churches which are not growing (low in mission strength and financial strength but not necessarily located in poor areas) could be or should be growing. It might suggest that church growth would be achieved if a parish only had the will and intention. I will explore this question when I turn to the church growth theme in the next section.

The rest of the report sets out relatively detailed processes which will allow the allocation of national Church Commissioner funds to be invested in mission and growth, with a discrete stream directed towards the support of the poorest communities. The aspirations of other task groups are noted, and the hope is expressed that the Church Commissioners can be persuaded to make additional funds available for these “and other strategic interventions which will advance the mission of the whole Church”.<sup>63</sup> The most dramatic change is the proposed introduction for dioceses seeking funding of “a bidding mechanism similar to the one currently in operation for the strategic development funding”. This will be linked to “evaluation of outcomes”.<sup>64</sup> There will be a “transition to the new funding arrangements...over ten years from the start of 2017”.

### *Simplification*

*Simplification* brings forward “options for simplification and deregulation in response to concerns about legislative constraints to mission and growth”.<sup>65</sup> “In taking on this work, the Group was fully seized of the importance of the mission and growth agenda in the Church today” it states, and a reference to the quinquennial goal concerning growth follows.<sup>66</sup> Its proposals rest on the conviction (supported, it is stated by consultation with dioceses) “that the

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<sup>62</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing the Future*, 19.

<sup>63</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing the Future*, 29.

<sup>64</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing the Future*, 37.

<sup>65</sup> Task Group, *Simplification*, 2.

<sup>66</sup> Task Group, *Simplification*, 2.

Church has been over-cautious when framing legislation”.<sup>67</sup> The report’s recommendations, it states:

are intended to address three levels of concern:

- Immediate major hindrances to mission, including pastoral reorganisation and diocesan/parochial management.
- Weighty and worthy bureaucracy and procedure that is of its time, but is no longer fit for purpose.
- Matters which generate redundant paperwork which could easily be simplified.<sup>68</sup>

The report offers no elaboration of exactly how existing legislation and processes impede mission. Nevertheless, these changes are deemed “necessary to give the Church the flexibility it needs for the urgent missionary task”.<sup>69</sup> I assume that the flexibility believed to be required involves, amongst other things, making it easier to respond quickly to new situations, reorganise parishes, alter or re-purpose buildings and deploy clergy more freely. There appear to be many constraints upon timely action in support of mission: *Simplification* is the longest of these initial reports by some distance. What follows is a list of detailed proposals concerning clergy terms of service, pastoral reorganisation, church buildings, Bishops’ mission orders, Compensation for loss of office, the Endowments and Glebe Measure, patronage, and the national clergy payroll. Many of these concern arrangements which have a relatively short history in the Church of England such as changes to the 2009 Clergy (Terms of Service) Measure, the 2011 Mission and Pastoral Measure and the 1986 Patronages (Benefices) Measure.

#### *Church Commissioners’ Funds and Inter-Generational Equity*

*CCF* provides an account of the recent history of the Church Commissioners. It was written by Andreas Whittam-Smith, the then First Estates Commissioner. The First Church Estates Commissioner chairs the assets committee of the Church Commissioners, the committee responsible for managing the Commissioners’ then £7.9 billion investment portfolio. The First Estates Commissioner is also a member of the Church Commissioners’ Board of Governors, the General Synod, and the Archbishops’ Council. *CCF* tells the story of how the Church Commissioners recovered from a period of “bad’ over-distribution” in the 1990s<sup>70</sup> and

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<sup>67</sup> Task Group, *Simplification*, 2.

<sup>68</sup> Task Group, *Simplification*, 2.

<sup>69</sup> Task Group, *Simplification*, 3.

<sup>70</sup> Whittam-Smith, *Church Commissioners’ Funds*, 1.



became highly and professionally disciplined. The report states that “this new discipline makes it impossible to over-distribute **without knowing that you are doing it**”.<sup>71</sup> The Church Commissioners have “for more than twenty years now, ...adopted a rigid policy of distributing only such sums that will enable the value of the endowment to be maintained in real terms through time.”<sup>72</sup> This is the principle of “inter-generational equity”. The requests for additional expenditure made in the reports described above require a suspension of this principle. *CCF* concludes that the Commissioners’ funds have been managed in such a way in recent times that “there is...scope for the Commissioners to contemplate some additional ‘pump priming’ type expenditure over and above its current support for the Church, even over a number of years” and that failure to invest at this time could mean “there would be no Church in future on which the Commissioners’ ongoing support could be spent”.<sup>73</sup> This is a dramatic conclusion which appears to suggest that the level of concern felt among senior officers of the Church of England about the impact of ‘decline’ was high indeed. The report is accompanied by a note by the Commissioners’ Chief Financial Officer setting out how this ‘good’ form of “over-distribution” could be managed.

#### *Significant questions raised*

These reports and their proposals were all accepted and approved by General Synod with some minor amendments and have since been enacted. The conclusion that they were therefore positively received is confirmed by a review of the relevant report on Synod proceedings.<sup>74</sup> There were some interesting cautionary notes, however. Philip Giddings (an academic, well-known Evangelical and Chair of the House of Laity at the time)<sup>75</sup> commented:

How do you teach old dogs new tricks...How are we going to ensure that we, as a Church, the whole Church, take on board this programme? It needs a spiritual revolution. It needs a work of the Holy Spirit. I would like to hear from the Chairs of these task groups how we are going to mobilise this Church to seek that work of the Spirit so that all these wonderful ideas which are good ones can be taken forward and the rest not? There is a profound spiritual challenge here and at the moment I do not see much in the papers (and perhaps that is understandable) about that. In particular, I want to know how we really are going to mobilise the enormous gifts of the laity of this Church to bring about the growth and evangelism and discipleship which God wants.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Whittam-Smith, *Church Commissioners’ Funds*, 2. (His emphasis).

<sup>72</sup> Whittam-Smith, *Church Commissioners’ Funds*, 2.

<sup>73</sup> Whittam-Smith, *Church Commissioners’ Funds*, 7.

<sup>74</sup> General Synod, *Report of Proceedings 2015*.

<sup>75</sup> General Synod has three ‘houses’ or distinct formal groupings. They are the houses of laity, clergy and bishops.

<sup>76</sup> The General Synod, *Report of Proceedings 2015*, 94-95.

This intervention highlights some of the key organisational and theological questions and issues which seem to me raised by the account of the material so far. Firstly, once again, it highlights the question of the scope of the programme. Does R&R aim at the kind of limited changes suggested by the account in *IEG* or the more far-reaching change apparently envisaged by *V&N*? The consideration of the detailed task group work considered so far has not offered much direct help with this question, though it has perhaps added to the case for seeing R&R as a more limited programme. The reports emphasise a set of relatively specific activities and it is not clear how these will effect the kind of change described in *V&N*.

Secondly, especially if more far-reaching change is, in fact, intended, it seems likely that it will take more than changes in organisational policy or practice to achieve it. The Church of England faces what could be characterised as a spiritual challenge. We have seen little evidence of a concern for addressing the question of where the spiritual energy is to come from, nor to identify the role of God in the process. In addition, though Giddings does not say so, we might consider the likelihood that if transformation is in view, significant organisational cultural change as well as changes in process might be required. There is no indication of how the programme might respond to these questions in the documents considered to this point.

Thirdly, there is a great deal of emphasis on the role of the clergy, especially in *RME*. There is less consideration of the role of the laity. Fourthly, Giddings states that “growth and evangelism and discipleship” are what God wants. I question whether that is quite as self-evident as Giddings appears to believe and the reports to assume. I will again defer a fuller treatment of some of the issues just raised until later in the chapter, particularly those concerning theological and organisational methodology. I note that 2017’s *SGPF* might well be understood as a response to a concern to make better use of the potential of the laity for ministry and mission and to achieve a kind of liberation of and spiritual revolution among the Church of England’s lay adherents. I will turn to that document shortly, together with the earlier *DD* which I am taking out of chronological sequence because of its thematic connections with *SGPF*. Firstly, however, I want to take a closer and critical look at the primary objective of the documents considered so far: numerical and spiritual growth.

## 7.5 Church growth: should we, can we?

The reports considered so far all assume that “numerical and spiritual growth” is a legitimate and urgent priority for the Church of England. I have not encountered any objections to an emphasis on spiritual growth but, as we saw in chapter one, there are many voices who seem opposed to the idea of numerical growth as an objective for the Church of England. I note that, in the light of my earlier discussion of the interpretation of Luke 10 in *V&N*, the understanding of numerical growth probably includes ‘greater numbers of people in church’ but is more focused on more ‘committed disciples and active workers’. As we also saw in chapter one, not everyone accepts the sincerity of the avowed concern for spiritual growth and it is sometimes argued that the emphasis is all on numerical growth. According to *RTF* “good growth” holds these two together.<sup>77</sup> It is perhaps not clear what is intended by spiritual growth, though *IEG*, for example, implies that the term signifies a concern for the growth of quality or depth of discipleship and positive impact on the wider community.<sup>78</sup> I will explore the question of emphasis or balance between numerical and spiritual growth further in my account of the interviews. For now though I do not wish to dispute that church growth and church growth in numbers is a legitimate concern of the Church of England. If the gospel is good news it would be strange not to wish to share it and if the Christian life constitutes an experience of salvation now and in the next world, why would you not want to offer it to others? It would also be a strange organisation that did not have some interest in the kind of growth that can be measured in numerical terms. If we hold that the Christian faith is true (as I do, in the critical realist sense described in chapter three) then it seems natural to argue for it and seek more adherents.

The emphasis on numerical growth, does, however, raise questions. I want to raise three in particular. I want to ask, firstly, whether the Church of England can pursue numerical growth without understanding why it has experienced decline; secondly, whether that church can pursue numerical growth without an understanding of what is going on in the world (or, in open systems terms, the environment); and, thirdly, whether the pursuit of numerical growth is based on an adequate understanding of what might make it possible. In the discussion that follows in this section when I refer to growth, I mean numerical growth.

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<sup>77</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing the Future*, 2.

<sup>78</sup> Welby, *In Each Generation*, 6.

Firstly, then, there is very little in the documents explored thus far to suggest that the Church of England understands the nature and meaning of the current situation. Questions such as ‘why are we losing numbers and influence?’ (a question asked from an organisational perspective) or ‘what is God saying to us through this experience?’ (a question asked from a theological perspective) are not asked, let alone answered. It appears to be simply assumed that the right response to losing numbers is to act to increase them. Perhaps this suggests that the analysis is that decline is the result of a lack of intentional activity designed to enable growth, but this is not stated. The journey, apparently straight from problem to solution, is highly questionable. It is an approach typical of classical organisational theory, or that associated with the machine model.<sup>79</sup> It focuses on discrete problems and addresses them directly through initiatives. Such approaches ignore the possibility (from my perspective, the likelihood) that decline in numbers is a symptom of a larger and deeper problem. This is a consideration required by a more systemic approach of which the Theological Dialogue is an example. That approach requires us to investigate what is happening in the environment in which the system is set in order to determine an appropriate response, one which is made having placed the information about developments in the environment into dialogue with a renewed understanding of the Church of England’s identity. In the absence of this analysis the risk is that remedial action is superficial, even misplaced.

Secondly, I note that the perspective of all the documents considered so far is church-centred. I do not see any evidence that an attempt has been made to include voices from or information about the environment in which the Church of England is placed. In system approaches it is understood that the energy for renewal is likely to come from engagement with the outside rather than from the inside. There is little sense in the documents so far considered that the environment might provide information that could have an impact on either what the Church of England has to say or how it might say it. The understanding of the faith tradition of the Church of England I have espoused in this thesis suggests that our understanding of the gospel message is always partial, situated, imperfect. Indeed, it changes over history,<sup>80</sup> as part of our journey with the eternal God who engages with us as embodied creatures in history. This, indeed, is the whole sense of the phrase faithful improvisation. I do not find any

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<sup>79</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 11ff.

<sup>80</sup> A point made convincingly in Bosch, *Transforming Mission*.

consideration of what our experience today is telling us about our understanding of the gospel. Such a consideration may exist somewhere in the background to these documents. As they stand, however, the R&R documents take a view not unlike those of a company with declining sales which focuses all its energies on better sales activity, never considering whether there is anything wrong with what it is presenting to the world. This thought might be extended to a concern that the current context might require a particularly nuanced, imaginative and careful engagement with the subject of mission and growth. For example, it seems likely that post-enlightenment, post-Auschwitz, post-industrial, post-Christendom societies might require a careful and considered approach which is based on an understanding of the impact and import of these and other examples of historical events and social changes. The notion of faithful improvisation requires a reappropriation of the tradition in the light of what is going on in the world.

Thirdly, even if we assume this concern is misplaced, another arises. I have doubts about whether the documents are based on a reliable understanding of what enables church growth. A report on this theme, *From Anecdote to Evidence*,<sup>81</sup> not itself part of the R&R documents, is positively referenced in *IEG*, *DD* and *Simplification*.<sup>82</sup> That report provides a set of factors associated with numerical growth and appears to be the main influence on this theme in the R&R proposals.<sup>83</sup> Mark Hart (a clergyman and statistician) has suggested that the report offers conclusions not supported adequately by the research on which the report is based. His argument seems cogent, but I am not in a position to evaluate his analysis.<sup>84</sup> A recent report, *Growing Good*,<sup>85</sup> based on work commissioned by the Church Urban Fund and the Theos Think-Tank offers a different understanding, though it speaks quite positively of *Anecdote to Evidence*. *Growing Good* makes a strong case, based on both qualitative and quantitative research, that congregations grow as a result of social action.<sup>86</sup> This turns what I believe to be

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<sup>81</sup> Church Growth Research Programme, *From Anecdote to Evidence*.

<sup>82</sup> Welby, *In Each Generation*, 2.; Task Group, *Developing Discipleship*, 7; Task Group, *Simplification*, 8.

<sup>83</sup> Good leadership

A clear mission and purpose

Willingness to self-reflect, to change and

adapt according to context

Involvement of lay members

Being intentional in prioritising growth

Being intentional in chosen style of worship

Being intentional in nurturing disciples

Church Growth Research Programme, *Anecdote to Evidence*, 8.

<sup>84</sup> Hart, "From Delusion to Reality: An Evaluation of *from Anecdote to Evidence*." 17-18.

<sup>85</sup> Hannah Rich, *Growing Good: Growth, Social Action and Discipleship in the Church of England* (London: Theos, 2020).

<sup>86</sup> Rich, *Growing Good*, 12-14.

the more typical view, that growth is required to resource action in support of the ‘common good’ on its head: instead action in support of the common good supports growth. The “presence” of the church is essential and when it is accompanied by perseverance, an ethos of “hospitality and generosity”, social action can lead to church growth, but with a caveat:

Crucially, social action leads to church growth when it enables congregations to develop meaningful relationships with those they would not otherwise have done, or who might not otherwise have come into sustained contact with the church.<sup>87</sup>

The report emphasises that ‘instrumental’ social action does not have the same effect. The Theos work suggests that growth might be seen to depend (ultimately) on qualitative factors in church life and being rather than the adoption of a programme of activity. It is the outcome, rather than the precondition of mission, when mission is understood as the activity of seeking the Kingdom of God in the world. *Growing Good* suggests that the church needs a much more integrated account of discipleship, social action and growth.<sup>88</sup>

The reports considered to this point contain very little explicit theology. Although this might be normal in reports of this kind one would hope to find somewhere a substantial account of the theological and ecclesiological rationales supporting R&R. I will now turn to two documents that provide much more explicitly theological content and see if we find in them a richer perspective.

## **7.6 Liberating the laity: *Developing Discipleship and Setting God’s People Free***

The subject matter of both *DD* and *SGPF* is the cultivation of discipleship in lay adherents of the Church of England and, especially in *SGPF*, the active engagement of those lay disciples in the ministry and mission of that church. The two reports are also notable for providing explicit theological content in support of these ideas in contrast to the reports discussed in the previous section. *SGPF* also provides an account of the Church of England and its mission that goes a long way towards filling the gaps identified above. I shall, however, argue that it falls short of

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<sup>87</sup> Rich, *Growing Good*, 13.

<sup>88</sup> Rich, *Growing Good*, 14.

the Church of England specific ecclesiology that I have suggested is required to engage adequately with the challenge of adaptation to new circumstances.

*DD* introduces the notion of discipleship which is a key theme of the R&R project as a whole. It is defined as follows:

To be a disciple is to be called to a life of learning and formation in the likeness of Christ...to be a disciple is also to be called to live a distinctive life of witness and service, an apostolic life, sent into the world, to follow God's call.<sup>89</sup>

The reports emphasise that the Church of England is not simply interested in adding numbers of adherents but in supporting the ministry of that church, based on what *SGPF* calls a new "partnership" between lay and ordained.<sup>90</sup> *DD* puts it this way:

Nurturing discipleship is the very essence of promoting spiritual and numerical growth. Nurturing discipleship lies at the heart of re-imagining both lay and ordained ministry.<sup>91</sup>

This is based on the understanding that ministry of all kinds is rooted in a common discipleship:

The outworking of that discipleship is the living-out of our Christian faith in the whole of our lives: in our work, in family life, in the wider community, in the service of God's kingdom...Together as the Church we are the Body of Christ, a community of missionary disciples.<sup>92</sup>

This is a notion of service that embraces the wider world:

There are many kinds of callings for Christians: the majority are concerned with living out the Christian faith through daily life and work, in the family and the wider community.<sup>93</sup>

This account of discipleship is powerfully, if relatively briefly, expressed. It combines a description drawing heavily on New Testament sources with one drawn from aspects of the "tradition". The latter is perhaps rather reliant on puritan and Methodist sources considering that this is an Anglican account, but that might accurately reflect the history.<sup>94</sup> It culminates in a plea for further work to be done to clarify the Church of England's understanding and practice of discipleship. The report references Worthen's conclusion that "there is no well-developed

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<sup>89</sup> Task Group, *Developing Discipleship*, 1.

<sup>90</sup> Task group, *Setting God's People Free*, 17.

<sup>91</sup> Task Group, *Developing Discipleship*, 4.

<sup>92</sup> Task Group, *Developing Discipleship*, 4.

<sup>93</sup> Task Group, *Developing Discipleship*, 7

<sup>94</sup> Notably, John Wesley and Richard Baxter.

authoritative source for the theology of discipleship to which the contemporary Church of England can readily look to inform its teaching here”.<sup>95</sup> It is possible that this conclusion reflects a reality that ‘discipleship’ is a concept that has only received sustained attention in recent times and is a relatively new focus of theological concern. *DD* recommends that dioceses and parishes study the paper’s appendix, *The Ten Marks of a Diocese committed to Developing Disciples*, that a new theological conversation about developing discipleship be pursued between “bishops, theologians and theological educators” and that a revised catechism be produced.<sup>96</sup> This seems like a relatively modest set of proposals, which are not backed up by the kind of extensive action plans associated with other R&R documents. So perhaps it is not surprising that a further and more comprehensive report was commissioned by the Archbishops’ Council and published in 2017.

