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Multi-Ethnoracial Belonging in a Local Newfrontiers Church

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Durham University

2025

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores which elements facilitate or hinder belonging in a multi-ethnoracial Newfrontiers church, considering the experiences of British-born and first-generation migrants to the UK, deploying focus groups (based on narrated photography) and semi-structured interviews. Participants' experiences are critiqued using the twin lenses of social psychology and Pauline familial metaphors.

This thesis found that belonging is dependent upon participants' experience of the church as a coherent, loving, nurturing and performative family. This is because belonging is conceptualised within principally familial metaphors. Within these, leaders are perceived as spiritual parents, guides and exemplars of Christ, expected to model qualities such as authority, approachability, care, prayerfulness and adaptability. Fellow congregants are viewed primarily in siblingship (and occasionally parenting) terms in which belonging is promoted when familial relationships of positive affect and depth are established, mutual care simultaneously experienced and performative serving expressed.

Furthermore, belonging is dependent upon an expansionary instinct in which relationships and serving competence undergo constant, positive and additive transformations. Consequently, illegitimate imbalances in leadership representation across ethnoracial and/or male/female delineations are aversive when they are perceived as contractions of relational and performative engagement, especially problematic in Newfrontiers ecclesiology, historically wedded to privileging uniquely male senior leadership.

This thesis further shows that the balance of gains and losses is different for non-British-born congregants. Finally, this thesis unveils unique 'Ephesian moments' comprising salubrious theological and sociological disclosure uniquely made possible by ecclesial ethnoracial diversity.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BLESS	Acronym for the author’s home church’s personal evangelism approach (short for: Begin with prayer, Listen, Eat, Serve, Share: explained on p. 110).
BMC	Black Majority Church.
KCHW	King’s Church High Wycombe (the author’s home church: see Chapter Three).
IIS	Inclusion of Group in Self (psychological theory of group belonging, introduced on p. 181).
IOS	Inclusion of Other in Self (psychological theory concerning interpersonal belonging, introduced on p. 181).
LBC	London Bible College (first mentioned on p. 31).
nBMC	New Black Majority Church.
NFI	New Frontiers International (the previous self-ascribed name of Newfrontiers).
SCT	Self Categorisation Theory (psychological theory concerning intragroup behaviour, introduced on p. 190).
SIT	Social Identity Theory (psychological theory concerning intergroup behaviour, introduced on p. 186).
SLT	Senior Leadership Team of the King’s Church High Wycombe, comprising three employed elders (male) and then, additionally from September 2022, an employed female member of staff.

GLOSSARY

BLESS	Acronym for the author's home church's personal evangelism approach (short for: Begin with prayer, Listen, Eat, Serve, Share: explained on p. 110).
Boomers	Those born between 1946 and 1964 (mentioned on p. 80).
Chapter One	Newcomers' small group facilitated by employed pastoral leadership staff lasting one school term instilling key 'rhythms' of Christian discipleship (explained on p. 108) and run in the church's main facility.
Connect	Newcomers' small group hosted by experienced and hospitable church members (volunteers) in a home (superseded by Chapter One in 2018 and explained on p. 108).
Encounter Evening	An evening principally for Christian believers comprising sung worship, testimonies, reflection and the practice of charismata (tongues, prophecy, healing) (explained on p. 109).
Invited Series	A preaching-led series which promoted the invitation of others from different ethnoracial backgrounds into pro-active hospitality and friendship (explained on p. 102).

DECLARATION OF COPYRIGHT

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

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Finally, I wish to dedicate this thesis to Jesus Christ who, I believe, encouraged me to undertake this project. His love, salvation and strength are ineffably sublime, as is his gloriously diverse Church which he is crafting for his eternal glory.

INTRODUCTION

Andrew Walls (2002, p. 77) forthrightly asserts that the convergence of two previously separated cultures – Jew and Gentile – in Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians created a crossroads in the history of the First Century Church. He terms this an 'Ephesian moment,' (p. 82) one which was to transform the maturity of the early Church by virtue of the encounter and accommodation of previously disparate cultures into a single church body.[1]

Furthermore, Walls is convinced that believers today are facing a fresh 'Ephesian moment' in which we find ourselves in 'a church more culturally diverse than it has ever been before,' a Church which ushers in the enticing possibility of greater disclosure of the 'full stature of Christ,' (p. 82).[2] [3] The early church, he notes, faced the temptation to fragment into two Christian separate communities: Jewish and Gentile churches. However, Walls asserts that such division was anathema to Paul who insisted '[e]mphatically, there was to be only *one* Christian community,' (p. 76).