*SGPF* takes the vision of lay discipleship and ministry much further, and begins with this question: “will we determine to empower, liberate and disciple the 98% of the Church of England who are not ordained and therefore set them free for fruitful, faithful mission and ministry, influence, leadership and, most importantly, vibrant relationship with Jesus in all of life?”.<sup>97</sup> The statement raises some questions. The “we” referenced here is not defined: it might mean ‘everyone in the Church of England’ or it might refer to Church of England authorities. It is not clear who is responsible for effecting the liberation in view. The report goes on to offer a good account of the ways in which the relationship between clergy and lay people can become unhealthy. If the desired “liberation” is to happen, the report argues that a new partnership between clergy and laity will be required, based on “baptismal mutuality”,<sup>98</sup> and a common call to be part of a “royal priesthood” with a common task.<sup>99</sup> This shift towards a new partnership is seen as representing a theological imperative:

The task we face as the Church is not a functional or managerial one. We are not trying to train up new volunteers to fill the gaps left by declining clergy numbers or make people work even harder to rescue the institutional Church. Rather our aim is that all should be able to respond to the saving work of God in Jesus Christ and rejoice to the full in following the vocation and using the gifts he has given them.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Task Group, *Developing Discipleship*, 7.

<sup>96</sup> Task Group, *Developing Discipleship*, 8.

<sup>97</sup> Archbishops’ Council, *Setting God’s People Free*, 1.

<sup>98</sup> Archbishops’ Council, *Setting God’s People Free*, 2.

<sup>99</sup> Archbishops’ Council, *Setting God’s People Free*, 1.

<sup>100</sup> Archbishops’ Council, *Setting God’s People Free*, 2.



The notion that ministry belongs to all members of the Christian church is made persuasively, but the report does not address the ecclesiological question of the differences and relationship between ordained and lay vocations. This seems important if the relationship between clergy and laity is to become more healthy and productive.

*Theology and culture brought into the discussion*

I do not, however, have any argument with the emphasis on lay ministry and partnership with clergy as a key element in the future strategy of the Church of England. From an organisational point of view it seems clear that it is better to engage and mobilise all the people who identify with the organisation. I put it this way because the question of whether someone could be said to be part of the organisation is more complex in relation to the Church of England than for other organisations possessing clearer distinctions between those who are 'in' and those who are 'out' of the organisation. From a theological point of view the argument that baptism and discipleship entails participation in the mission of Christ is persuasive.

I am, however, interested in two features of the argument as it develops which bear on the specific interests of this investigation. The first is the argument that an emphasis on lay ministry will require a change in culture. The Church of England's culture is currently "one that over-emphasises the distinction between sacred and secular...and therefore fails to communicate the whole-life good news and...make whole-life maturing disciples".<sup>101</sup> The second is the way (as the previous quotation implies) the issue of culture is related to underlying beliefs, to theological convictions. In fact, the report concludes that there is a lack of a "systematic theological framework for thinking about lay engagement and leadership"<sup>102</sup>. In order to start to redress this the report turns to a theology of mission based in the doctrine of the Trinity:

Whilst mission has sometimes been conceived as the work of rescuing souls from a degenerate world, a more holistic and inclusive vision understands it as the property and activity of God at work in the world as creator, redeemer and sustainer. The Triune nature of God establishes a pattern by which God the Father sends the Son and the Holy Spirit into the world, who, in turn, send the Church into the world. Mission is not about removing people from the world to seek refuge within the Church, therefore, but about releasing and empowering all God's people to be the Church in the world in order that the whole of creation might be transformed and restored in Christ.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Archbishops' Council, *Setting God's People Free*, 2.

<sup>102</sup> Archbishops' Council, *Setting God's People Free*, 13.

<sup>103</sup> Archbishops' Council, *Setting God's People Free*, 14.

This takes us into territory unexplored to this point in the R&R documents. *SGPF* provides some answers to my earlier questions about the understanding of mission characterising R&R. Here is a *Missio Dei* theology and it links to “an ecclesiology that sharply clarifies the identity and scope of the Church as a sign and expression of the kingdom, rooted in the world, and characterised by unity and diversity of gifts and charisms”.<sup>104</sup> These ideas provide the theological basis for a change in culture in which a number of “levers” are to be deployed. These include: the development of a “theologically grounded identity and vision for lay people”; a new voice for the laity; “‘lay aware’ episcopal priorities and praxis”; activity to equip “the frontline”; liturgy that better recognises lay people; changes to the selection and training of clergy; a reform of structures and communications that better recognise the laity.<sup>105</sup> A further set of more specific recommendations follows: “national championing” of the desired culture shifts; a national online portal to enable communications and keep the theme alive; “a learning community of ‘Pilot Dioceses’” so that lessons can be learned and shared; and changes to ministerial selection and education.<sup>106</sup>

#### *A step in a different direction*

*SGPF* takes us quite a long way away from the institutional world of *RME*, *RTF*, and *Simplification*. It introduces an explicit theology and ecclesiology and recognises the power and importance of culture. It identifies a way of releasing resources and energy, including spiritual energy, in a way that seems more likely to help the Church of England realise the bold ambitions articulated in *V&N* than those offered hitherto. It explicitly recognises the primacy of God’s mission. It covers a lot of ground convincingly in what, though longer than most R&R documents, remains a relatively short exposition of complex matters.

I detect some tensions, however. Firstly, I am not sure how well *SGPF* coheres with the rest of the R&R programme. The burden of this report is to “liberate the laity” but most of the rest of the R&R documents focus on the clergy. The solid, institutional changes are made to recruit more clergy and train them better. *RME* seeks higher quality candidates for ordained ministry which rather implies that the clergy have failed to deliver church growth or prevent decline. This might alienate the clergy but emphasises their importance.<sup>107</sup> The major training

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<sup>104</sup> Archbishops' Council, *Setting God's People Free*, 14.

<sup>105</sup> Archbishops' Council, *Setting God's People Free*, 19.

<sup>106</sup> Archbishops' Council, *Setting God's People Free*, 21.

<sup>107</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing Ministerial Education*.

innovation is one designed to improve the leadership skills of senior clergy (as we shall see when I turn to *Green* shortly). I grant that none of this is necessarily in contradiction with the focus of *SGPF*, but I think it might prove or, at least, appear so in practice. I am also concerned that the effort to produce a theology of lay discipleship and ministry is not matched with an effort to produce one for clergy and for priesthood. The explicit direction of R&R is towards seeing the clergy as strategic, enabling *leaders*: it would seem necessary to do the work that will enable clergy to make sense of that in terms of their vocation and ordination to *priesthood*. This is not only for the benefit of the clergy: it seems to me to be essential if the clergy and laity are to re-negotiate their relationship successfully.

Secondly, I am concerned that the recognition of the role of culture does not go far enough. According to *SGPF* the Church of England is characterised by a reliance upon clergy. The report appears to assume that the laity are eager to participate fully in ministry and mission and suggests they do not because the clergy tend to discourage or prevent the laity from doing so.<sup>108</sup> I am not sure that the laity always seek or welcome the “liberation” in view. I suggest the reality and difficulty of the task of developing active lay vocations might be under-estimated, or at least, that the basis on which these claims about the laity are made needs to be made clearer.<sup>109</sup>

Thirdly, despite its generally helpful account of clergy/lay relations and its references to William Temple<sup>110</sup> *SGPF* does not offer a distinctively Anglican expression of church identity. This is, from my perspective, a significant omission in the light of the emphasis of the Theological Trialogue on ‘Co-nurturing identity’. The report offers a summary of its main themes:

1. a focus on our common baptism into the priesthood of all believers;
2. the core dynamic of discipleship for the whole of life;
3. an ecclesiology that sharply clarifies the identity and scope of the Church as a sign and expression of the kingdom, rooted in the world, and characterised by unity and diversity of gifts and charisms; and
4. a renewed sense of purpose and vision for the education, nurture and formation of lay leaders.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Archbishops' Council, *Setting God's People Free*, 13.

<sup>109</sup> Two research projects which I have conducted for the Susanna Wesley Foundation have offered evidence of the reluctance to take on ministries that sometimes seems to characterise lay people. One is a theological action research project carried out in a town centre parish in Guildford Diocese and the other a project investigating change in Methodist circuits and churches. Neither is yet published and both would be better seen as offering an indication only.

<sup>110</sup> Archbishops' Council, *Setting God's People Free*, 3.

<sup>111</sup> Archbishops' Council, *Setting God's People Free*, 25.

I am not criticising the focus on these themes, though I wonder whether the term “lay leaders” suggests something specific and different from the general emphasis on lay ministry. I do, however, note that these are general ecclesiological ideas. They can, of course, be applied within the Church of England, but they are not specific to it. *SGPF* makes a distinction between “gathered church”, a church engaged in worship and other spiritual practices, and “sent church”, a church in mission, going out into the world.<sup>112</sup> This serves a purpose but is, again, somewhat general. It also, arguably, introduces an unnecessary dualism and undermines the integration between discipleship and social action sought by *Good Growth*. Further, the report seems somewhat congregationalist. It does not take much account (for example) of the commitment to locality or to providing pastoral care for all who want it which is such a feature of the Church of England’s history and how it is seen both by those who attend its services and by those who do not. Despite *SGPF*’s recognition that there is a dimension of ecclesial existence as cultural artefact, the report lacks a sense that the Church of England, as a particular expression of God’s grace in history and culture, has specific features requiring exploration, understanding and renewal.

*SGPF* is more aware of organisational and management ideas than the other reports I have looked at so far. I note its helpful references to culture and “stakeholder theory”,<sup>113</sup> for example. This provides me with a cue to complete my account of the R&R documents by turning to that which most explicitly and deliberately attempts to combine theological and organisational concerns: *The Green Report*.

### **7.7 Senior clergy as strategic leaders: *The Green Report***

Though I come to it last, *Green* was the first document published. This might mean that in practice it set the tone for the programme as a whole. Given that, as we saw in chapter one, it was particularly controversial, the impact it has had on the reception of the programme as a whole may be particularly significant. The report sets out an ambitious range of proposals for

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<sup>112</sup> Archbishops’ Council, *Setting God’s People Free*, 16.

<sup>113</sup> Archbishops’ Council, *Setting God’s People Free*, 16.

“leadership development for senior clergy” and for “talent management”, costing £2 million per annum between 2014 and 2016 and £785,000 per annum after that.<sup>114</sup> The report:

begins with a theological exploration of principles and context. It then recommends a new and dynamic curriculum to support the leadership development needs of current bishops and deans. The report also recommends radical change in the way exceptional individuals are identified and developed for future strategic leadership roles in the Church.<sup>115</sup>

We have seen that R&R has been perceived as possessing too great a debt to management language and concepts. As this sentence just quoted from the first page of the report suggests, in *Green*, the language of management is quite explicitly front and centre. The concept of “exceptional individuals” who need to be “identified and developed for future strategic leadership roles” is a particularly striking example. I do not take issue with the proposal to help senior clergy become better leaders as I am willing to accept that leadership is a concept with validity in churches. This is hardly surprising given that I have spent many pages making a case for bringing the insights and practices of organisation theory to the Church of England. In relation to the themes of my inquiry, however, I find the report lacking in several quite important respects. I shall argue that its theological justifications for the adoption of secular leadership ideas and practice are somewhat superficial. The meaning of the term “leadership” is taken as self-evident rather than explored and it appears to be assumed that it is appropriately deployed in relation to the role of Christian ministers.<sup>116</sup> The proposals offered insufficiently emphasise the special nature of the church and of ministry within it

The “theological exploration of principles and context” referred to above covers a lot of ground in a few pages. The burden of the argument is that, in order to “respond radically and imaginatively to new contexts” the Church of England needs “clergy of exceptional leadership potential” “better equipped to take risks for the Gospel”.<sup>117</sup> The rationale for the emphasis on risk-taking is not explained. Leadership roles need to be “reshaped” “in the cause of growth in

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<sup>114</sup> Green, *Talent Management for Future Leaders*, 3.

<sup>115</sup> Green, *Talent Management for Future Leaders*, 3.

<sup>116</sup> All theories of organisation bring with them some definition of or view on the organisational leadership task. For example, the machine model brings with it the concepts of control and division of tasks; human relations theory brings with it an emphasis on enabling people to flourish and work well together; and so on. A great deal of the recent leadership discourse focuses on leadership style, on the personal qualities and inter-personal skills of the leader and on collaborative and informal leadership in organisations. See Simon Western, *Leadership: A Critical Text*, 3rd ed. (London: Sage, 2019). My own primary understanding of the leadership task in church contexts is expressed in my exposition of the Theological Trialogue in chapter six. The tasks are co-managing the present, co-creating the future, co-nurturing identity within a theological framework emphasising the discernment of the voice of the Spirit.

<sup>117</sup> Green, *Talent Management for Future Leaders*, 5.

depth and number".<sup>118</sup> What follows is a justification of the focus on leadership and management and a programme developed by unnamed "professional partners".<sup>119</sup> At this point, unusually among R&R documents, the report refers to theological sources other than scripture. Francis Bridger, Pope Francis, Thomas Merton and Pope Benedict XVI are all quoted in defence of the argument that professional skill can be used to promote "more ministry, not more bureaucracy"<sup>120</sup> amongst a group of leaders who are as "prayerful" as they are professional.<sup>121</sup> This section effectively explores some dimensions of a relationship (between ministerial and leadership practice) but the basic theological validity of the relationship is assumed rather than justified. There is no treatment of the more fundamental question of how the nature of the Church of England and of the ministry of its bishops and priests is compatible with organisational concepts and leadership categories. One of the concerns of the report is to promote a more collegial, corporate approach to leadership from the bishops. That seems a common sense aspiration and certainly one typical of secular organisations, but it is not supported by any theological presentation of the responsibilities and duties of episcopacy or of those of bishops to one another in the Church of England. Perhaps it is not reasonable to expect such a presentation in a report of this kind, which I described earlier as pragmatic and political. I suggest, however, if the report is to attempt a theological exposition, as this one does, that these are the kind of considerations one might expect to find addressed.

The report then proceeds to define the "leadership characteristics for Bishops and Deans" that it wishes to encourage.<sup>122</sup> Once again, they are based on the quinquennial goals: senior clergy are to lead in a way that contributes to the common good, reshapes ministry and supports the growth of the church.<sup>123</sup> This is followed by an exposition of the programme for bishops. It takes the standard form of contemporary leadership development programmes in which modules are interspersed with action learning sets which allow participants to think through and apply learning to their own contexts. The programme for bishops is followed by plans for more deliberate induction activity for new bishops and new deans.

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<sup>118</sup> Green, *Talent Management for Future Leaders*, 5.

<sup>119</sup> Green, *Talent Management for Future Leaders*, 5.

<sup>120</sup> Green, *Talent Management for Future Leaders*, 7.

<sup>121</sup> Green, *Talent Management for Future Leaders*, 31.

<sup>122</sup> Green, *Talent Management for Future Leaders*, 9.

<sup>123</sup> Green, *Talent Management for Future Leaders*, 9.

The proposals for talent management involve abolishing the old diocesan bishops' 'preferment lists' (closely held lists of those deemed suitable for senior roles) for a more "systematic" and transparent approach.<sup>124</sup> The programme aims to achieve a high standard: individuals identified will be those "with exceptional leadership potential for Gospel, Kingdom and Church impact".<sup>125</sup> Those identified as possessing such potential by diocesan bishops and confirmed by "a national programme overseen by the Development and Appointments Group, overseen by the archbishops" will "be offered a place on a tailored development programme".<sup>126</sup> The programme appears to be thoroughly worked out (covering entry, exit, alumni network, development activity and so forth) on principles close to those applied in similar programmes in the civil service and other institutions and to represent good practice in those terms. It is less clear that this practice is right for the Church of England. Any theological argument for identifying and "fast tracking" candidates for senior leadership is absent. Such a theological justification could probably be made but it would need to take account of conflicting evidence from Christian history. I observe that the young and relatively unqualified have frequently fulfilled prominent Christian leadership roles: Daniel and David would both be good examples. On the other hand, the choice of what appear to be ordinary and notably fallible companions does not suggest that the identification of what today might be regarded as exceptional leadership potential was a priority for Christ.

Furthermore, the report does not offer a definition of leadership and expresses little by way of a philosophy or approach to the contested field of leadership studies. This is a field in which many different and influential notions of leadership can be found. These include, for example, older notions such as 'command and control' (associated with the machine metaphor or classical organisation theory) which remain popular in practice if not in theory, and newer ideas such as 'collaborative leadership' (which emphasises the importance of the leadership provided by groups working together),<sup>127</sup> or 'servant leadership', (which emphasises the idea that the leader should not control but serve).<sup>128</sup> It references no leading writers in the field. Perhaps, once again, I am expecting too much from a report of this kind. Perhaps the primary

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<sup>124</sup> Green, *Talent Management for Future Leaders*, 16.

<sup>125</sup> Green, *Talent Management for Future Leaders*, 16.

<sup>126</sup> Green, *Talent Management for Future Leaders*, 17.

<sup>127</sup> See, for example, Herminia Ibarra Morten T. Hansen, "Are You a Collaborative Leader?" *Harvard Business Review* July/August 2011, <https://hbr.org/2011/07/are-you-a-collaborative-leader>.

<sup>128</sup> Robert K. Greenleaf, *The Servant As Leader*, (Cambridge, Mass: Center for Applied Studies, 1970).

focus was on producing a professional and practical proposal for action which it largely succeeds in doing. The inclusion, however, of a section justifying professionalism in leadership suggests an awareness that the writers were operating in contested territory. It would seem prudent to ensure that the argument for a significant change in the Church of England's practice, accompanied by significant expenditure, would be backed up by some depth of discussion in relation to the disciplines involved and the relationship between them. Instead, many concepts associated with organisational discourse are used without any sense that they might need to be used with care or discrimination, if at all, in the context of the Church of England. References to the phrases "talent management" and "middle management" (in reference to archdeacons)<sup>129</sup> are but two of many examples.

## **7.8 Gaps and questions in the light of the Theological Trialogue**

In the final section of this chapter I will bring together what has been revealed from analysis of and theological reflection upon the R&R documents. I will add further reflection upon the data in the light of all the theological and organisational material explored in the thesis to this point, especially the Theological Trialogue as a model of ecclesial adaptivity. My purpose is to summarise what I have learned so far and to clarify gaps and questions. My awareness of these gaps and questions informed my approach to the interviews. I will set out what I discovered in the interviews in the next chapter.

### *Scope and intent of R&R*

After analysing and reflecting upon the R&R documents the nature, intent and scope of R&R are still not clear to me. The early documents suggest relatively limited objectives, to make organisational changes which will support a greater focus on church growth. The changes proposed are, in themselves, ambitious and, perhaps, radical. It is not a small matter to set out to increase the number of clergy by 50% or more annually from 2013 to 2020; to target Church Commissioner funds to support growth and ministry in areas of deprivation (with consequences for those churches who will no longer benefit from this funding); to break the hard-won principle of inter-generational equity and invest in these measures; to make numerical growth so clearly

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<sup>129</sup> Green, *Talent Management for Future Leaders*, 7.



the Church of England's chief priority. Nevertheless the changes remain specific and 'departmental'. The later R&R documents suggest a more comprehensive response to the Church of England's decline, focusing on a significant culture change in which the role and conception of the laity is at the centre. It is not clear to me how the R&R documents add up to an effective programme in the sense that their internal consistency and coherence is not evident to me from the data considered in this chapter. This might reflect the way that change processes can develop by their own momentum and as they engage with a wider set of actors and influences, or it might have been part of an unfolding plan. Whichever it is, I am left uncertain as to the answer to the question of what R&R is and how it is intended to work.

### *Theory of change*

What understanding of change is enacted by R&R? R&R appears to move speedily from problem (decline in numbers and influence) to solution (numerical and spiritual growth). *RTF*, *RME* and *Simplification* all suggest a set of specific, somewhat technical interventions. These seem most consistent with an approach that understands change in the way typical of the machine metaphor, as a set of discrete measures.<sup>130</sup> It could be suggested that these are the only type of direct interventions available to a bureaucracy, and, especially to the senior actors in an organisation in which power is as highly dispersed as it is in the Church of England. The question of the degree to which R&R is shaped by the rather unusual polity of the Church of England is one that I will return to in chapter eight. At the same time, it is clear that the interventions I have been discussing are intended to produce results beyond the specific outputs they entail (more clergy, better training, more targeted spending). They are intended to support a more fundamental aim and outcome: growing the church. Later documents are more interested in the theology which is necessary to underpin such an effort (especially *SGPF*) and speak more of culture change aimed at directing and powering the resources of the Church of England (especially those represented by the laity) in support of growth.

This does not, however, add up to a theory of change which has credibility or clarity in the terms normally sought within organisational studies. It is simply not clear on what basis R&R is to be effective in achieving its goals. There are attempts to place the proposals in the context of theologically informed concepts. The theology that is presented in the earlier documents is mostly brief and mostly drawn from scriptural references and feels somewhat added on after the

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<sup>130</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 11ff.

fact: I do not find an attempt at a systematic account of how R&R is rooted theologically. *Green* describes its proposals as an example of “faithful improvisation” but it does not explain how.<sup>131</sup> *DD* and *SGPF* offer much more and much more convincing explicitly theological accounts but these do not satisfactorily address the theological understanding of change at work. In other documents the relative lack of explicit theology does not mean there is no theology, it means that any theology there is is implicit. One reads the documents searching for the implied theology in the absence of a clearly espoused theology. The approach seems to be essentially pragmatic. That is not as negative a remark as it might appear. As I suggested earlier, it could be necessary for change to begin with urgent and specific measures which must be taken before a deeper rationale can be developed. Sometimes processes in churches involve action followed by theological reflection ahead of further action. There are some signs that this might be the case with R&R: later documents seem to be designed to at least begin to address those theological concerns which are not considered in the earlier documents. I shall explore this question further in the next chapter.

I made an argument in chapter six that effective and sustainable programmes depend on very wide participation and require not just consultation, but conversation, co-creation. Without this measures are less well-designed and less likely to achieve the kind of changes in mindset or behaviour that are usually required. Despite occasional references to consultations with dioceses, by which I believe is meant bishops and their staffs, there is little evidence that wide participation or discussion has taken place or is intended.

*The Theological Trialogue: co-managing the present, co-creating the future, co-nurturing identity*

I have kept my own theory of change (or, perhaps better, adaptivity) in the Church of England before me throughout the preceding account of the R&R documents. This focuses on three key functions: co-managing the present, co-creating the future and co-nurturing identity. I find that the material examined to date does not suggest a very developed attempt to address the Church of England in any of these dimensions. So far as the present is concerned we are told that it is declining in numbers and influence at an alarming rate but only a small amount of diagnosis is offered, sometimes more by implication than by direct statement. The Church of England, it is suggested, (to put it rather more bluntly than the reports themselves) does not

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<sup>131</sup> Green Steering Group, *Talent Management for Future Leaders*, 5.

have enough or good enough clergy (*RME* refers specially to a desire for higher quality candidates) and does not train them well enough;<sup>132</sup> it has subsidised decline and insufficiently incentivised growth; it has created administrative burdens that hamper growth; it has neglected a major resource, the laity. This diagnosis may well be accurate but I do not see how it could be judged complete or sufficient. *SGPF* begins to consider some of the deeper factors that might be at work and to highlight cultural problems. This is still, however, far from the holistic, systemic account that I consider required.

In particular, the documents are inward-looking in the sense that there is little consideration of the world beyond the internal life of the Church of England, of the challenges and opportunities that it might offer (thinking organisationally) or what God might be saying to the church through those challenges and opportunities (thinking theologically). *V&N* offers a brief reference to “a lost and bewildered generation”.<sup>133</sup> *SGPF* starts to open up a discussion about what it might mean to engage with a more ‘whole life’ understanding of the Christian faith, and to equip lay people to understand themselves as Christian ministers and witnesses in the wider world. The perspectives are, however, all ecclesial perspectives. There is little or no consideration of what it might mean to operate in a world suspicious of organised religion and characterised by secularity<sup>134</sup> and to have a membership themselves shaped as much (at least) by prevailing intellectual and cultural *mores* as by the teaching of the Church of England. Can we be as confident as the documents appear to be about what Christian faith means or looks like in this context? My own argument (set out in chapters three and four) is that our understanding and practical expression of Christian faith, though rooted in unchanging events and an unchanging God, is experienced in history and changes in response to the new information provided by new events and learning.

A further striking absence is a clear statement or understanding of the nature of the Church of England. Yet sustainable change requires, according to the Theological Triologue, a foundation in a reappropriation of the Church of England’s essential identity. By this I mean its purpose and values and culture (thinking organisationally) and its nature as the Body of Christ manifested in a particular tradition and human context (thinking ecclesiological). In chapter four I argued for a sacramental understanding of the Church of England in which its concrete,

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<sup>132</sup> Task Group, *Resourcing Ministerial Education*.

<sup>133</sup> Nye, *A Vision and Narrative*, 1.

<sup>134</sup> I realise this is a contested term. I use it in the senses set out in Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

empirical life and its existence as body of Christ are inseparable. The result of this is that we have to take the embodied, historical existence of a church seriously. The Church of England is not just a mechanism for achieving certain spiritual outcomes, but has, at the least, a particular identity under God reflecting, amongst other things, its role in English society and history. We may hope and believe that this aspect of the Church of England's identity need not be incompatible with the desire to achieve greater effectiveness in specific aspects of its mission but the whole must be respected and, I suggest, taken explicitly into account.

The emphasis in the documents as I read it, is all on the Church of England as a body that must seek more adherents and (though to a lesser extent) a greater depth of discipleship, but it is far less clear what it wants these things *for*. There is little understanding in the early documents that Christianity offers (as I argue in chapter four) a vision of the world transformed to which ecclesial communities witness. The material addressing these issues is restricted to passages acknowledging the ministry of the Church of England to the wider community. It is true that the quinquennial goals recognise the importance of the common good, but the emphasis in R&R is all on the internal working of the Church of England. The later documents begin to acknowledge and express a larger and, to my thinking, more adequate understanding of church, notably in *SGPF* which introduces the Trinity, and churches as the servants of God's mission in the world. Welcome as this is, it is still a somewhat generalised ecclesiological account. It does not address the particular nature of the Church of England. Specifically, it has very little to say about what one of my interviewees called its institutional identity, that is, its life as a focus and symbol of meanings beyond those comprehended by its communal and organisational life. These include the way it is seen and valued by its own lay people, as well as by the wider community. Without a rearticulation of the Church of England's identity which embraces all the dimensions of its existence, attempts to change it will continue to be resisted by the many who consider those changes to be alien to their understanding of that church. This is why it is important to develop a vision for any church, that is, a description of what it might look like in the future based on a conversation between what is going on in the world and a rediscovered understanding of the nature of that church. This is notably absent from the documents.

### *Inter-disciplinary understanding*

The R&R programme appears to be an organisational change programme: its formal nature in those terms is acknowledged in *IEG*.<sup>135</sup> Yet it is one that concerns a significant manifestation of the Body of Christ in England and has objectives that can only be fully understood theologically. There have been several influential theological voices warning against the use of management approaches, including Stephen Pattison, Martyn Percy, and John Milbank, as discussed in chapters two and five.<sup>136</sup> The management language employed by R&R documents, notably *Green*, has aroused some criticism in the Church of England press. One therefore seeks for a rationale for the use of management concepts and for a reconciliation, better still, a critical integration of such concepts with a theological understanding of the Church of England. Instead one finds either pragmatic accounts of what is to be done or a somewhat indiscriminate and unexplained intermingling of the discourses. I will seek a deeper understanding of the interdisciplinary relationship between theology and organisational thought and practice in the interviews.

## **7.9 Conclusion**

The last paragraphs suggest a somewhat negative assessment of R&R but the picture is far from complete. My concern is simply to point out omissions and questions that arise from the story so far. These are significant but do not alter the fact that the principal measures taken as a result of R&R have been positively received by many (and certainly by General Synod) and undoubtedly have put matters of great importance to the future of the Church of England 'on the table'. I concur with Philip Plyming's response to the presentation of *RTF* and *RME* at the Synod in 2015 this far at least: "I welcome their honesty about the current situation".<sup>137</sup> In addition, as I said at the beginning, the R&R documents are mostly of a certain, somewhat functional type and do not reveal all the thinking that has informed them. They have quite specific purposes and do not, it seems fair to suggest, tell the whole story. In the next chapter I

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<sup>135</sup> Welby, *In Each Generation*, 1.

<sup>136</sup> Pattison, *The Faith of the Managers*; Percy, *Anglicanism*; Milbank, "Stale Expressions,".

<sup>137</sup> Synod, *Report of Proceedings*, 123.

shall attempt to uncover the rest of the story, and to address some of the gaps and questions, through the interviews I conducted with the leading architects, and some of the critics, of R&R.

## Chapter 8. The story of the interviews

### 8.1 Introduction

In the last chapter I suggested that my analysis of and theological reflection upon the R&R documents in search of answers to my research questions left a number of gaps and uncertainties. The scope and nature of R&R remains unclear. The reports contain material that suggests a programme of limited interventions as well as material that suggests an attempt to reorientate the activity of the Church of England at every level. This is partly a question about the scale of the ambition behind the programme. It is also a question about the nature of the change sought, whether R&R is intended to provide a more supportive environment for diocesan and parochial activity or to operate as a kind of strategy for the whole Church of England. As I look at the programme organisationally I discover no evidence of a theory of change: in other words, the theoretical basis of the programme. It does not appear that the question of why the Church of England is 'failing' (it appears to be assumed that it is) has received much attention, nor is there evidence of an attempt to consider how the conditions found in the Church of England's environment might need to be taken into account when determining future activity. Speaking theologically, I seek but do not find an explicit concern to hear what God might be saying to the Church of England. As I consider the programme there is little by way of explicit theological exposition in many of the key documents. There is very little explicit engagement with the question of ecclesial identity before *SGPF*. The general nature of church is powerfully presented in *SGPF* but it is not clear how the general truths so discussed are embodied in the Church of England, with its particular history, public role and commitment to locality.

As I have acknowledged all through the discussion, the documents concerned have a particular purpose which may well not include answering my questions. On several matters, such as the nature of the Church of England or the nature of the problems it faces, one might hope nevertheless to find some references to more substantial supporting material. For the most part, however, this is not evident.

I hope to find answers to my questions and to discover (what I consider to be) the missing material, in the interviews I conducted with those who conceived and developed R&R. I turn

now, therefore, to presentation of a thematic analysis of the interviews I conducted with senior Church of England officers. Most of the interviewees are or were closely involved in developing or leading R&R but the interviewee group includes critics also. The group included several senior clergy, including a number of bishops, a Church Commissioner, and serving officers in the national church institutions as well as two clergy not involved directly in the R&R process but known as theologians – in one case supportive, in the other critical, of R&R.

I shall begin by considering how and why the programme developed as it did, considering the factors that shaped its form and content. These factors include, notably, the sense of urgency and frustration felt by some bishops and senior lay-people. These feelings are partly the result of a sense of the danger facing the Church of England. They are associated with and exacerbated by, the particular polity, structure and governance arrangements of the Church of England and the nature of the Church of England as a highly politicised arena. Putting these factors together leads to a stress on the difficulties inherent in reforming an institution such as the Church of England and to the suggestion that R&R is shaped in response to these realities by a relatively small group of determined senior individuals.

I then consider other distinct themes which emerged from the interviews, including: the diagnosis of decline; the place of numerical growth in ecclesial priorities; the role played in R&R (or otherwise) by finance and the desire to exert power by at least some in the national church; the particular mission and nature of the Church of England; and the part played in R&R by 'managerialism'. I achieved a greater understanding of (and sympathy for those working with) the difficulties facing those wishing to make changes in the Church of England. Nevertheless, I found relatively little evidence of deeper or more convincing consideration of the matters raised by my examination of the R&R documents.

In the penultimate section of this chapter, I shall offer a summary of how the interviews have added to the picture put together from the analysis of the documents. This will focus on what I have discovered about the ecclesiological and organisational rationale of R&R in the light of the ecclesiological and organisational material developed in previous chapters and on the Theological Dialogue in particular.



## 8.2 The shaping of R&R

In this section I will set out what I have found about the scope, nature and intent of R&R. The interviews suggest that the role of influential individuals in shaping R&R was critical and that these were individuals convinced of the need for determined, urgent action to address the problems facing the Church of England. There were other, connected factors. These include the nature of episcopacy in the Church of England, the structure of the Church of England and the particular nature of that church as a political arena. All of these factors appear to have worked against the notion that change should be managed in the ways suggested by development of the Theological Trialogue in chapter six. The Theological Trialogue leads me to look for careful consideration of such matters as the identity of the Church of England, the challenge posed by the environment, the nature and causes of decline, and the future character of the Church of England. The factors that influenced the urgency of the approach of R&R appear also to have militated against wide participation and a sense of coming together to discern the voice of the Spirit.

### *History*

I begin with the story of how R&R came to exist. The history is significant because it speaks to the question of what exactly R&R is and hopes to achieve and to the role of key individuals in determining the nature and content of the programme. R&R, it seems, did not start as a programme, but developed into one. It appears that the initial impetus came from certain bishops. According to interviewee 12, "it was really Richard Chartres' [then Bishop of London] idea when he was head of the church commissioners. Everyone thinks it came in with Justin but it didn't, it would have predated him". The Bishop of Willesden, Pete Broadbent, wrote a blog in 2013 which argued for the setting up of task groups in the areas of funding, ministry and regulation and advocated a number of the measures that emerged through the programme.<sup>138</sup> It is also in this blog that what became the work of the various task groups is linked to the quinquennial goals. It appears that the adoption of these goals provided a spur or an opportunity for at least some bishops to pursue the kinds of actions recommended by Broadbent. The task groups were set up separately (though, as we saw, all of them described

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<sup>138</sup> Pete Broadbent, *Twenty Quick Hits to Change the CofE: Resourcing Mission & Growth – Making it Happen*, 2013. [Http://Bishopofwillesden.Blogspot.Com/2013/11/Twenty-Quick-Hits-to-Change-Cofe.Html](http://Bishopofwillesden.Blogspot.Com/2013/11/Twenty-Quick-Hits-to-Change-Cofe.Html).

their work in terms of achieving the quinquennial goals) but by the time that their work was presented to Synod (2015) it had become a programme. According to interviewee 6: “There were changes that needed to happen...And we began to roll those together and it became a programme”. Another interviewee (7) attributes the creation of a programme from the task groups’ work to the influence of John Spence (Chair of the finance committee of the Archbishops’ Council). In the meantime (2013), Justin Welby had become Archbishop of Canterbury and seems to have introduced a new urgency and focus to the process.

#### *A sense of urgency*

The urgency arose, in large part, from the sense among these key individuals that decline had become so threatening that a speedy response was required. It appears that the emphasis on the R&R content as an explicit response to decline crystallised with the appointment of Welby as Archbishop of Canterbury. According to interviewee 2 the trends relating to decline can be misleading: they resemble “a melting iceberg...people don’t realise the gentle decline of the Church of England numerically”. The suggestion here is that decline looks gentle, but is, in fact, debilitating and remorseless. Interviewee 7 (who in general is more sceptical about R&R than most of my interviewees) nevertheless observed that “the fact of decline in certain measures is undeniable”, and that does indeed appear to be the case as earlier portions of this thesis have suggested. The contention is that the matter was so urgent that it was necessary to take action without following the kind of process that might be more typical of the Church of England, that is, to act more swiftly and be less consultative than would normally be expected. According to interviewee 6:

It was basically, if we don’t do it now, all the projections are that by the time we actually get to implement it by about 2020, we’d be further in decline than what it was. And the second is that Justin is a man in a hurry. Let’s be honest about that. And I think others of us are too. You know, I’ve only got five years left to go before I retire. I want to see some change in the church before I stop doing it. And this was a moment to say, actually, I’m fed up with this. I’ve been moaning about all the things that don’t work for years. I want to change them.

This quotation summarises well how R&R appears to have been shaped to a high degree by the acute concerns and influence of particular senior individuals. In what follows I will develop the reasons suggested by the interviews for making this claim.

### *Episcopal “dis-ease”*

The sense of urgency appears to have become linked to, and exacerbated by, the perceived difficulty of ‘getting things done’ in the Church of England. This is further linked to a sense of episcopal dissatisfaction, at least in some quarters. According to interviewee 5 “Renewal and Reform is a lightning conductor of episcopal dis-ease generally”. All these factors appear to have come together so that a relatively small group of dissatisfied bishops and other senior officers created the impetus for R&R. To understand this we need to look a bit more closely at how episcopacy is understood and how it works in the Church of England. This was a theme to which interviewees (especially the bishops) returned often and which I will explore now. It becomes clear that there are perceived differences in how the role is understood and that these particularly concern how bishops should relate more traditional conceptions of the role to a new emphasis on organisational leadership and the development of diocesan strategies for growth.

In general, interviewees assumed that episcopacy combines features unique to the churches (pastoral care, teaching, for example) with those more typical of senior roles in general, notably, organisational leadership. The differences between episcopacy and leadership in other organisations were emphasised by making comparisons with secular organisational roles. Interviewee 11 remarked of bishops: “They’re not non-executive and they’re not chief executive, but they are the executive chair”. According to interviewee 9 the diocesan role is both pastoral and organisational: “Teacher and pastor...that is undoubtedly the primary vocation...[but] the bishop has to do strategy as well and the organisational change”. It is not always obvious how these roles should be managed or related to one another. Interviewee 9 found that it was the pastoral and teaching role that produced most impact amongst parishioners: “My first pitch was to talk about the mechanics of what we need to do more of in the church...people were meh about that...when I started talking about the beatitudes and being a Christlike church...God was present”. This is, I suggest, a striking example of how organisational processes, on their own, lack impact in church settings. They mean little without renewed connection to God, to the faith itself.

This is not, however, the only way in which the nature of episcopal leadership differs from that in other organisations. Interviewee 11 states that “one of the unique things about the church...is that its...senior executives like bishops have only been in the church”. This is an

exaggeration (something similar could be said about the leadership in most professions) but it conveys something important perhaps. Bishops often come into role without exposure to a model of what organisational leadership looks like elsewhere. Interviewee 7 reflected on the experience of working with a new bishop:

So, we had a service and he set off some various initiatives and things and what that made me realise was that most bishops, fairly obviously really, but the only model they worked with is being a vicar. Because that's what we do. We don't teach people to be bishops we teach them... we don't even do that. If anything, we teach people to be vicars then don't start me off. We don't do that either. So, what most bishops do is they have in their head, I'm a vicar but it's a big parish. So, what does a vicar do? He has an initiative, that's the only way that he can get some... it's a bit like sonar. You know, you send a ping out, it's got to come back again. So, if you send an initiative out it's got to come back, that's the only way that you know whether you're doing a good job or not. So, every diocesan bishop, blow me down, will have a new Mission Statement, a new vision and, probably, after a few years set up a conference and do various things. Just to know something's happening.

This is the background to *Green* of course. The programmes it recommended are precisely designed to address this perceived problem. But the aim is not, according to one authoritative source, to simply reduce episcopacy to an organisational, executive role:

We felt it was important that our priests didn't end up like doctors, separated from the management of the body. So you need to hold it together. Our senior leaders, we want our deans to be equipped to chair a chapter on finance. They could hand that chairing role over to somebody else if they want to, but then you'd be a very different type of priest. We are an incarnational faith, our priests are meant to live in the full world, and that's part of living in the right way. Not being an accountant and passing your exams, but being able to inhabit the space responsibly (interviewee 15).