Drawing on Walls, historian-theologian Jeffery (2022, p. 2) reflects that 'modern-day encounters between Euro-American, African and Asian Christians could be as theologically formative and enriching as any encounter in the history of the Church.' The Church is in a moment of significant transition, therefore, as richly multi-ethnoracial[4] congregations emerge, especially within larger cities and neighbouring towns. The contemporary UK Church may well thus be entering a new epoch in which the gathering of different ethnoracial groups evinces theological insights made possible solely by its emergent diverse composition. This study aims to contribute to such intriguing work.

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[1] Based on Ephesians 4:[13] until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (ESV). Contentions over the Pauline corpus shall be considered in Chapter Two.

[2] See also (Virgo, 1988b, pp. 43-44).

[3] See also (Ganiel, 2007, pp. 563-564) on convictions of one South-African Newfrontiers church regarding the transformative effect of diversity.

[4] This term will be discussed shortly.

As will be seen shortly, the creation and sustaining of diverse churches are fraught with challenges. However, a church which has accommodated a diverse ethnoracial constituency may well yield insights that can assist others as they attempt to blend multiple cultures and backgrounds harmoniously together. In particular, how people from diverse ethnoracial backgrounds experience belonging as they converge into new congregations is the principal theme of this study.

Indeed, the British Church must wrestle with the pressing matter of diversity: the demographics of the Church have irreversibly altered. As in the Apostle Paul's era, the choice before the church is stark: to morph into siloes of homogenised demographics, or to transform into multi-ethnoracial communities. Of course, such transformation is conditioned by global and national migration. For example, substantive shifts in demographics were reported by the latest UK census in some larger and medium-sized cities with 36.8% identifying as '"White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British' in London, down from 44.9% in 2011, (ONS, 2022c). As the *Guardian* also pointed out from the census, minority ethnic people make up more than half the population in Luton, Birmingham and Leicester, (Booth, et al., 2022). Such shifts produce ramifications for the Church.

For example, Rogers (2018, p. 90) highlights that, between 1998-2005, non-white church attendance grew 19%, while attendance amongst whites contemporaneously fell by the same proportion.[5] The Church thus embodies a conflicted picture of simultaneous growth and decline, and not solely in its demographics. Within the established denominations, key Protestant groups have experienced almost ubiquitous shrinkage, some of it bordering on precipitous. For instance, Anglican, Baptist and Methodist membership dropped by 18%, 6% and 15% respectively between 2012 and 2017, (Brierley, 2018, p. 5). Some press reports indicate that, at the start of 2024, church attendance in the Church of England was 20% below its 2019 levels, (Butcher & Swerling, 2024). Such decline can tempt theologians and church leaders into imbibing an assumption of the church's impending and almost inexorable demise.

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[5] Citing Brierley (2006, pp. 99-100).

However, Goodhew (2015, p. 28) challenges such pessimistic 'secular eschatology.' He notes that a study in Southwark 'has shown that 240 new black majority churches had been founded there in recent years,' (Goodhew, 2015, p. 33). Indeed, Davie (2018, p. 347) asserts that the 'implications for the religious life of Britain are immense,' in which it is 'the non-white… populations in London that drive growth,' (p. 352). UK church growth is not confined solely to new Black Majority Churches.[6] Bucking the trend of the established denominations, many New Churches[7] are continuing to grow. Total membership of the latter grew 13% between 2012 and 2017 to 210,000: notably, Newfrontiers comprised the largest part of this grouping at around 38,000, (Brierley, 2018, p. 5). Within London especially, Jeffery & Kay (2018, p. 255) observe that 'efforts to embrace ethnic diversity are an important feature in the growth of some Newfrontiers churches.'

However, incorporating an ethnoracially diverse constituency is complex. Jeffery & Kay (2018, p. 256) consider the case of King's Church London[8] in which its white British-born leader Steve Tibbert describes the transition to ethnic and racial diversity as '"the biggest leadership challenge I have ever faced" and recounts how embracing diversity "involved making changes to every area of life,"' including worship, prayer and the expression of small groups.

Indeed, the complexity of diverse ecclesial communities can trigger unwanted consequences through misunderstanding or a lack of appreciation of others' cultural sensibilities. DeYoung, et al. (2003, p. 81), assert that a 'truly diverse congregation where anybody enjoys more than 75 percent of what's going on is not thoroughly integrated.' Such integration thereby most probably necessitates compromise and commitment which may disproportionately affect different constituents. This study aims to be attentive to understanding what congregants from different ethnoracial backgrounds are both gaining and losing as they converge within a diverse church.

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[6] Rogers (2018, p. 86) defines nBMC as that which has founded since 1950 and in which 'the majority of congregants are black.'

[7] Such as Newfrontiers, (Kay, 2016, p. 16).

[8] One of Newfrontiers' largest churches gathering around 1,400 each Sunday as of June 2016, (Jeffery & Kay, 2018, p. 252) and 1,500 by 2018, (King's Church London, 2024).

Yancey (2011, loc. 657) notes that the creation and sustaining of multiracial churches requires leaders to 'find ways to include the numerical racial minorities. This effort is related to the principle of intentionality.' In this, specific elements of a church's sociological structures may well facilitate or impede positive experiences of individuals' belonging. Furthermore, DeYoung, et al. (2003, p. 136) also point out: 'Developing a rich multicultural theology and way of worship must be at the top of the agenda of multiracial congregations.'

Within this, Jeffery & Kay (2018, p. 256) observe that Newfrontiers' theological convictions centre around 'the need to incorporate people from different backgrounds into "one new man in Christ,"' a reference to Ephesians 2:15 in which the Apostle Paul outlines an ecclesiology insistent upon the reconciliation of Gentiles and ethnic Jews. Parts of Newfrontiers are now experiencing sustained growth, not just numerically, but in terms of the diversity of their ethnoracial composition, (Jeffery & Kay, 2018).

As noted, the development of multi-ethnoracial congregations is complex, and involves potentially costly investments and sacrifices from those who attend as they contend with cross-cultural tensions. Marti's (2009, p. 56) ethnographic study of multi-ethnic churches in Los Angeles leads him to conclude that a number of core components assist congregants in overcoming such costs, including an 'inclusive congregational identity… if it allows minority members to experience the benefits of corporate belonging amidst the risks associated with ethnic competition and discomfort.'[9]

Areas of discomfort that different members experience and their influence on ecclesial belonging thus warrant careful attention, and identifying these constitutes a significant motivation for this study. This is because the Church is confronted with the choice of principally mono-ethnoracial versus multi-ethnoracial congregational belonging. If Walls is correct, and only the latter can nurture disclosive 'Ephesian moments,' then an understanding of the unique qualities of the latter, along with the associated costs, is exigent.

The fieldwork comprises research using qualitative methods including focus groups and semi-structured interviews in an ethnoracially diverse church. The church selected is the King's Church High Wycombe in which, during the qualitative data gathering research phase, I was employed. My role was as Executive Pastor, serving the more senior Lead Pastor who was ultimately responsible for the direction of the church. As will be seen in Chapter Three, the church's demographics significantly altered in the early 2000s from principally mono-ethnoracial to one embracing nearly fifty nationalities ten years later. This entailed a thorough re-evaluation of many areas of church life. Some of these challenges were disorienting and difficult to navigate as newcomers from diverse cultural and ecclesial backgrounds blended together. These challenges were acutely apparent in areas such as small group communities, serving, expressions of corporate prayer, and the mobilisation of emerging leadership talent. Notwithstanding such complexities, some aspects of church life seemed to be revitalised, including the intensity and frequency of prayer, for example.

However, a leader's perspective, such as mine, carries the risk of perilous partiality and selectivity in which the existential experiences of congregants remain inadequately explored or misunderstood. Indeed, congregants' experiences may diverge widely, or converge merely partially with leaders' perceptions, such as mine. Therefore, it is important, as a leader, to explore carefully 'is what *appears* to be going on within this situation what is *actually* going on?,' (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 9). Browning (2005, p. 284) is correct in describing descriptive theology within the Practical Theological enterprise as 'restorative.' Individuals and groups like to be understood… being understood is a deep hunger of the human spirit.' Indeed, for Browning, such an undertaking of learning evinces 'love and positive regard,' (p. 284).