For this interviewee it remains important that bishops combine organisational leadership with the distinct pastoral, teaching and ministerial roles traditionally associated with priesthood and episcopacy. Interviewee 15 also confirmed, however, that that the trend in episcopal appointments is to select candidates who share the new emphasis on growth and the organisational dimension of episcopal leadership.

Clearly, the original work that we did on leadership training, we set that up actually before R&R. So we started before R&R. And our aim is to enable bishops to engage with R&R. We will equip them, we are not just training them in R&R models or R&R ways of doing things, we see our role to equip them to engage with the programme. But clearly, the vision, the language, the hopes, when we go and do appointments, clearly that's one of the frames for how we tap into the health of a diocese when we're doing our appointments.

Given the arguments I have made I am bound to support the proposition that the bishops should exercise a leadership that embraces mission and organisation alongside pastoral care and teaching. If the Church of England is both spiritual system and human society in a concrete whole then I don't think these matters can be separated in its ministry and leadership. The case does, however, seem to need making in more convincing theological and ecclesiological terms and in the context of a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of the nature of both episcopacy and the Church of England than I have uncovered in R&R. Furthermore, it would be better, it seems to me, to have made the case more adequately for such changes in policy before implementing them. One of my interviewees (10) put it baldly: episcopal theory "means nothing outside the church history classroom". In other words, theories of episcopacy are seen as an 'academic' consideration lacking practical value. Partly as a result, the emphasis on the development of organisational leadership in the episcopate is not supported by ecclesiological argument. The appeal is to pragmatism: needs must. The current situation, however, seems likely to generate uncertainty amongst those leading and those being led, which, paradoxically and ironically, is not conducive to confident leadership. As we saw in relation to an earlier quotation, I suggest that the power of the episcopal role is evident when it speaks theologically as well as organisationally. That these perspectives, the theological and the organisational, must be integrated is one of the principal arguments of this thesis.

Another, related and, for the current purpose, crucial theme that emerged was the question of the role of the bishop at national level versus the role at diocesan level. Notwithstanding the issues discussed in preceding paragraphs it is suggested that the diocesan role is challenging and multi-faceted but comparatively understandable. The national role, the role of the bishops corporately in the Church of England appears to be much more problematic. The result is that, according to interviewee 8, the "leadership offered in dioceses is not being offered in the same way nationally". Several expressed frustration about this. Firstly, many bishops seem unwilling to engage with their episcopal colleagues on matters of shared or national concern, except in highly formal processes. This was highlighted – and might have changed as a result of – participation in the leadership development programme set up as a result of *The Green Report*.

In our second of three day residential modules a bishop stood up and said, for the first time in 20 years as a bishop he heard fellow bishops sitting around talking to each other as what it means to be a bishop.

How great was that, he said. I say, how pathetic is that. That these grown people, having leadership roles in a big organisation, which is an institution, call it what you like, have never had an opportunity or never taken the opportunity to do this (interviewee 7).

It appears that some bishops and senior officers see the exercise of corporate leadership by the bishops as critical to the church's capacity to manage necessary change – especially in the light of the challenges posed by the church's structure, a theme to which I will turn below. This seems, however, difficult to achieve and to be a source of continuing frustration. Interviewee 10 (a bishop) referred, with some vehemence, to the “spinelessness of bishops”, describing them as “corporately infantile”. It is frequently suggested that the bishops nod through measures without much real engagement and then either ignore or even oppose the measures later. Interviewee 6 suggests that this is not necessarily the fault of individuals:

Bishops are not usually noted for being appointed for being anything other than completely risk averse and paralysed by the problems of institutional change and how they implement it. One of the things that the senior leadership programme is for is how we address that. But a collective of bishops in a room become dysfunctional. There's an institutional paralysis which gets into them which we need to overcome so that we're actually able to take risks, be free to fail, be vulnerable with people.

“Completely risk averse” might be overstated, but I accept that bishops may well lack confidence in exercising organisational leadership. In relation to collective leadership, it could be that bishops do not believe in it or do not know how to exercise it. Whether it is a matter of principle or a lack of capability the absence of such leadership may help to explain why a relatively small group of individuals felt they had to drive the R&R programme through. It may also help to explain why there seems to be some ambiguity around the nature of R&R. Perhaps that ambiguity reflects a lack of clear, aligned, committed leadership and of genuinely shared ownership. These are normally regarded as an essential feature of organisational change.<sup>139</sup> In their absence mixed messages abound and credibility is reduced.

#### *The centre and the parts*

The Church of England has an unusual structure and, it is suggested in the interviews, this makes life difficult for those senior officers who seek to address the challenges facing that church. To understand this I need to include a short description of relevant aspects of Anglican polity. When the Church of England was established it inherited a distinctive structure in which

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<sup>139</sup> Kotter, *Leading Change*.

parishes and dioceses had a high degree of independence.<sup>140</sup> In other words, the national church had limited powers over dioceses and the dioceses had limited powers over parishes. The archbishops were not superiors in relation to other bishops, but first among equals. The system allowed the Church of England a voice and presence in national life and governance but concentrated resources and ministry locally. It could be described as a system of highly distributed leadership – to the point where the Church of England, though in many ways a single organisation, was also, in others, more like a network of organisations, or, in modern terms, somewhat like a franchise. The trend of the last one hundred years or so has been to concentrate more resources at diocesan level (departments of mission, education, ministry and so forth, with directors and staff) and national level (the National Church Institutions or NCIs, including Board of Mission, Ministry Division and so forth). Anglican funds are managed at diocesan and national levels that would once have been managed at parish level. The creation of the Church Commissioners and national pension arrangements adds to the influence of the national church.<sup>141</sup>

Interviewee 14 sees R&R as evidence of, or as the result of, this centralising tendency. He also sees it as reflecting (and strengthening) the domination of a particular Church of England party or interest (the evangelical 'party').<sup>142</sup> R&R is "about dominant narratives and exclusive narratives. And so it is a real question about power and privilege actually" (interviewee 14). The 1995 report *Working as One Body* attempted to rationalise the national church institutions and recommended the creation of the Archbishops' Council as a means of exerting more control and greater clarity.<sup>143</sup> Its recommendations were only partly implemented. For interviewee 14 it represented and encouraged the notion of an organisational mindset and rule from the centre, both of which he believes to be features of R&R: "It's the natural consequence of *Working as One Body*. Justin's exactly become the archbishop you would expect if *Working as One Body* had been implemented. I don't mean that rudely of him at all. I saw him yesterday. But I think he's the heir to that agenda".

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<sup>140</sup> William P Haugaard, "From the Reformation to the Eighteenth Century" in *The Study of Anglicanism*, edited by Sykes, Stephen, John Booty, Jonathan Knight, Revised ed., (London: SPCK/Fortress Press, 1998), 17-18

<sup>141</sup> Chandler, *The Church of England in the Twentieth Century*.

<sup>142</sup> It is misleading, of course, to speak of these 'parties' as if they are simple, homogenous groups. They are not. There are many types of evangelical, for example.

<sup>143</sup> Archbishops' Commission, *Working as One Body*.

Whether or not this is the case in fact and whether or not R&R is an example of the alleged agenda in action, whether or not such an agenda is a good or bad thing, a qualification is required. The qualification consists of an acknowledgement that the 'centre' is itself a complex environment composed of a range of institutions whose power relationships with each other are not clear, along with a proliferating bureaucracy. Lambeth Palace, Church House with its departments, General Synod, the Archbishops' Council, the Church Commissioners (to name the major players) are all, in effect, centres of accumulated power. The complexity is reinforced by a democratising movement which has seen a synodical structure established at all levels. The Church of England is governed by General Synod (subject to parliament and the monarch) and episcopally led (by the archbishops together with the bishops) to use the normal formula, but within an increasingly complex and confusing system. Interviewee 5 believes that the lack of accountability which accompanies this loose and complex structure is itself a contributor to the fact of decline, because it makes concerted and prompt change of any kind difficult to achieve: "I wouldn't say it is simply a failure of organisational form but in terms of how we got into it organisational form is not helping".

It could be argued that the system has evolved in this way (whether consciously or unconsciously) to ensure that the church is forced to think carefully about change and to secure a very wide consensus to make it possible – that is, to avoid hurried and misguided decisions. Another way of looking at it would be to suggest that the system is devised (or has evolved) to ensure that it is very hard for one of the Church of England's interest groups (including lay and clergy) to gain a decisive influence. In other words, it may have more to do with political compromise or the balance of power than either organisational or ecclesiological design. On either account, the suggestion is that the Church of England's organisation has developed so as to make change difficult and to maintain the status quo. This is a situation that serves the church reasonably well, perhaps, during periods of relative stability but is arguably quite unsuited to periods of acute social change such as that we currently experience. In such times the centralising tendency removes freedom and resource from parishes (where the difficulties are most acutely felt and where, arguably, they can be most practically addressed) while, simultaneously, the tendency to bureaucracy and complexity makes it hard for the centre to act except in a limited way.



If this analysis is at all correct, perhaps it helps to explain why Renewal and Reform is the way it is. It might indeed be the result of the efforts of one party or interest to do what they think right or necessary but it might also be the result of the limitations on what can be practically achieved. If it is already difficult to achieve theological agreement given the range of Anglican opinion, it is doubly difficult to do so in the context of the procedural challenges faced by any initiative for significant change.

Yet, at the same time, there is increasing public expectation that a national body should have identifiable and accountable leadership. Interviewee 7 told the following story about a conversation at an early module in the leadership development programme for bishops set up following *The Green Report*:

On the second day one of my colleagues was getting fed up and stood up and said, look, you know, all this talk about the church. Just tell me how to run my diocese, that's what I want to know about. And Kevin said, look, I'm not a Christian, I'm not from your country (he's Canadian), and I don't really understand what's going on but I've done a lot of research to be here. And all I can tell you is, a lot of people out there think there's a thing called the Church of England and they think you're the leaders of it. So, do you want to talk about that or not?

I suggest that all this helps to explain the anxiety and urgency felt by the architects of R&R. In the face of overwhelming evidence of decline, the perception of a lack of action or ineffective action taken in response, a sense of a lack of urgency across the Church of England, combined with frustration at the church's structure and processes, some felt a determination to act as speedily as possible *in the areas they could influence*. The reports included in the R&R programme as introduced by the archbishops in 2015, make clear, specific propositions. From the beginning it seems that the architects of R&R knew that it would not be easy to achieve the change they sought so they focused on achievable and limited initiatives which developed into a more ambitious culture change programme once established.

#### *Political games*

R&R advocates argue that they were also compelled to push their agenda through Synod as quickly as they could by the difficulty of getting agreement on change. This refers not only to the difficulty of managing the structural complexity but, even more, of finding common cause. I have referred before to the way the Church of England is divided into relatively formal groupings sharing distinctive theological and ecclesiological convictions. I suggested above that the Church of England may well be structured in the way it is partly to ensure that no one group is

allowed to dominate that church. But these divisions make the Church of England a more than usually blatantly political body (in the sense that it is composed of groups representing very particular ecclesial interests) and political manoeuvring is rife. This makes decision-making in general and consultation in particular unusually difficult. The weariness of the architects of R&R with the internal politics that prevents or dilutes remedial action in the face of problems, is not groundless, as even the staunchly critical interviewee 14 acknowledges:

I also understand that in the past, maybe not people like me, but people who might be deemed to be representative of my position have used [consultation] in a way that I think is less than honest. Because they've been able to conduct their own guerrilla warfare to not change things and maintain the status quo when they draw them into that. And you know, countless reports on doctrine, and this, that and the other. It's the classic way, isn't it, of institutions being able to say, we're dealing with this, when in fact, what they're doing is investing in their own inertia...this isn't just a problem for the right or the left or conservative or liberal. It's a standard thing. It totally just depends who is in power. And everybody uses this trick from the playbook, because you could see it going on in the 60s and 70s when there was a liberal catholic ascendancy. How do you keep this slightly permissive broad world going? Well, you draw in a selection of top evangelicals and make it incredibly complicated for them to be directional. And exactly the same has gone on really since things flipped I think in the early to mid-80s.

In chapter five I quoted Morgan's remark that the thinking associated with the political metaphor in organisational thought acts to "explode the myth of organizational rationality".<sup>144</sup> Organisations do not usually contain people simply or naturally orientated around a single purpose, but are composed of groups with different conceptions of that purpose and different interests. It is obvious that this is the case with the Church of England, which has to manage the interests of parliament, lay and clergy, church parties, powerful prelates and so forth. As interviewee 10 observed, this can lead to a rather destructive situation where "the purpose of our lives is to critique what other people are doing". The same interviewee mentioned a basic divide between "cavaliers" and "roundheads" which, I think intentionally, indicated the deep historical roots of these internal political divisions. This reference to the English Civil War refers to those likely to be high or central church in their theology and broad in their sympathies (cavaliers) as opposed to those more low church or puritan in their theology and stricter in their outlook (roundheads). The division is a little simplistic, but it does bear a real relation to tendencies we see continued in contemporary Anglican debates.

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<sup>144</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 203.

It seems to be believed that if the Church of England allows itself to be too attentive to the different voices in, for example, the debate about the role and nature of that church, progress and agreement become impossible. According to interviewee 15:

What is the church for? It's here to praise the Lord, according to the church. Or it's here to transform unjust structures in society. We would all answer that in a very different way. All of us, and probably even people on the R&R project board, different vicars step into it in different ways...That's always the issue with the church, you can't sit down and get everybody to agree on the vision.

According to interviewee 6 wide participation simply ensures that little or nothing happens:

I think we did count the cost, and I think we said to ourselves, we've seen how using the usual channels of consultation have killed absolutely every initiative that's been taken in the church over the past 20 years.

This is, at the least, exaggerated. The Church of England made many changes in the 20 years prior to 2015. The introduction of a completely new service book, *Common Worship*, is but one, major example. Nevertheless, in order to overcome these perceived difficulties, a group of leaders appear to have done what they could to achieve as much change as they could, as quickly as they could, leaving as little opportunity as possible for their efforts to be undermined or delayed. The approach was deliberately pragmatic:

I'm a strategist, and I can usually see when something's going to fail and what's necessary for success. So I think one of the things that I learned from the early experience was a kind of pragmatic understanding that there are certain things you can manage in the church and certain things you can't. But actually we waste an awful lot of time pretending that we can solve problems when we can't (interviewee 6).

It appears then that R&R is the way it is because some key players felt they needed to drive through certain actions in a fashion that is not typical of the Church of England because they believed it was the only way to address urgent and serious problems. They were supported, or perhaps, (in time) led by the Archbishop of Canterbury in doing so. After fifty years of steep and steady decline in attendance and influence which was rarely directly acknowledged, never mind addressed, the sense of urgency does not seem unreasonable. I can see why the architects of R&R believed there were genuine difficulties associated with building and maintaining leadership and allowing wider participation in R&R. But the organisational and theological approaches I have developed argue for a different approach, nevertheless. The kind of systemic approach I have favoured in this thesis is precisely one that

typically takes a relatively long time, but is designed to be effective and sustainable. The risk of acting without careful consideration (especially theological thought) and widespread participation is that change proves superficial and is resisted outside of the circle of 'believers'. Perhaps we should see the R&R programme, at least in its early form, as emergency action, preceding a period of deeper thought and associated action. There is some evidence of that deeper thought being provided, mainly in *SGPF*, but perhaps not as much as one might think desirable. Interviewee 6 knows that there is some theological work still to do:

And the two factors which I think will help us in that is one, ensuring that we can contain within whatever we do at Renewal and Reform, a real deep theology. You know, I resist the idea that it's untheological, but I do understand the worry that we're not being informed by proper debate with theologians. And I think one of the things that Justin is aware of is that we need to make sure that the roots of our discussion keep on being informed by the insights of theology.

Despite my sympathy with the way the R&R leaders understood their situation some of the organisational ideas I considered in chapter five (those associated with the political metaphor) suggest it is possible to deal with different positions and traditions more positively. Those ideas suggest that far more could be achieved by more skilful management of difference and conflict than appears to be thought possible by some of my interviewees. My interviews offer ample evidence of the different interests and opinions found in the Church of England on a range of important issues. But I do not believe that those holding those different views often discuss them, directly, together. Could such discussions not take place and be managed in a productive way? I suspect, on the basis of my experience in the interviews, that common ground could be found more easily than some might fear. I say this partly because, though of course there are real differences, I felt that interviewees sometimes railed against what they think an opponent has said rather than what they actually said (interviewee 10 on Linda Woodhead, for example, which I will quote later in the chapter). Sometimes remarks were exaggerated to make a point, including the remarks just referred to by interviewee 10, as well as those of interviewee 14 about the organisational language and priorities of the Church of England (which I will also quote later). Interviewees 7 and 10 both referred to the tendency of the bishops to agree relatively easily when together and to renege on agreement later. Speaking of the decision to suspend inter-generational equity interviewee 10 remarked, "the bishops in the Synod voted for it, although they then went away and said, well, we're not entirely sure about that". If the kind of discussions I think possible were pursued rigorously, differences would probably remain but

they might be more 'out in the open', less destructive and the agreements found more lasting, genuine and effective. That would, however, require a willingness on all sides to commit to such a process.

### **8.3 Institutional reforms or organisational culture change?**

Having considered the factors that influenced the formation of the R&R programme I return to the question of its nature and aims. The scope and ambition of R&R was somewhat ambiguous in the account of the documents I presented in chapter six. The perspectives of interviewees show a similar lack of clarity and unanimity. For some R&R has specific and limited ambitions. According to interviewee 3 "the original focus was...around funding specific institutional renewal". For interviewee 10 R&R is "modestly offered". For interviewee 9 "Some of the Renewal and Reform material is essentially housekeeping to bring the church's national arrangements and finances into line with this theological understanding of mission which was going on 20 years ago..."<sup>145</sup> This interviewee added: "we do not solve the significant questions facing the Church of England...by redistribution [of funding]...but it does take us part of the way there...I don't think it was ever intended to be the answer to life, the universe and everything". The picture that emerges here is of a programme that focused on specific measures, such as how funding should be used to encourage mission and growth.

There is, however, another perspective. For interviewee 3 what started more modestly "partly through Justin's arrival...began to take on more interesting pieces around renewal and discipleship....now less to do with the institution, and more to do with trying to change the church's life and culture and general feel". For interviewee 11 the ambition is clear: "I asked to meet the archbishop and he and I agreed...that the only way you can turn this mighty ocean liner around is through radical thinking...we want the risen Christ to be evident in every community, every group of people. It isn't just a church-based Christ". For interviewee 5 the programme is about changing the conversation, the culture, the priorities of the Church of

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<sup>145</sup> I will return to the question of the theology of R&R later

England: "it's starting to work its way through...the thing that is now very, very different is the stuff that's deemed to be admissible conversationally [such as 'missional ambition']".

There appear to be genuinely different perspectives here, all involving supporters and leading figures in the development and management of R&R. On the one hand there are those who see R&R as a programme with limited objectives and on the other, those who see it as an ambitious attempt to effect change across the Church of England. If the R&R programme was intended to effect some relatively modest "housekeeping" in support of strategies conceived and managed by the dioceses and parishes then that is quite a different matter to the attempt to create culture change across the Church of England. This is somewhat disconcerting. It may simply confirm what I have already suggested, that the structure of the Church of England does not easily support the kind of consistent governance, thinking and messaging that one would normally seek in a strategy or change programme. It also seems possible that the uncertainty I have found reflects the speed of the process which may well have undermined consistency of thought and purpose. As I have already suggested, we must take seriously the possibility that there is, in fact, no clear and consistent understanding about the scope and nature of R&R.

On balance my interpretation of the evidence is that R&R has grown in ambition over time. *V&N* and *SGPF*, both later documents, each suggest more comprehensive aims and appear to seek a significant change in the culture and practice of the Church of England. This appears to be the agenda of those most closely concerned with the programme's implementation. The views of those individuals whose influence appears to have initiated the programme suggests that some may always have seen the programme in these terms. If I am right about this it still leaves us with the question of the kind of change sought.

The emphasis in reports and interviews is on organisational change rather than on theological or personal and corporate spiritual renewal. The documents do not contain a call to prayer and show only limited interest in explicit theological conversation (in *DD* and, more significantly, in *SGPF*). I asked one interviewee (13) whether R&R aims primarily at spiritual renewal or is an organisational change project. That person opted to say it was both and went on to suggest that bishops increasingly saw the two as linked. That person further described bishops in organisational terms, as sponsors of change but with this linked to the spiritual authority which bishops hold. It seems that the R&R programme was conceived or came to be conceived as possessing both dimensions but I did not hear a consistent account of the

programme in both dimensions. This could be because the proponents of R&R believe that organisational measures are necessary to enable an essential spiritual renewal and that this is the purpose of the procedural and cultural change sought. Or perhaps R&R assumes that the spiritual life of the church is healthy and merely in need of being released and nurtured by such measures as better leadership, more active encouragement of discipleship and lay ministry, fewer obstacles to innovation. Another way to put this is to say that perhaps R&R assumes that the Church of England has a greater need for action in relation to growth than theological or spiritual discernment or change in relation to its 'being'.

#### *Turning a super-tanker*

According to interviewee 2, who has experience of change management in other contexts, R&R is "the most gentle change programme I've ever come across in my career! For others, it's completely radical and incredible, but for me it's a gentle turning of a super-tanker". The idea that commercial organisations are more demanding and rigorous in their change programmes than the Church of England is in R&R is an idea offered by a couple of interviewees. I am mainly interested, however, in the idea of the Church of England as a super-tanker. Though it characterises the Church of England as a single ship when it sometimes appears more like a fleet of ships sailing in roughly the same direction, the analogy seems apt in that the Church of England is a large organisation that has established a way of operating over many years. This may make it especially hard to change. It is not just scale and history that makes it difficult, however. It is also the organisational complexity that, as we have seen, characterises the Church of England.

This may help to explain why R&R appears to be something of a hybrid in organisational change terms. At one level I observe a classic example of the type of change process characteristic of bureaucracies. There are task groups, reports and detailed recommendations which are submitted to the formal authority (General Synod in this case) for discussion and approval. The measures themselves are limited, specific and departmentally focused. Change is delegated partly to the relevant departments and partly to a specially created and dedicated department, in this case, the Renewal and Reform department. I suggested in chapter five that the problem for bureaucracies is that they find change difficult. The reliance upon relatively isolated initiatives often leads to a tendency to treat symptoms rather than causes. Organisational change frequently founders upon organisational inertia and the inability to create

sufficient focus. Bureaucracies rely upon strong central control to make such initiatives possible and even then they often do not succeed.<sup>146</sup> The problem for the Church of England is not only that reforming a bureaucracy is inherently difficult but that the required central control does not appear to be available.

This may be the reason why the R&R programme seems to have another dimension. I mean by this that R&R is described as an attempt to change the 'narrative' about the Church of England. This involves creating a shared concern or story about decline and the need to respond by emphasising mission and growth. Interviewee 13 emphasised the importance of messaging: "How you engage people in the change...some kind of shared vision...how do you take everybody with you?... [the] communication strategy's absolutely key". This is about shifting the perception of the situation and the response required by the Church of England. According to interviewee 15 there are signs that this is working: "I think it's brought energy and it's brought focus...It's brought good conversations, it's opened up conversations around, what is a flourishing church, what is a flourishing Diocese?" This resolve to change the narrative is, perhaps, linked to a determination not to rely on processes of formal planning but to experiment.

According to interviewee 15:

I don't think many other organisations are doing that any more or otherwise [formal vision and strategy]. I think if you look at other organisations, I think a lot of them have learnt that that's not the right way to go. Clearly, you need to have some sort of plan and journey...But it's how we blend those with the cultural, people, the emergent... How are things emerging. The looking at the capacity on the ground, it's all very well having a big vision, but if you haven't got the people to deliver it, well then you can either spend millions training them or...So I think we're getting much better at it, yes...bush fires, we talk a lot about bush fires in our team, or acupuncture points. Or where there's energy, things will get going. In a way, that's what the church has always done.

The whole point is, you've got to keep your interpretation going in on an ongoing way, rather than having a paper, which is then out of date in a year's time. It's actually a really good sign of a really healthy shift in the church's culture, that there's not one position paper. I think it's really good.

This perspective suggests that R&R operates by a combination of changes in narrative and the nature and focus of leadership (as evidenced in the *Green* material) supported by specific, targeted institutional reforms, augmented by a willingness to experiment and 'get

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<sup>146</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*.18-21



behind' promising developments. This might be indicative of an emphasis on applying some of the ideas associated with the 'flux and transformation' metaphor alongside the more 'classical' approach.<sup>147</sup> I did not find corroboration of this integrated picture from other interviewees. This makes me think that this was not a planned or deliberate approach. The evidence I have suggests that it has evolved in this way.

Overall, it is not clear to me what, if any, formal theoretical and expert influences have formed the approach to R&R. Although I gave interviewees the opportunity to name such influences few mentioned any specific examples. Most referred to the wisdom gathered from experience. Interviewee 8 referred to "pragmatism, experience, no theories" and to prior experience in a public sector body turned corporation. Interviewee 9 named Margaret Wheatley, an interesting reference to a leading exponent of complexity theory.<sup>148</sup> Interviewee 6 had more to offer than most, referring to Avery Dulles, Peter Rudge, and a range of personal organisational experiences. Anecdotally I have heard that Deborah Rowland's work is increasingly influential.<sup>149</sup> Overall, however, I have not found evidence that the strategy is founded in any particular understanding of organisation or organisational change. Given the constraints created by bureaucracy combined with organisational complexity and the absence of clear lines of authority and control the hypothesis I set out in the previous paragraph about R&R's organisational approach is, if correct, understandable. As it stands, however, it seems a somewhat uncertain basis on which to hope to turn a super-tanker around, which is certainly how at least two of the interviewees, one a major architect of R&R, view the purpose of R&R. I suggest it lacks coherence, solid theoretical foundations, and, consequently, some legitimacy. Further, I suggest that a broader and deeper engagement with organisational theory would offer useful perspectives and potential improvements. I will offer some suggestions in the final chapter.

It is not just that the programme might be more firmly rooted in organisation theory. I am even more concerned that it should be a programme with a strong theological foundation. By this I refer to such things as I have discussed in previous chapters, including, a credible

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<sup>147</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*, 241ff.

<sup>148</sup> See e.g. Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Learning about Organization from an Orderly Universe*, (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1992).

<sup>149</sup> See e.g. Deborah Rowland and Malcolm Higgs, *Sustaining Change*, 1. Aufl. ed. (San Francisco, Calif: Jossey-Bass, 2008).

understanding of the Church of England within concepts such as the Kingdom of God and the *Missio Dei*; the agency of God in relation to that of human beings; and a consequent emphasis on discerning and responding to the leading of the Holy Spirit. The Theological Triologue emphasises the importance of maintaining identity, of being church authentically, as a pre-condition of productive activity. I seek a sense of how the R&R programme is conceived ecclesologically. But these ideas and, indeed, this language is missing from the interviews. I cannot completely demonstrate an absence of this kind but I can illustrate it. In all fifteen interviews the Holy Spirit is mentioned a total of ten times. The Kingdom is mentioned more frequently – 36 times – but 33 of those references are in four interviews. ‘Pray’ or ‘prayer’ occurs 22 times but not once in relation to the idea that prayer for guidance either has been or should be a part of the process. The ideas I have referred to might, of course, be taken as read and I do not offer these simple statistics as any form of proof. But I think they are indicative of the emphasis evident to me within the programme and from its creators on practical and organisational action.

#### **8.4 R&R content: key themes**

I turn now from the question of the scope and nature of R&R to a consideration of its content. The key themes which emerge from the interviews concern the nature of and reasons for decline; the emphasis on numerical growth; the role of money and power in influencing the R&R programme; the nature and identity of the Church of England; and the concern that the programme is unduly ‘managerial’.

##### *Diagnosis of decline*

Firstly, I will address the understanding of “decline” that informs the R&R process. In the reports this is hardly treated at all and I suggested the question needed much deeper consideration. The interviews produced some thoughts. One attempt to respond to the search for such a diagnosis was to suggest that the work I am looking for was done in the noughties. I have already quoted this remark by interviewee 9: “Some of the Renewal and Reform material is essentially housekeeping to bring the church's national arrangements and finances into line with this theological understanding of mission which was going on 20 years ago...and that's why

the workings out are not as apparent". The most obvious document associated with this shift towards mission is *Mission Shaped Church*.<sup>150</sup> That report suggests that our society is experiencing an epochal shift away from Christendom and into a post-Christian culture but it has little to say about what that means, beyond creating an imperative that the church shift into missionary mode.<sup>151</sup>

Similar thoughts emerge from the interviews. There is a recognition of significant social change and a concern that the church has not kept pace with it (interviewee 13). Interviewee 10 refers to "the end of Christendom". According to interviewee 11:

The whole trend in secular society has moved away from the church. I remember being a young lad when the Forsyte Saga was shown on TV on Sunday evening and suddenly evensong attendances were slashed...there was a whole societal structure that supported the attendances of the church.

Interviewee 6 made a more philosophical observation:

You've moved from a place where a metanarrative was accepted and important...to the place where no metanarratives are allowed, to the place where story is the most important thing. Now that means that for those of us who believe there is something about revealed truth...that Christianity has a story which is true, and which is a story we want to draw people into, we have to tell it differently.

The idea that the Christian story might have to be told differently in these times may be familiar territory for missiologists. Nevertheless, the notion of focusing on story in an age that responds to stories but does not respond warmly to the meta-claims of Christian story strikes me as a potentially fruitful area of discussion. The interviewee did not go on to describe how this might happen or what exactly it might mean, however.

Interviewee 7 offered more analysis of the nature of the societal change which has taken place. The interviewee referred to

lack of trust; questioning of authority; lack of confidence in institutions. And that's taking its toll on us and taking a long time to work through....I mean clearly there was use and abuse and misuse of power in all sorts of different ways. So, a huge misuse of patronage. What would once upon a time quite happily be called the old boy's network was rife ... Clearly it was safeguarding issues were around, in all sort of ways, horrific things that I've sadly had to learn in my life were going on right through that time, before and after.

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<sup>150</sup> The Mission Shaped Church Working Group, *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004).

<sup>151</sup> The Mission Shaped Church Working Group, *Mission-Shaped Church*, 11-12.

There seems no reason to doubt that abuse of power has played a part in the decline in the regard of the English population for the Church of England. Social attitudes in England were, in any case, moving away from an identification with institutions, especially large, national institutions that felt increasingly distant. According to interviewee 7, there was:

A sort of shaping and framing of the institutional church which was fairly obviously, I think, going in the complete opposite direction of the rest of society [referring partly, I think, to centralising tendencies in the Church of England as a whole]...Power is what it's all about really.

Finally, it was suggested that there is a disconnect between the views of people and clergy: "the vast majority of people in the pews are now in a much more liberal place than the leadership of the church" according to interviewee 3.

This last is a contestable claim but overall these responses suggest linked but distinct perceived factors in the decline of the Church of England: changes in the prevailing philosophy of our society and, especially, its understanding of truth; sceptical attitudes to institutions from without (these linked to a concern about the abuse of power) and failures in institutional culture and behaviour within. They seem consistent with the views of commentators including Grace Davie and Charles Taylor.<sup>152</sup> The thoughts on these matters, however, are somewhat scattered and fragmentary and remain relatively undeveloped. One might, for example, go on to suggest that members of the Church of England, living both within that church and this changing society are themselves likely to be conflicted by living through these trends. One might go further to suggest that these concerns seem prime examples of where organisation theories associated with the political and instrument of domination images might be helpful in enabling the Church of England to be more honest in facing and effective in addressing its own institutional failures. Theologically and ecclesiologically one might ask how the gospel picture of church as a community of liberation or abundant life might be enacted and achieved in the actual empirical life of today's Church of England. In other words, one might consider how to ensure that the Church of England could become a sufficiently credible witness to Christ in contemporary British society given the climate of scepticism. Nevertheless the emphasis of both the documents and of supporters of R&R in the interviews appears to be more on the *need* for mission and growth

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<sup>152</sup> Davie, *Religion in Britain*; Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

than on the *nature* of the witness of the Church of England and its posture towards contemporary society.<sup>153</sup>

*“Bums on seats”*

The interviews contained a lot of material on the central theme of the R&R reports: numerical and spiritual growth. Interviewee 14 contends that while the reports place numerical and spiritual growth together in theory, the real emphasis is more on numerical growth: “their criteria in terms of how they assess themselves is almost wholly around numerical growth”. There would appear to be some justice in this remark as the reports contain no discussion of how spiritual growth will be measured: perhaps it is believed it cannot be. Interviewee 2 acknowledges that the difficulty of measuring the spiritual means that the more easily measured numbers seem more emphasised: “we don't really know the quality of spiritual growth and leadership...what we do know...is...numbers”. Some are happy with the emphasis on numerical growth, including interviewee 12 (who no-one would characterise as an evangelical). This interviewee rejects the argument that such a concern is in conflict with the Church of England’s more traditional pastoral ministry or an emphasis on presence and service:

So we've seen the graph and it's okay for us waxing lyrical about our George Herbert church which is all about parish visiting and what not. But if that church isn't going to exist you're not going to have a broad church or evangelical church, you're not going to have a church at all.

This person is, at the same time, concerned that the more nebulous, less tangible nature of the concept of spiritual growth can lead to it being overlooked:

The danger, of course, is if Renewal and Reform or whoever else reduced the churches’ goals to a very limited metric, bums on seats whatever it might be, they may get what they want but they may lose something much more important.

Others, however, including interviewee 6 insist: “It's not all about numbers. No-one has ever said it's all about numbers”.

The argument made by interviewee 12, that without numbers, other aspects of the church’s ministry suffer, is made several times. Interviewee 8 suggests that it is vital to keep “enough of the entity of the church sustained, so that mission can be effective”. For interviewee

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<sup>153</sup> Of course, it is possible that this represents a failure of the interviewer for not asking the necessary questions, but I do not believe that to be the case. For the most part I think the interviews fairly represent the primary concerns of the interviewees.

10, there is a clear relationship between the number of people engaged with or belonging to the Church of England and the impact of that church, whereas, “some want one or the other”. In other words, interviewee 10 suggests, some want an emphasis on making a difference in society as against growth in numbers, or vice versa. Interviewee 1 sees growth as crucial to retaining the reach and breadth of Anglican ministry in England: “Church membership is declining, it’s critical we have that breadth because, you know, I want the church to be relevant...not to a minority narrow group of people”. In other words, if the Church of England wishes to sustain its pastoral ministry or contribute to the common good, or retain a presence across English society, it needs numbers and motivated, mature disciples to do so.

The arguments of those who reject this outlook are often given short shrift. Those who reject the notion that church growth should be a priority are seen as nostalgic, ignoring the implications of decline, and as basing their views on an unrealistic idea that the Church of England’s ministry can be sustained by clergy and buildings alone. Interviewee 6 refers to “a slightly romantic vision that [Linda] Woodhead peddles” which reduces the Church of England to a heritage organisation on the lines of “the National Trust”.<sup>154</sup> This line was developed passionately by interviewee 10, who asserted that the argument put by critics such as Martyn Percy or Linda Woodhead is:

Historically nostalgic and theologically mistaken and sociologically jejune...state church has never been the vision of the Church of England. I don't think John Wesley would have recognised it, as an Anglican priest in his day. I don't think John Keble would have recognised it...Latitudinarians would have, but theirs was never the only voice in the Church of England...Linda's line is, you don't need a congregation, you just need a vicar.

These remarks raise some questions (even allowing for the deliberately polemical, provocative and satirical intent that I think lay behind them). Keble (a High Churchman and Tractarian who became hostile to the Reformation)<sup>155</sup> and Wesley (the founder of Methodism) are odd choices as Anglican exemplars. They are clearly from the more extreme ends of the Anglican spectrum of opinion. It also appears somewhat inaccurate to characterise the alternative as “Latitudinarianism”<sup>156</sup> which seems an unfairly dismissive characterisation of the

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<sup>154</sup> A reference to the argument made in the book co-written with Brown, that the Church of England has alienated itself from the British public by abandoning its traditional, pastoral role in favour of centralisation and a focus on “mission” – see Brown, *That Was the Church That Was*.

<sup>155</sup> Avis, *Anglicanism and the Christian Church*, 222.

<sup>156</sup> Latitudinarianism is a term used to describe middle way or broad Anglicanism of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It became a pejorative term for “lack of interest in doctrine and sacraments, spiritual sloth, Erastian subservience to the state, conservative political views, and occasional doctrinal heterodoxy” Terry Brown, “Anglican Way Or Ways,” in *The Oxford*

broad church (and does not consider the position of more moderate catholics and evangelicals). In addition the interviewee contrasts relatively extreme positions, with a pejorative term for what, after all (broad church Anglicanism) constitutes the position held by a great many adherents of the Church of England. Further, given the fine balance of the Elizabethan settlement between catholic and protestant theologies and the notion of the *via media* between them so fundamental to Anglicanism, the remark could be read as a repudiation of the fundamental identity of the Church of England – to which theme I shall attend properly shortly. And, finally, it is far from clear that the representation of Woodhead's views is what she does, in fact, believe. In her writing she emphasises the idea that it is the increasing narrowness of the Church of England and its distance from the concerns of ordinary people that the Church of England needs to address. She accuses the Church of England of retreating from what she understands to be its remit to be the church for the whole English people.<sup>157</sup>

This last set of observations illustrates one of the features of contemporary discussion within the Church of England about its situation and the question of what constitutes an appropriate response. This is the characteristic way that discussion does take a somewhat polemical and generalising tone, a tendency found on both sides of the argument. Critics such as Percy and Woodhead are dismissed as nostalgic for an England that has disappeared and for outdated, liberal, Erastian theologies. But, from the other direction, the accusation is made that Renewal and Reform is merely interested in a crude notion of numbers, “bums on seats” (as the remark quoted above from interviewee 12 acknowledges) but this does not tally with the passionate and thoughtful tone and argument I generally encountered in my interviews from supporters of R&R.

#### *Money and power*

The critique of R&R that seems quite frequently made, that it is inappropriately focused on numerical growth, can be taken further to become a critique of an alleged preoccupation with money and power. This was the position of one interviewee (14) who argued that the Church of England has been inappropriately influenced by late modern capitalism.

I found it really interesting that in Reform and Renewal...that on the one hand it has no trouble buying into the assumptions underlying the rhetoric of late capitalism, you know, growth, success and that kind of

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*Handbook of Anglican Studies*, eds. Mark D. Chapman, Sathianathan Clarke and Martyn Percy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 623.

<sup>157</sup> Brown, *That Was the Church that Was*.

thing...but it doesn't buy any of the stuff that's actually in modern management which is now equality and empowerment and non-discrimination. So you think, hmm, this is a bit unselfconscious.

I will return to the discussion of management and the alleged adoption of inappropriately instrumental models later. For now I focus on the concern that a focus on growth in numbers is viewed as a capitulation to the spirit of capitalist economics. I report it here because although only one interviewee raised the issue in this way in relation to R&R specifically, it is a critique consistent with a theme of contemporary theology, that churches have become overly influenced by concepts arising from capitalist thought and practice.<sup>158</sup> Interviewee 14's concerns are also closely related to the critique of the world of management offered by Milbank and Shakespeare.<sup>159</sup>

The impact of such ideas on R&R is hard to assess. I do note that it appears that the emphasis on church growth *is*, apparently, influenced to some extent by a concern for finance if not a commitment to 'capitalism'. Interviewee 15 said of R&R: "The way it's currently set up, it is about growth, and partly I think that's because it's a financial programme as well. So growth equals money as well as disciples". If the programme is indeed influenced by a concern to increase revenue is that, in itself, a problem, either organisationally or theologically? I cannot see why it would be: sufficient finance is a basic requirement of any enterprise of any kind and it is dishonest to pretend otherwise. Having financial resources and dealing with them wisely is surely a necessity arising from the embodied, contextual character of churches. In other words, if the organisational aspect of the Church of England has theological validity and significance (as I have argued it does) then a certain concern for this dimension of its existence appears to me a proper concern from a theological perspective.

If, however, R&R is partly motivated by financial concerns it is strange that there is no evidence R&R is linked to, or supported by, a larger, more comprehensive financial strategy for the Church of England. Such a strategy would surely include other considerations, including the question of managing expenditure. This might include some appraisal, for example, of the costs associated with maintaining 42 dioceses each with their attendant extra-parochial staff structures. If the need to improve the financial position of the Church of England is a major driver of the R&R programme it does not appear to be the result of careful consideration of, nor

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<sup>158</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

<sup>159</sup> Milbank, "Stale Expressions,"; Shakespeare, *Being the Body of Christ*.



related to, the range of possible options. This remark should be qualified by the recognition that there is a considered and deliberate policy to use resources to invest in the future of the Church of England, rather than to simply maintain it as is, set out in *CCF*.

Further, the question of money is linked, according to interviewee 14, to the centralising tendency in the Church of England and an accompanying question of power. This interviewee does not object to R&R in its entirety but is concerned that it is overly dominated, and perhaps driven, by the views of one party in that church. I have quoted part of the following remark already but it is relevant here too:

There's lots of dollops of reform and renewal that I don't object to. I don't think it's alien or something that the body needs to exorcise itself of. It's...actually a question about dominant narratives and exclusive narratives. And so it is a real question about power and privilege actually.

The suggestion here is that as the Church of England centralises it becomes more possible for one party to capture power. It is suggested that R&R illustrates and represents this. Regarding power we can observe that the Church of England has indeed become more centralised throughout the twentieth century and thus, accumulated more power at the national level. Perhaps this did facilitate R&R given that I have characterised it as the creation of a relatively small group of enthusiasts. On the other hand, all church parties have always used such power as they can access to promote their views – a point conceded by interviewee 14.

Whatever the truth behind the discussion above I remain concerned that the Church of England gives insufficient attention to and is insufficiently realistic about its relationship to questions of power. Perhaps it would be helpful to pay more attention to the thinking associated with the metaphor of organisations as “instruments of domination”, to return to Morgan's terms.<sup>160</sup> Organisations exercise power and sometimes in illegitimate, unhealthy or oppressive ways. Recent examples of safeguarding failures in the Church of England suggest that there is still some way to go in handling the question of power.<sup>161</sup> I am concerned that the R&R programme does not sufficiently address the implications of seeking church growth in a society that has experienced centuries of church dominance, a concern I raised when discussing the R&R reports in the previous chapter. However unfair it might be, the history

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<sup>160</sup> Morgan, *Images of Organization*.

<sup>161</sup> Inquiry Panel, *Interim Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse*.

influences some, perhaps many, to view the Church of England not only as irrelevant but as a destructive and malign influence. These perceptions are reinforced by safeguarding failures which suggest the Church of England still has an unhealthy relationship with power. These issues must be addressed if the strategy of mission is to have credibility within English society. I repeat what I said in chapter five, that this is likely to mean a greater willingness to acknowledge and address sinfulness within the Church of England and greater honesty, transparency and humility in its self-presentation within that society.

But the primary concern expressed by interviewee 14 especially (though not uniquely) is not only or even mainly with growth, or power or money, but with the conception of the Church of England at work in R&R. In fact, interviewee 14 does not even object to the language of growth *per se*: “So it’s not that a language of growth or even fecundity is inappropriate. It’s just that, we are dealing with something a bit more complicated [the Church of England].” It is to the question of the nature of the Church of England to which I turn now.

*“Discerning the body”*

The discussion about growth and the role played by the influence of capitalism or otherwise, points us toward what I believe to be perhaps the most important matter of concern, namely that of the nature and identity of the Church of England. I have argued in my exposition of the Theological Trialogue that a clear and comprehensive understanding of identity is a critical ingredient of effective and appropriate change, judged both theologically and organisationally. This was influenced by an ecclesiological conception of church as a contextual, culturally shaped expression of the gift of God, the Body of Christ. We have already seen that *SGPF* offers material that starts to address some of the foundational questions with which I have been concerned, addressing, for example, the significance of the Trinity and of church as a body with a mission to the world. As we also saw, however, there is little discussion of specifically Anglican identity in the R&R literature, either of its range of traditions or what I have called its institutional existence, that is, its significance, in context, to those within and beyond the Church of England, not least as the principal national expression of the Christian faith.

If we turn to the interviews we find a variety of perspectives about the identity and purpose of the Church of England. The one most associated with some of the leading advocates of R&R is a particular understanding of that church’s role (especially in the face of decline) as being

primarily missionary, with that term seeming to be understood relatively narrowly, as evangelism. What I mean by this is that the primary focus of the interviewees most associated with R&R appears to be on evangelism in the specific sense of faith-sharing and winning new adherents to Christianity. The Church of England must engage in mission and make use of its role as the national church with a presence in every community, to carry out that mission. Interviewee 6 puts it baldly: "I'm having a robust conversation with the incumbent and saying, actually, you've not realised what it means to be the Church of England, precisely all the opportunities it gives you to engage with people through being the nation's church...The church exists for evangelism". Interview 11 wants to take some of the burden of caring from a building away from small congregations: "And where that really works well, the congregation can then be liberated to enjoy Jesus and to evangelise".

Interviewee 6, as we have seen, wants to emphasise the Church's identity as a missionary movement as against a role as a national church – or at least, as a national church overly influenced by the interests and concerns of the state:

Recognise Constantine got us into this mess in the first place. Erastianism has been both a poison on the church and also a helpful way of being. What those folk are advocating that the Church of England remain as distinctive as to what its heritage might be have not looked very carefully at the ways in which we are so assimilated and bound up with the state and society. So when you read the critique of Linda Woodhead, basically all she's doing is inheriting Erastianism and saying, this is how we're now in the warp and woof of the nation, or how we were, and we're losing that. But she's no less bound into a series of understandings that have come from a particular ideology than those of us who want to advocate a change of practice.

It is true that everyone is coming from some position or tradition. But it is also true that this, in itself, does not invalidate arguments made from within a particular tradition. For interviewee 6 the Church of England's ministry is essentially evangelistic:

The church exists for evangelism, and if we weren't doing that, we wouldn't be doing our job. The Church of England has not always been very good at that. You know, we had a Decade of Evangelism, a complete waste of time and space and everything else. But we are now talking about a society which is rapidly drifting away from the faith, and there's more ignorance of the faith and more rejection of the faith, according to the latest surveys. So we are actually talking about re-evangelising a country that has lost that Christian heritage.

Prioritising a pastoral role simply does not meet the current challenge:

If we were content to rest with the old vision of just being the church for the country and being the chaplaincy, we could fade into obscurity and give all the churches to the National Trust, because no one would come. Because they all want to be, you know, vaguely Christian, but they don't actually want to commit. Now, commitment and discipleship are unavoidable bits of the church package (interviewee 6).

Some critics of R&R are concerned that the programme is an attempt to homogenise the ministry of the Church of England in the style of the charismatic evangelicalism associated with Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB), whose influence is significant in the Church of England today, especially through its energetic programme of church planting, but interviewee 6, though sympathetic to HTB, does not see this as a universal template:

I think part of the difficulty of some of the church planting stuff, which is a critique which we do need to acknowledge, is template solutions like, 'here is HTB. It works. Let's transplant it everywhere else'. These are now being shown to be fatuous because you need to have an understanding of incarnation. You need to understand the context to which you're going...that's the great strength of the Church of England, that when you realise that you are meant to be incarnate in the community God's put you, then things do change (interviewee 6).

Here is an emphasis that resonates with the argument I have made for church in context, the embodied church. But the primary focus appears to be on mission understood as church growth.

For some there is a sense that such a focus on evangelism, if over-emphasised, carries dangers. All the work of the Church of England matters: "dioceses are generally ready to accept that in terms of making disciples they are not strong...[but] let's not throw the baby out with the bathwater" (interviewee 8). Interview 12 is concerned that mission does not become an instrumental activity: "we're the kind of institution that says no actually the way we transform peoples' lives is as important as the lives we transform".

There appear to be real tensions which R&R does not seem to recognise. According to interviewee 3 the Church of England is a coalition of interests (a fleet rather than a super-tanker, perhaps), and "everyone comes from some tradition whether they're conscious of it or not", the implication being that not everyone recognises that, or recognising it, is not always honest about it. The suggestion is that sometimes agendas and preferences shaped by particular traditions are presented as objective analysis. There are also tensions between the organisational, institutional and community aspects of church. For interviewee 3 "the CofE has a particular duty, relationship to all the communities of the nation". This argument itself comes, of

course, from a particular understanding of the Church of England as interviewee 3 recognises. This interviewee describes the Church of England as a "national land-based, parish-based, episcopal church in the western Catholic tradition which also shares in the critiques of the Reformation". This understanding finds support and development from interviewee 4: the Church of England is the church shaped for and by this context: "The gift of the Church of England to the world church is its contextual rootedness...at the parish level you have a highly contextualised Christian community" with the bishop as a regional presence and "similarly the way the church sits, nationally in England". Interviewee 4 traces this diverse contextualising to a Reformation principle, "a colloquially speaking, locally rooted church". Others, like interviewee 11, see the Church of England principally in terms of a mission to bring the knowledge of Christ to individuals. It seems likely to me that these perspectives could be reconciled but this will not be helped by ignoring or marginalising important understandings of the Church of England's identity and task.

It does not seem satisfactory to reduce the identity or purpose of the Church of England to church growth, yet this does appear to be the primary focus of R&R. It does not seem adequate in relation to the conception of church I developed in chapter four as a sign and foretaste of the Kingdom of God. The broader nature and traditions of the Church of England, to the extent that they are considered at all, might appear to be considered an inconvenience by some advocates of R&R. My sense is that it is not so much that the R&R advocates deny the validity of these traditions or wish to dissociate themselves from the historical breadth of the church as that they possess a combination of party theological sympathies and practical convictions about the priority of mission in the current context: a mixture of evangelical conviction and practical concern about a loss of Christian witness in England. For them, the Church of England may be a contextual church – but the current context requires a rigorous focus on discipleship and church growth. These concerns are not trivial and the facts of decline offer powerful evidence in support. But it is hard not to conclude that R&R lacks a sense of being located in a truly comprehensive understanding of the Church of England. Interviewee 14 sees the understanding associated with advocates of R&R as limited and somewhat mechanical: "I think they assume the church to be a fairly defined body with defined aims, objectives and outcomes. It's what I might term a very mechanistic way of regarding the church". He adds:

I'm asking for the body to be discerned, before we start performing operations on it or treat it. And I think even just from the straightforward management theory perspective, comprehending the nature of the body is the first thing you need to do before you start.

This seems a reasonable and justified perspective: if we are going to change something it would make sense to be clear what exactly it is we are changing. I have certainly argued for that point of view: in the Theological Triologue renewed understanding of the identity of the church in view is a pre-requisite of sustainable and appropriate change. It does appear that the R&R process lacks a clear basis in an ecclesiology which recognises Anglican identity as I have described it in chapter four, that is, in a way that does justice to the nature of the Church of England as both mystery and social system. In particular, there is very little consideration of the church's nature and role as an embodied, historical entity. What role does it have in England, what vision does it have for England?

I refer back to my account of faithful improvisation in chapter 4. I related the concept to the notion of the theodrama derived from Von Balthasar as expounded in Healy's work.<sup>162</sup> The task of a church is to develop its life in an improvisatory manner as it faces new challenges in history, in order to journey faithfully towards the eschaton. This requires both a re-appropriation of the tradition and a real understanding of the context. It could be argued that the emphasis on growth is precisely the required response to the context of our times. Even if this is so, however, we might seek more evidence that both the re-appropriation of the tradition and the understanding of the context had received sufficient attention. This evidence is not obviously available. Interviewee 3 suggested that R&R exposes the fact that the Church of England's self-understanding is implicit, but that tacit understandings can no longer cope in the face of the changes in the world and the challenge posed by those to that church. A more explicit understanding is required, one that takes account of the changes and challenges. But this work has not yet been done. This is a powerful and persuasive point of view.

#### *Management and managerialism*

I will turn now to the question of the Church of England as organisation and the role management concepts play in that church. I suggested earlier that the interviews offered little evidence that R&R has been influenced by any particularly consciously held organisational or management ideas, though some references were made. I now want to explore the question of

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<sup>162</sup> Alexander, *Faithful Improvisation?*; Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life*.

the value of management concepts and the accusation that the Church of England has embraced something which can be described, pejoratively, as 'managerialism'. Does the way that management thinking is understood and actualised in the R&R thinking and processes undermine the notion of the Church of England as the Body of Christ and do violence to the essential nature and identity of that church?

Earlier I referred to interviewee 14's remark that R&R:

doesn't buy any of the stuff that's actually in modern management which is now about equality and empowerment and non-discrimination. So you think, hmm, this is a bit unselfconscious.

The suggestion here is that managerialist notions are adopted as a result of unreflective attitudes or lack of awareness rather than deliberate choice. It is possible that in the absence of awareness and deliberate choice the attitudes associated with popular conceptions of management practice, or those current in the business world have been unthinkingly absorbed. I have already noted the lack of any significant theological critique of, for example, concepts of organisational leadership, in *Green*. Interviewee 14's remark above focused not on management thinking *per se* but the kind of management thinking that is being practised in the Church of England. That individual is not against management concepts as such but seeks a more discriminating approach:

One maxim I work with, there are no bad foods, there are only bad diets. So if you set that as a template, there's nothing bad here. Theologically I don't see how any of it can be bad. It's not evil...so it is to be tasted, discerned and sampled. Probably consumed. The question is how much and to the exclusion of what if anything, really? So I'd be asking....about a balanced diet for a body.

Interviewee 14 believes that R&R is characterised by unsophisticated, perhaps instrumental attitudes to management. I note that this is a view that echoes the attitude to management concepts found in the works of Milbank and Shakespeare discussed in chapters two and five.<sup>163</sup> But interviewee 14 does not believe all management ideas should be dismissed in this way. He sees what he calls managerialism as linked to contemporary evangelical theology and *mores*:

So I think clearly some evangelical churches...are going to be slightly squeamish of anything that's ecclesiological and will be, for all sorts of pragmatic reasons, drawn to a very mechanistic way of reading the Bible and won't have enormous difficulties in adopting that in ecclesial

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<sup>163</sup> Milbank, "Stale Expressions,"; Shakespeare, *Being the Body of Christ*.

paradigms along the lines of *Working as One Body* or so forth. I mean there's just a leanness to that kind of objective chasing worldview.

I described earlier how this interviewee understands *Working as One Body* to have introduced a narrowly 'managerial' outlook to the Church of England in the 1990s. I am aware that I have given interviewee 14 more space than others but have done so because this interviewee offers a theological critique not found among other interviewees, but evident in broader debates about R&R.

In general the interviews are more notable for a defence of the ideas and practice of management. According to interviewee 12 management thinking is about looking after the people of the organisation properly:

I probably had about 20 years of experience of significant sized organisations and the need for which the word management is unavoidable. If management means ensuring that every single person in the organisation knows exactly what they've been asked to do. And they're paid to do what they've been asked to do or they will receive rewards and satisfaction as a volunteer through doing exactly what they've been asked to do.

Interviewee 15 argues similarly:

But that's process, it's management, it's about fairness to people. It's like appointments processes, people want to know, they want clarity, transparency, how they're going to be treated. Am I getting the same, am I being treated in the same way as you, blah blah blah. And that's part of the dignity of human beings.

For interviewee 1 management is about attending properly to the reality that the Church of England is an organisation:

If management means making sure that money is spent according to a budget and not just willy nilly. And that shortfalls are anticipated, if management means that governance is in place and you have regular meetings at regular times. And the minutes are kept and people don't stay on committees forever they do three years renewable for three years and then come off.

For interviewee 15 this is a lesson that the Church of England needs to learn in the wake of the exposure of its failings:

The other thing though...and I use this example a lot, safeguarding is a real wake-up call for clergy who avoid management. It has shown us there are some things where you have to be accountable, you have to take decisions and you've got to be able to manage process.



Does this 'good management' come at the price of more creative thinking? Interviewee 12 does not think so: "I really pushback against the idea. The alternative to managerial often isn't visionary, it's often poorly managed. And that's an even worse situation". There is much to learn from many sources: "there are really good insights from the way in which people organise themselves, not least from some of the most peculiar companies, you know? The Microsofts and the Googles" (interviewee 6).

For lay people whose careers have been spent acquiring management skills it is dismaying to find that many in the Church of England do not seem to value such experience. I have already referred to interviewee 5's concerns about this. But it is also suggested that attitudes are changing. Interviewee 13 commented:

I did a presentation [on the senior leaders learning programme] on change management in the church...I said...do you think professional change management has a role in the Church of England?...in a group of about 50 people, you got 100% yes....if you'd done that ...10 years ago I think that same group of 50 people would have looked at me quite strangely.

The arguments I have made for the validity of organisational approaches in the Church of England make me sympathetic to these latter perspectives. There is also some recognition of the task of discernment involved in engaging with the insights derived from management thought and practice.

We have insights to learn. Of course you filter that, and, of course, the whole thing about the life of prayer and spirituality is that you filter it in a way that says, okay, some of these things are going to be antithetical or anathema to Christian understanding...Why should the devil have all the good music? (interviewee 6).

Perhaps those who express concern about what they characterise as managerialism are really concerned that R&R lacks a larger 'vision' for the Church of England, or, insofar as one has been made or implied, do not like or share it. This is the suggestion made by interviewee 12:

If people accuse Renewal and Reform of being managerial what I hear they're really saying is that the vision has not been sufficiently clearly articulated or they don't agree with it. And the implementation has, in a sense charged ahead without an appropriate articulation of the vision. I think there is some truth in that.

I received the impression that my interviewees (even interviewee 14) all wanted to affirm the essential goodness of secular wisdom such as organisational theory and management

practice on a similar theological basis to that I have referred myself, namely that, in the terms of Colossians, in Christ “all things hold together...through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on heaven or earth” (Colossians 1.18-20). I similarly felt that interviewees wanted to defend an understanding of the Church of England as both sacred mystery and social system. Interviewee 6 got closest to stating that idea directly.

We are the divine society. We are priests. We are office holders.  
We're not operating in a management structure, but there's no reason  
why the wisdom of God can't come in from those other places.

The thinking of those engaged in R&R seems to be more sophisticated in terms of the understanding of church and of the value of management thinking than the R&R literature. It would be helpful, perhaps, to make this more evident and more sophisticated. Interviewee 8 spoke of the need to develop "a theological vision" that allows us to be "multilingual" combining organisational and theological ideas. I concur with that aspiration. It also appears to me that familiarity with a wider range of ideas about organisation and management would be helpful.

### **8.5 Gaps and questions: returning to the Theological Trialogue**

In chapter six I offered a summary of what my reading of the R&R reports had revealed in relation to my research questions and the theological and organisational framework I developed in preceding chapters, notably the Theological Trialogue. I suggested some gaps and questions to be further explored. I will now summarise how these matters look in the light of the interviews.

#### *Scope and nature of R&R*

It appears that R&R began, formally at least, as a relatively limited project which aimed to make institutional reforms intended to enable the Church of England to pursue numerical and spiritual growth. The interviews suggest that it has become an attempt to shift the culture of the Church of England towards growth. This is not, however, entirely clear and it is possible that R&R is not governed and managed in a way that allows the kind of clarity I have sought. It appears to have developed with more concern for the art of the possible than for either theological or organisational clarity and sustainability. The case that the urgency of the task and the difficulty of effecting change in the political and structural environment of the Church of

England makes urgent, top-down action necessary is powerfully made. I am, however, concerned that, ultimately, this risks the project failing through lack of sufficiently robust theological and organisational foundations and the difficulties of gaining support, especially in the parishes.

*The Theological Trialogue: co-managing the present, co-creating the future, co-nurturing identity*

The interviewees offered a more thoughtful account of the causes of 'decline' than the reports, but, considered overall, I cannot find the basis of a coherent and wide-ranging diagnosis. We must still say that in the context of R&R the understanding of the causes of the Church of England's decline remain unclear, except insofar as the programme implies a lack of intention around mission, low numbers and quality of clergy, a failure to target funding towards growth, an abundance of unhelpful regulation and a failure to deploy the resources of the laity. The action taken in these areas may well be wise and fruitful. Nevertheless, the case that these are fundamental causes of the Church of England's decline, or the fundamental obstacles to its recovery, is simply not made with evidence and rigour.

In addition there are some thoughtful observations about the nature of the world in which the Church of England now operates but, once again, these are somewhat fragmentary. I have not found an answer to the question: "what is happening in the world as it bears on the Church of England?" Nor have I found a concern for, let alone an answer to the question, "what is God saying to us?" Because I am hypothesising that we are in a time of unusual, paradigmatic change I would not expect to find any kind of detailed prescription of the future state of the Church of England because it would not be possible to produce it with any authenticity. But I would expect to see some work in that direction, or which at least recognises the nature of the challenge.

Finally, R&R appears to be lacking in any explicit or developed account of the traditions and identity of the Church of England. Although there are acknowledgements in both reports and interviews of the breadth of ministry and tradition found in the Church of England the focus is very much on the church as missionary organisation. There is, in particular, little sense of it as a national church with a life and significance that extends beyond the interests and concerns of its members. This is a serious weakness, both ecclesologically and organisationally. According to interviewee 9 "what was never developed for R&R was an independent

freestanding rationale which said this is the new direction for the Church of England...[certainly]...never developed to the same depth as the detailed prescriptions made". It is neither clear what the Church of England *is* nor what it must *become*.

#### *Theory of change*

The interviewees showed some awareness of organisational ideas about the management of change, but, overall, no particular theory of change appears to inform R&R. In addition there is little suggestion that more specifically theological considerations such as the role of the Spirit or the question of human/divine agency have received much attention.

#### *Inter-disciplinary understanding*

I have already observed that the discourses of theology and management/organisation are somewhat poorly related in the R&R reports. The interviews suggest that the views of those involved in the creation and implementation of R&R are more balanced and thoughtful, with some theological underpinning. This is not, however, represented clearly in the way that the project presents itself, especially in its documents. I concur with the view expressed by interviewee 8, quoted earlier, that in order to become "multilingual" a theological vision for the interaction of the theological and organisational or management discourses is required and I suggest that this needs setting out clearly.

## **8.6 Conclusion**

The next and final chapter will consider what I have learnt from this research project. It is clear, however, that I have suggested that R&R has some significant deficiencies considered theologically and organisationally. This does not mean, however, that it will be ineffective. This is not only because imperfect processes can achieve at least some of the desired results. It is also because my task is to look at R&R through a particular set of lenses (organisational and theological), not to assess it in totality. In addition, I understand why the architects of R&R chose to act as they did. It might well be that it was indeed the only way to make necessary change possible. Perhaps the real achievement of R&R will be to 'break the ice' and make more considered and well-founded initiatives possible – I will address some recent indicators in this direction in the concluding chapter. I was struck by the perspective of interviewee 12 who

argued that we should not reject R&R because of its limitations (not least its understanding of the Church of England) and certainly not on the grounds of its perceived indebtedness to untheological language.

I would say the renewal and reform is yet to reach its full potential because it hasn't taken on, and obviously I've got an interest in this, sufficiently the breadth of the Church of England.

Renewal and reform is this fantastic gift, it's got lots of money, it's got lots of energy, it's got great people running it. I am not going to be the person that will turn up my nose and say, because you used the words resource instead of the word empower or whatever, I'm going to walk away from this.

R&R is, seen from this perspective, an opportunity and will become, to a large extent, what imaginative church women and men make it. It has created a space in which it is more possible to do innovative and creative work if one so wishes. If R&R is not all it might be, that does not prevent those concerned for the future of the Church of England and its witness to the Kingdom of God from getting involved and helping it to become what it needs to become.



## Chapter 9. Conclusions and implications for practice

### 9.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will set out what I have found and concluded from this investigation. Specifically, I will argue that R&R became an attempt to transform the Church of England in such a way as to address declining numbers and influence but that the programme as conceived lacks clear ecclesiological and organisational rationales. In particular it takes an insufficiently systemic view of the contemporary situation and risks failing to be transformative. Because it has not engaged the Church of England at large it risks being insufficiently supported. The R&R programme lacks a clear sense of the nature of the challenge, the nature and identity of the Church of England or a vision of the future Church of England. The development of the Theological Trialogue has helped me to identify these as essential ingredients of a more systemic approach. My suggestions for revised practice will include a focus on creating a narrative about the Church of England's situation, identity and future ahead of making detailed plans and proposals. The implications of the approach suggested by the Theological Trialogue for the Church of England include a new willingness to define key aspects of that church's identity; to more greatly value theology (by which I mean explicit engagement with theological questions and a greater use of those with theological expertise) and develop more theological resources of substance; and to acquire greater skills in the art of managing interests and conflict. I will also advocate the further development of thinking and resources in the area of what I call 'organisational ecclesiology'.

I will begin by stating what I have learned about Renewal and Reform and how I have answered the questions I set myself about its nature and its ecclesiological and organisational rationales. I will include some reflections on the implications of and risks entailed in what I have discovered. I will then offer some thoughts about how the Church of England might revise its practice in order to make its programmes designed to respond to declining attendance and influence likely to achieve more faithful performance. Finally I will make some observations about the value of organisation theory as partner for ecclesiology as well as a source of practical wisdom. This will include a suggestion for further study.

This project has been notably interdisciplinary and the task involved has been complex. In order to make sense of my conclusions I think it will be helpful to summarise what I have done in this project before I set them out.

*A summary of the content and argument*

I set out, firstly, to investigate the nature and ecclesiological and organisational rationales of what at least presented to me as an ecclesiastical change programme, the Church of England's Renewal and Reform (R&R) programme. I believe this to be the first scholarly research into the programme, certainly the first with this particular focus. I wanted to know whether the programme was coherent and convincing in ecclesiological and/or organisational terms. Secondly, I wished to investigate the ecclesiological and practical value of organisation theory to the contemporary Church of England by viewing that church from perspectives derived from organisation theory. I wanted to explore the possibility that organisation theory could offer resources capable of both illuminating and enriching the ecclesiological understanding of the Church of England's nature and identity. I also wanted to find out whether organisation theory could appropriately aid that church practically by enhancing its management and capacity for negotiating change and thus help it to respond to contemporary challenges – whilst remaining faithful to its theological self-understanding. These challenges I characterised as centring on the reality of what is often described as 'decline', meaning the reality of a dramatic reduction in church attendance along with a reduction of the Church of England's influence more broadly. I wished to carry out this investigation in a way that enabled me to offer suggestions for how the Church of England might achieve a more faithful performance in its attempts, as represented in the R&R programme, to adapt itself in response to contemporary challenges.

I set out to explore the nature and rationale of R&R empirically, by reviewing its primary documents and interviewing its principal architects, managers and critics. Before I could do that, however, I needed to answer some of the theoretical questions that are raised by my investigation. Specifically, I needed to consider how the Church of England understands itself ecclesologically; whether that ecclesiological understanding allows it to be viewed and treated, at least to some extent, as an organisation; and whether organisation theory provides ideas, resources and practices that can be appropriately deployed in such an ecclesiological context. All this was necessary not least to address the opposition that is frequently expressed against what is dismissed as 'managerialism'. Before I could address these considerations I had to



recognise that I approached the investigation as a Christian believer and an Anglican priest. I therefore had to develop my own theological position in such a way as to explore the basic validity of such an interdisciplinary approach.

All these considerations set the agenda for the first five chapters of the thesis. In chapter two my investigation of earlier attempts to apply organisation theory within the churches concluded that these works demonstrate the potential of organisation theory but leave questions about the ecclesiological validity of using organisation theory in the Church of England unresolved. My review of these works did, however, clarify the principal ecclesiological issue to be resolved, namely, what kind of thing is a church? Specifically I identified the central question as that put by Clare Watkins. This concerns how we engage with the church properly as both social system and Body of Christ.<sup>1</sup> Watkins' discussion of the notion of church as sacrament provided a concept that became a major feature of my exploration of ecclesiological questions in chapter four.<sup>2</sup>

In chapter three I made a case for theology as a process of interpretation of the revelatory divine acts centring on the Christ event. This combines a confidence in the reality and knowability of divine truth with an emphasis on the limitations of such knowledge as a result of our location in culture and history. I argued that theology is essentially interdisciplinary on the basis of the trinitarian argument developed by Paul Fiddes.<sup>3</sup> Because of God's activity in the world in creation, incarnation and transformation, all sources of wisdom are in some sense from God, though to be received with care because of the fallen nature of the world. I characterised my project as one of practical theology. Building on the understanding of theology just described, supported by critical realism, I set out an understanding of practical theology as a means by which theological truth continues to be uncovered through a dialogue between normative Christian sources and contemporary experience, facilitated by the methods of social science research. I followed Swinton and Mowat in describing this as a process of "hospitality" and "critical faithfulness".<sup>4</sup>

In chapter four I argued that it was appropriate to understand the Church of England as more than an organisation, but an organisation, nevertheless. I set out a sacramental

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<sup>1</sup> Watkins, "Organizing the People of God", 691.

<sup>2</sup> Watkins, "Ecclesiology y management".

<sup>3</sup> Fiddes, "Ecclesiology and Ethnography,".

<sup>4</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology*, 91-93.

understanding of the nature of church, in which the divine gift and the social system are so bound together that it is not possible in practice to identify or separate the two. This means that the Church of England must always be understood primarily in theological terms but also recognised as a human society, an organisation. The implication of this is that the social existence of the Church of England is a theological matter. I believe this to be the first attempt to develop a properly ecclesiological rationale for seeing the Church of England in organisational terms and to do so using a sacramental approach.

In chapter five I suggested that the principal objection to organisation theory (even among those disposed to an interdisciplinary approach to theology more generally) rests on the belief that it is particularly instrumental in its outlook. I argued that this is a misconception of the nature of organisation theory which is, in fact, composed of a range of particular theories (which I described in outline) underpinned by different views of the world. These theories provide a rich resource for the Church of England: even the apparently instrumental ideas and practices associated with the metaphor of the machine may have their value as part of a larger appreciation of the body of theories available. In making this case I offer a rare example of a discussion of the validity of management approaches in the Church of England that engages fully and directly with organisation theory.

These arguments made, I had provided myself with the necessary theological and ecclesiological understanding and organisational material to be able to investigate R&R from a theological and organisational perspective. In chapter six I described how I would carry out the empirical investigation. I set out the research process, following Swinton and Mowat's version of the pastoral cycle.<sup>5</sup> This involved investigating the situation (R&R) using qualitative social science research methods. The first phase of the cycle, a pre-reflective account of the situation, was offered in chapter one. In line with the second phase of the cycle I collected data and analysed them thematically. The sources of data included the documents published by the Church of England in support of R&R – the first time to my knowledge that these have been analysed. I also interviewed the main architects and managers of R&R along with some R&R sceptics. Once again, to my belief, this is the first time such work has been carried out. The third phase of the cycle is theological reflection upon the data. I offered this reflection in the

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<sup>5</sup> Swinton, *Practical Theology*, 95.

account of the empirical data offered in chapters seven and eight and made use of a particular theoretical model of ecclesial adaptivity, the Theological Trialogue. This model was also developed in chapter six. It combines theological sources, notably the concept of faithful improvisation, with a model from organisational cybernetics, the Trialogue. I believe this to be the first such example of a model of ecclesial adaptivity, integrating theological, ecclesiological organisational perspectives. The fourth phase of the cycle, making suggestions for revised practice will come later in this chapter.

I will now describe what I have concluded from this investigation.

## **9.2 What I've learned about Renewal and Reform**

### *The nature of Renewal and Reform*

R&R appears to have begun as a set of loosely connected initiatives designed to encourage and enable dioceses and parishes to focus upon and implement missionary strategies. More specifically, money given by the Church Commissioners to support the work of parishes would be directed in such a way as to encourage activity aimed at church growth; action would be taken to recruit more clergy and train them to be effective as leaders of mission; unnecessary regulations would be removed to allow greater freedom for initiatives intended to encourage church growth; senior clergy would be trained to lead more strategically and effectively in an era of mission and growth; and those with potential for such roles would be actively identified and prepared for leadership. All these initiatives can be understood as a response to the 2010 quinquennial goals which were summarised in 2011 as “contributing as the national Church to the common good; facilitating the growth of the Church; reimagining the Church’s ministry”.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time it appears that a group of bishops and senior lay officers had ambitions to go further, and take action that would galvanise the whole Church of England to respond to what they believed was a decline that increasingly and urgently threatened that church’s survival. When Justin Welby became Archbishop of Canterbury they found an ally who shared

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<sup>6</sup> House of Bishops, *Challenges for the New Quinquennium*.

this basic outlook. By the time R&R was launched in 2015 it had become a single programme. By 2016 it was being described as the principal response of the Church of England to the phenomenon of 'decline'. Its aims were transformative and increasingly aimed at changing the culture and focus of the Church of England at every level. This perspective was reinforced by the creation, in 2015, of a department of Renewal and Reform with dedicated staff and the appearance, in 2017, of *SGPF* which advocated a thoroughgoing change in the practice and culture of mission and ministry at parish level.

#### *Ecclesiological and organisational rationales*

It appears that R&R has not been directed by any particular theoretical approach, neither ecclesiological nor organisational. In organisational terms it seems to be most indebted to classical or 'machine' theories. I mean by this that it is developed from a set of initiatives rather than from any systemic appreciation of the situation. It has acquired some language about culture (notably in *SGPF*). One interviewee used language reminiscent of the concept of complex adaptive systems, with talk of building on instances of growth and effectiveness. The overwhelming sense, however, is of initiatives welded into a programme in the classical manner associated with the organisational concept of bureaucracy.

There is little by way of explicit ecclesiology until *SGPF*. This does provide a strong connection between the vocation of churches, the Trinity and the mission of God. It does not, however, address the particular nature of the Church of England. In R&R as a whole the Church of England is characterised as a body that needs urgently to turn its efforts towards its chief vocation, mission. Despite some rhetoric about 'the common good', the primary emphasis here is on numerical and spiritual growth. It seems also that it is numerical growth that is the primary focus, so that 'evangelism' is often preferred to 'mission', especially in the interviews. We saw, in chapter eight, that interviewee six, an architect of R&R, frankly advocated this position.

When I consider the R&R programme in the light of the imperatives for adaptivity and effective change suggested by the Theological Dialogue the weaknesses of the programme come sharply into focus. In organisational terms, the programme is not based on a clear or deep understanding of why the Church of England has the problems it does, nor of the nature of the environment in which the Church of England operates. In theological terms, the programme does not seem in any clear way orientated towards hearing what God might be saying through the circumstances in which the Church of England finds itself. Instead it leaps straight from

problem (decline in numbers) to solution (growth in numbers). In organisational terms the programme does not offer an adequate account of the identity of the Church of England, certainly not one that embraces its identity as community, organisation and national institution. In theological terms there is no articulation of the particular vocation and character of the Church of England as an embodied and culturally distinct manifestation of the Body of Christ in England. In the absence of these concepts there is little chance, organisationally speaking, that the programme could offer a convincing account of what the Church of England is to become. It does not try to do so. To put this theologically, I found little interest in either the documents or the supporters or architects of the programme in the notion or practice of discerning God's future for the Church of England.

### *Implications and risks*

The purpose of this investigation is not to judge the wisdom or merit of the component parts of R&R. They may or may not be highly admirable in themselves. Neither am I offering any evaluation of the programme as a whole in the sense that I am not offering a judgement about whether it has been or will prove a success or failure. I am focused on the ecclesiological and organisational rationales of the programme. My own experience suggests that organisational change programmes are often less than ideally conceived in principle, in the sense that they lack what theory suggests to be essential ingredients, but are still at least partially successful. Nevertheless, the fact that the programme lacks a coherent conceptual basis must undermine its legitimacy and credibility. At the very least, I suggest that the investigation offers evidence that R&R as conceived carries with it a number of significant risks.

The first of these is that, by its nature as a series of initiatives lacking a clear understanding of the situation facing the Church of England or its desired future state, it is insufficiently systemic. As a result, it risks treating symptoms rather than causes. The programme never considers whether the lack of church growth might be better understood as evidence of deeper problems, such as significant changes in social attitudes to organised religion, the association of the established church with an oppressive social conformity or even, hostility to the concept of evangelism within as well as without the Church of England. These are all speculations, but not entirely without foundation. The point is the lack of evidence of deeper consideration of the Church of England's challenges. Consideration of these challenges might lead, for example, to the conclusion that the Church of England should not prioritise

certain activities, such as evangelism, so much as a certain posture towards the people of England, such as service and humility. Perhaps an insight of this kind has influenced a new initiative emphasising humility, to which I will refer more fully shortly.

Secondly, the absence of a clear articulation of the identity, values and purpose of the Church of England entails the risk that whatever path is chosen for that church means it comes with a loss of authenticity and integrity. The emphasis in cybernetic approaches and in the culture theories of Schein and others is that organisational change must preserve the essential identity of the organisation whilst expressing it in a way more likely to address new challenges. In the Theological Triologue these organisational insights are augmented by the insights of faithful improvisation which stress the importance of changing in a way that is consistent with the Church of England's traditions.

Further, thirdly, there is no narrative about what the Church of England will become in the effort to meet its challenges effectively while remaining itself, that is, how it imagines it will act and conduct itself in the future so as to preserve its integrity whilst effectively addressing its challenges. Such narratives both engage supporters with change whilst offering reassurance. The absence of an understanding of, and clear narrative about, how change will both preserve identity/be consistent with the traditions and vocation of the Church of England and offer an effective solution to threats and difficulties is likely to undermine the change process. The absence of these factors is likely, singly and in combination, to have the impact that the strategy selected will not prove effective or sustainable.

Fourthly, I have established that R&R was somewhat hurried through by a group of enthusiasts fearful of the consequences of consultation which they considered to be delay, obfuscation and dilution of the initiatives proposed. This means that there has been little attempt to engage the wider Church of England in the changes proposed. The Church of England's supporters and adherents have had no chance to contribute their thinking nor to understand the intention of the reformers. This creates the risk that the R&R strategy is not widely 'owned'. When these factors come together there is a high risk that the programme will meet considerable resistance from those fearful (and perhaps with justice) that it threatens valuable features of the church to which they bear allegiance.

In this connection it might be worth noting the appearance of the Save the Parish movement – a group that is concerned that developments in the Church of England, including R&R, threaten the integrity and priority of the parish in Anglican practice and the range of ministries offered locally to communities. It has pledged

to resist plans to redirect money away from parochial ministry, and to resist any further centralisation of power and authority away from parishes and towards dioceses and the central church.<sup>7</sup>

It seems quite possible to me that Save the Parish exists at least partly as the result of a failure to express strategy in terms which reassure the Church of England's clergy and people about the preservation of core aspects of its identity and traditions.

I also note the observation of the recently published report on the SDF (Strategic Development Funding) programme. This refers to the programme that directs funds made available by the Church Commissioners to support mission initiatives in dioceses. Considering the effectiveness of these projects, the authors report that they "been struck by a broader lack of trust and unity of purpose for which these schemes seem to serve as a lightning rod".<sup>8</sup> This also seems likely to me to be evidence of a failure to engage people in a narrative that offers a reassuring and convincing account of how the Church of England will change whilst preserving that which is essential. The result of the absence of such reassurance is suspicion and alienation.

Those who support R&R emphasise the urgency of the situation and the structural/political difficulties associated with developing more deeply considered and widely supported strategies for change. I do not dismiss these concerns. I accept that the Church of England presents a particularly challenging environment for achieving the kind of change that might be required to address its situation successfully. The risk however, with being led by a sense of urgency and of pushing through a plan, is that resistance and incomprehension result and, in consequence the process ends up taking longer than expected or intended anyway, or even has to be done again. The structure and politics of the Church of England are challenging but my organisational and ecclesiological researches suggest that it will be necessary to overcome those obstacles. Clearly the architects of R&R did not think it possible. I do, however, and

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<sup>7</sup> "Save the Parish," accessed 18 March, 2022, <https://savetheparish.com/>.

<sup>8</sup> Sir Robert Chote et al., *Independent Review of Lowest Income Communities Funding and Strategic Development Funding* (London: The Archbishops' Council, 2022), 6.

consider it essential to find a united way forward in order to create an effective and sustainable strategy for the future. I will suggest later the basis on which this might be achieved as part of the section proposing revised practice.

I reiterate that none of this means that R&R has failed or will fail. Whatever else it may achieve it seems to me that it has achieved at least two valuable outcomes which I wish to note. The first is that it has focused attention on the reality of declining numbers and influence. What is recognised can be addressed, and prior to R&R I judge that certain realities (e.g. declining attendance numbers) were less widely recognised than they are today. Secondly, and the point is related, R&R has 'broken the ice' and allowed other things to happen. In fact, although its initiatives remain influential (as the report on SDF funding demonstrates)<sup>9</sup> and though the director and department of Renewal and Reform remain in place, one hears little about R&R as I write this in 2022. Attention and energy now appear to have turned to what appears to be a separate initiative, "A vision and strategy for the Church of England in the 2020s" which is characterised as "A Church for the whole nation which is Jesus Christ centred, and shaped by, the five marks of mission. A church that is **simpler, humbler, bolder**".<sup>10</sup> This work is led by Stephen Cottrell, the Archbishop of York and was launched in 2021. I have not investigated this in any depth but it appears possible that it will develop a more comprehensive strategy for the Church of England.

There have also been two publications which appear to offer some more in-depth theology and, in the latter case, research, relevant to the Church of England's challenges. The first is *Kingdom Calling*, in which the Faith and Order Commission offers a considered account of the role, nature and working of the Church of England.<sup>11</sup> The second is *Growing Good* which explores the relationship between church growth and a loving commitment made by local churches to work with and for the wider community.<sup>12</sup> These all can be seen as steps in the direction of developing a more complete understanding of and response to the situation facing the Church of England.

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<sup>9</sup> Chote, *Independent Review of Lowest Income Communities Funding*.

<sup>10</sup> "Vision and Strategy: A Vision and Strategy for the Church of England in the 2020s", accessed 23 March, 2022, <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/emerging-church-england/vision-and-strategy>. Their emphasis in bold.

<sup>11</sup> The Faith and Order Commission, *Kingdom Calling: The Vocation, Ministry and Discipleship of the Whole People of God*, (London: Church House Publishing, 2020).

<sup>12</sup> Rich, *Growing Good*.



### 9.3 Revised practice: suggestions for more faithful performance

I want to suggest some ways, arising from the work done in this thesis, in which the Church of England might achieve more faithful performance. In the first place I suggest that any programme to meet the challenges of the present and future and achieve a transformative outcome would be greatly enhanced if the Church of England developed a systemic organisational understanding and response. This would enable the Church of England to address underlying as well as presenting issues. In this section I will first make some suggestions about how the Church of England could proceed in order to achieve this. I will then suggest some wider implications for the Church of England's practice.

#### *A more systemic approach*

I have set out an understanding of what the elements of a more systemic approach might include, in the form suggested by the Theological Triologue. This model offers a systemic perspective in both organisational and theological terms. In terms of revised practice the exposition to this point suggests some clear imperatives. The Church of England should develop, firstly, a diagnosis of its current situation; secondly, an understanding of what God might be saying through the circumstances in which that church finds itself; thirdly, a comprehensive account of the purpose and vocation of the Church of England; and, fourthly, a narrative about how these elements are brought into conversation with each other and suggest a vision for the Church of England's future. Furthermore, I suggest that this work must be undertaken in a way that widely and deeply engages and consults the range of the Church of England's adherents. Another way of looking at this is to say that what is required is an explicit process of prayer and discernment in which the whole Body of Christ is engaged and involved. My understanding is that the organisational activity is a significant part of how the work of prayer and discernment is enacted.

Perhaps I will be perceived as offering a counsel of perfection. I have two responses to that suggestion. The first is that I accept that all change processes are imperfect in practice for the same reasons that everything is imperfect, notably human limitation and human sinfulness (as discussed in chapter three). The second is that all models of change are idealised, in the sense that they are abstractions – it is the nature of models – and work based on them does not

turn out exactly as envisaged theoretically. It is still better, I suggest, to start with a sound theoretical basis.

Such a process is clearly likely to take a relatively long time and it might be objected that it would be thwarted by the structural and political challenges identified by the architects of R&R. In other words, it might be objected, again, that this is an idealistic proposal that would fail. I have acknowledged the difficulties posed by structure and politics within the Church of England: they are not in dispute. I suggest that these difficulties can be overcome, however. I accept that such a process will take time, but I contend that it is better to take longer and get it right than to produce something that is resisted and poorly conceived and requires a further programme to make up its deficiencies. The idea that a new programme is necessitated by the limitations of R&R is at least one credible reading of the reason for the appearance of the new Cottrell process. What if the responses received to the proposals consulted upon are so varied and contradictory that no consensus is possible? It is a risk, perhaps. The whole purpose of the cybernetic approach, faithful improvisation and the Theological Dialogue, however, is to create a set of principles which, if observed, maximise the opportunity to manage change in the Church of England in a way that engages and reassures people and achieves a sense of shared discernment.

The key, I suggest, to avoiding some of the political and procedural pitfalls, is to create the narrative about the identity and future of the Church of England I regard as so important, in a way that remains purposeful, disciplined and time limited. Insofar as the process involves substantial consultation I advocate drawing specifically on the principles and practices of soft systems, as discussed in chapter six.<sup>13</sup> In the discussions that are part of the consultation process all views are heard and nothing is off the table. Only in this way can the Church of England create something that is widely supported and likely to be effective and sustainable. Where there is agreement about the route forward, structural complications become far less significant. On the other hand, where the process is not managed so as to include the diverse communities of the Church of England the structure provides a ready resource for those who oppose the direction taken. In other words, the lack of direct managerial positional power available to archbishops and bishops makes it relatively easy for those who wish to resist to do

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<sup>13</sup> Checkland, *Systems Thinking*.

so with impunity. To put it another way, I suggest the Church of England seek behavioural solutions to the problems created by structure, and that these will prove a more useful place to start than any attempt at reforming the structure.

#### *Implications for the contemporary Church of England*

In order to undertake such a task the Church of England would need to consider some other issues. For example, I suggest it needs to clarify the roles of those at various 'levels' of that church. I suggest that the perspective of the Theological Trialogue is that those at the formal centre or apex of the organisation should be predominantly concerned with leading on precisely the kind of narrative I am suggesting. Operational management belongs to those near the 'work'. I think there is some recognition of this division of roles in the R&R process. There is for example, a repeated emphasis on the responsibility of dioceses for local strategy. Deficiencies remain, however. The centre has not led the development of a narrative that has engaged the wider church. I believe it is critical that the senior individuals (especially bishops) and institutions that constitute the 'centre' or the national church give the necessary time and energy to leading the process of discernment and participation that I have urged. At least some of my interviewees seem to believe that something has been done to the Church of England, rather than that something has been chosen by the Church of England. I attribute this, at least in part, to the haste and lack of consultation involved. That a similar response of that of some of my interviewees can be found in other places across the Church of England seems to be evidenced by the appearance of such popular movements as Save the Parish. A process that allows the discernment and participation I suggest would be far more likely to command wider support and much more likely to prove sustainable.

In order to create the narrative about the Church of England's future, and to support an effective process of discernment and participation, it is necessary to find a way of talking positively and adequately about what might be called, in organisational terms, its identity, or in theological terms, its particular traditions and vocation or charism. This involves addressing something that is frequently believed to be too contested or unclear or better left vague. I have discussed the way in which the Church of England has generally preferred to maintain a minimalist approach. This has allowed the Church of England to embrace a substantial diversity of theological perspectives and ecclesiastical practices. Can this be reconciled with the demands suggested by the Theological Trialogue?

One problem that does arise from the Church of England's diversity when combined with a reluctance to define the Church of England's identity or vocation, is that it becomes vulnerable to those who wield power within it at any given time. The R&R process does not seem to lean on any explicit, comprehensive characterisation of the nature and mission of the Church of England. The implicit message of the R&R process (made explicit by some interviewees) is that the Church of England exists for the purpose of evangelism and discipleship-making. I believe this to be an inadequate definition.

On this theme, I stand by the contention made in chapters four and six that the Church of England has a more distinct identity than is often recognised, its diversity notwithstanding. If the Church of England is to negotiate the challenges posed by its environment, however, it may need to act positively to emphasise this. In particular I suggest two things that might be re-stated and underlined. These, are, firstly, the breadth and diversity of the Church of England as themselves key markers of its identity. The Church of England should affirm the value it places on its distinct traditions. Secondly, I suggest that church should seek to articulate those things which unite it, and make its diversity an asset, a source of richness, rather than of division. These might include such elements as are suggested by the core concept of the Church of England as Reformed and Catholic, such as its nature as a church of both word and sacrament and of both institution and community. The Church of England might insist on combining the intensity and extensity described by Daniel Hardy, seeing itself as a church that combines a focus on worship and personal, spiritual formation, with the work of realising of the Kingdom of God in local contexts. This extensity might have dimensions that can be described both in missionary and pastoral terms.

In order to make it possible for the Church of England to develop this clearer sense of identity I suggest that that church will need to place a higher valuation on the discipline of theology and the availability and employment of theological resources. I have commented on the lack of explicit theology in the R&R process. I accept that one can be theological without being so explicitly, but one would hope to find evidence of more explicit theological reflection referenced somewhere in a major change programme such as R&R. I accept also that theological reflection does not necessarily require the involvement of professional theologians. The apparent absence of professional theologians in the R&R process seems, however, unwise and cavalier. I fear that this may reflect something more deep-rooted than the valuation placed

on theology by the current body of senior figures in the Church of England. A striking feature of this research process has been the relative paucity of Anglican writing on the substantial, systematic theological issues that have been raised. I suggest that what might be an essentially Anglican preference for more pragmatic approaches serves the Church of England ill at a time of such challenge and change. The Theological Trialogue and the qualitative research both suggest the complexity and depth of the issues that need to be addressed properly to make possible a change capable of achieving the transformational outcomes apparently sought by R&R. The Church of England does not appear to bring any great depth of thought to these matters, and fails to draw on such expertise as it may have available.

It is also hard to see any process being successful unless it is able to overcome the difficulties created by political interests as well as by structure. I suggest that the political difficulties would be considerably reduced by an evident commitment to the kind of genuine conversation I have advocated. The conversations with interviewees of quite different views suggest that misunderstanding is rife and that there is more common ground than generally recognised. That may not be enough, however. People in the Church of England, especially those in its more senior roles, may well need to acquire skills and expertise in the management of conflict and interests. There are many resources available to assist in such an endeavour as I began to indicate in chapter five.

#### **9.4 Church as organisation**

At the same time as I wished to explore the rationale of R&R I also wished to better understand the potential role of organisation theory in relation to the Church of England. I have done this by developing such an understanding in order to support the investigation of the rationale of R&R. I have made what I believe to be persuasive arguments in support of the idea that the Church of England is an organisation. I have argued that theology is essentially interdisciplinary and that there is no reason why organisation theory should be excluded from partnership with theology and ecclesiology. R&R is, at the very least, an acknowledgement that there is an organisational dimension to the life of the Church of England and that any attempt to change it requires an organisational perspective and organisational action.

I believe that I have developed a credible model of ecclesial adaptivity in the Theological Triologue, one that draws on powerful theological arguments and organisational theories. I suggest that its application to the data in this thesis has produced rich results. I further suggest it would be usefully tested and refined by application in the Church of England. The recursive or 'nested' nature of the model (meaning that the church-system has the same essential functions at every level) means the insights associated with the Theological Triologue could be applied to the national church, the diocese, or the parish.

I would also like to see influential figures in the Church of England encourage theologians and organisational theorists to take the question of the relationship of ecclesiology and organisation theory further, and develop the many other possibilities that I am confident exist for the use of organisation theory within ecclesiology and the practice of that church. I mentioned in chapter two how Peter Rudge sought to develop a discipline of "ecclesiastical administration" or "management theology".<sup>14</sup> I make a very similar plea here, for the further development of what I prefer to call an 'organisational ecclesiology' as a theoretical and practical resource for the Church of England and other churches. The existence of all the churches in history and culture means that change and management will always be matters of concern. I call this area of study and practice organisational ecclesiology because, as all my arguments to this point suggest, I favour an approach that engages with the products of the social sciences but in a way that is shaped by a theological appreciation of the nature and mission of the churches. There are many areas of organisation theory which have received scant or no attention in this thesis but which may offer valuable perspectives for the church's self-understanding and practice. This is a proposal for further study which I am sure would prove rewarding. It would offer an invaluable resource to the Church of England as it works to renew and reform itself in response to what I expect to be a continuing challenge to maintain a comprehensive mission and ministry in the country it serves.

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<sup>14</sup> Rudge, *Ministry and Management*, xiv.

## Appendix A: Ethics declaration

The research for this project was submitted for ethics consideration under the reference BUS 17/ 041 in the University of Roehampton Business School and was approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee on 24 April 2017.





## Appendix B: Sample interview participant consent form.



# PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**Organisation, Church, and Society: What may be learned from an organisational perspective on “Renewal and Reform” in the Church of England?**

### **Brief Description of Research Project, and What Participation Involves:**

This research will look at the Church of England through the lens of theories of organisation and from the perspective of ecclesiology to illuminate the ways and the extent to which the Church of England is unique and the ways and extent to which it is an organisation like others. “Renewal and Reform” is chosen as the focus for research because the programmatic nature of the initiative provides a crucible in which key organisational and ecclesiological questions are in play and can be examined. The research is not a review of Renewal and Reform. I hope that by bringing the voices of organisational theorists, ecclesiologists and contemporary church men and women together in a conversation there might be valuable insights into the nature of the church and its current challenges. My intention is to hold a number of unstructured conversations in which the style will be exploratory and with the intention of obtaining a deeper understanding of interviewees' experiences and views.

I intend to conduct 20-30 in depth interviews of approximately 60-90 minutes' duration, normally in the interviewee's workplace. My interview subjects will include senior clergy, senior lay people and academic contributors to the senior development programme: those who have contributed to the Renewal and Reform programme and those affected by it. I will also hold 50-60 short “conversations” with similar conversation partners as opportunity arises on occasions such as meetings and conferences.

My research will be conducted in compliance with the University of Roehampton (UOR) Code of Good Research Practice and conducted under the UOR Ethics Guidelines. Furthermore, all activities will be conducted with health and safety good practice. Were you to formally consent to support my research you have the right to expect anonymity, whereby your contribution will not be traceable to you as an individual unless you give specific written permission for it to be attributed - a permission that may be withdrawn,

along with a broader Right to Withdraw, such that at any stage prior to my work being published you may require any contribution that specifically and uniquely relates to your input to be removed. Following the interview, you will receive a copy of the written notes of our interview for you to comment upon, redact or amend. The data gathered through this project will be used principally to form the substance of my PhD thesis. Findings from the research may also inform other academic papers, blogs, seminars or workshops.

You also have a right to confidentiality. Written notes relating to any conversations relating to the research will be transcribed electronically and secured in the University of Roehampton Business School electronic repository, that restricts access to me only, after which any paper-based record will be destroyed by secure means. You will be asked whether you agree to our interviews being recorded. Should you agree to this, the digital record will be electronically transcribed and stored as per the above arrangements and the voice record destroyed. Stored data will only be identifiable using an anonymiser ensuring that no lasting link between an individual comment and the retained record will be maintained on file. Recordings will be stored for 10 years. If you are concerned that your views or style will identify you, even though the interview is anonymized, you will be free to stipulate that your data is only used in aggregated form, with no use of direct quotations.

I aim to complete my PhD in 2020. I would be pleased to provide you with an electronic copy of my thesis upon request, that is, as long as my PhD has been approved for publication by the University. I would also be happy to provide a verbal summary of my findings on a best endeavours basis irrespective of the outcome of my research.

#### **Investigator Contact Details:**

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#### **Consent Statement:**

I agree to take part in this research, and am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point without giving a reason, although if I do so I understand that my data might still be used in a collated form. I understand that the information I provide will be treated in confidence by the investigator and that my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings, and that data will be collected and processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and with the University's Data Protection Policy.

Name .....

Signature .....

Date .....

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with the investigator (or if the researcher is a student you can also contact the Director of Studies.) However, if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Head of Department.

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## Appendix C: Interview questions

The questions below formed an agenda designed to open up the issues and allow a fruitful conversation to develop.

For those who developed or involved in managing R&R.

- How did you become involved in R&R? What does the term mean to you?
- What has your role been? What has it meant to you?
- How would you describe R&R? Why is it important?
- How did you arrive at this particular programme?
- How well has it gone? What are its prospects?
- What do you make of its reception? How aware are you of critical voices? How do you respond?

For those not identified with R&R.

- Please tell me about your experience of Renewal and Reform
- What have you found encouraging about Renewal and Reform - and why?
- What have you found more difficult and why?
- What would you see as the principal issues facing the Church of England?
- What would you like to see happen - and why?



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