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[9] Marti's (2009, p. 56) study notably did not include Afro-American congregants, (Garces-Foley, 2007, p. 215).

This desire to consider congregants' own accounts of belonging is a major motivation for this study. It is incumbent upon leaders, such as me, to be diligent in learning from the invaluable but possibly overlooked or misinterpreted experiences of diverse ethnoracial congregants to demonstrate such love and esteem. The intention of this research is 'to enhance and challenge… initial impressions… to develop a deep and rich understanding' of the complexities of the situation, (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 103). Indeed, how people from different ethnoracial groups experience belonging within a single congregation, and what both promotes and hinders it, are pressing concerns: diversity is the future of my own church, but also the UK Church more broadly. This study is an attempt to afford ethnoracially diverse participants an opportunity to articulate their own experiences of ecclesial belonging. They require the opportunity to be heard, no matter how encouraging or disjunctive their experiences have been or continue to be.

Furthermore, 'the questions asked of scripture and tradition from within the academy are often quite different from the questions asked by the Christian community,' and the existential experience of ordinary congregants can become 'subsumed to the distantiated presumptions of academic questioning,' (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 26). This practical theological project aims instead both to privilege and foreground the experiences, concerns and voices of participants in this study, and subsequently to consider carefully the themes that emerge from their disclosure rather than *a priori* presume what these themes might be.[10] I engage with this project as a simultaneous 'insider' and 'outsider': an insider in the sense that I understand the major internal workings of the church being investigated, its unique lexicon and knowing much more about the personal lives and challenges of many of the participants in this study than would be possible for a total outsider. However, in my leadership role, I simultaneously stood as somewhat of an 'outsider': I was not the average congregant because I held some (but not ultimate) influence over the strategic direction and plans of the church, and I not infrequently stood on a platform leading others. Measures taken to engineer critical distance and mitigate power differentials will be outlined in Chapter Two.

This project is embedded with the discipline of Practical Theology which explores the 'practices' of faith communities such as churches. Such practices comprise the '*things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God's active presence for the life of the world,*' (Dykstra & Bass, 2002, p. 18). As will be seen shortly, belonging constitutes a fundamental human need, as demonstrated by both social psychology and scholars' views of aspects of Pauline ecclesiology encompassing familial metaphors. Practical Theology takes 'human experience seriously,' as a locus in which 'the gospel is grounded, embodied, interpreted and lived out,' (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 5).

This study is based in a Newfrontiers church. Therefore, the distinctive ecclesiological character of Newfrontiers shall be explored by first considering its historical context and the influential movements which shaped it. The major personal and experiential influences which shaped Newfrontiers will then be surveyed prior to a summary of some of its distinctive sociological characteristics which influence participants' experiences of belonging. Key areas of theology and doctrine which differentiate Newfrontiers will then be identified, including accusations of authoritarianism and its controversial 'complementarian' stance on uniquely male senior leadership. Additionally, its espoused theology underpinning the growth of multi-ethnoracial churches will be considered alongside other distinctive ecclesiological factors, such as expectations on adherents' lifestyle, which could influence congregants' experience of belonging.

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[10] Consequently, engagement with literature around black theology such as (Reddie, 2012) and (Jennings, 2020) is not highlighted because participants' emergent themes related to belonging did not readily align with the principal concerns or epistemological commitments therein. However, Jennings' injunctions over the importance of collective discipleship and disclosure were incorporated into the methodological approaches outlined in Chapter Two. However, perspectives and qualitative research from academics engaging in intercultural church such as (DeYoung, et al., 2003), (Yancey, 2011), (Marti, 2009), (Krause & Hayward, 2013) and (Watson, 2009) are considered within this thesis.

Prior to an assessment of my church's own attachment to Newfrontiers, and the specific influences that this brings in shaping its ethnoracial ecclesiology, the methodology underpinning the fieldwork will be explained. This constitutes five focus groups comprising twenty-one participants of varying ethnoracial backgrounds, and then nine follow-up semi-structured interviews involving a total of twelve participants, three of which were not part of the initial focus groups.

In these focus groups and interviews, participants described their own experiences of belonging and participation: narrated photography was deployed in the focus groups to mitigate the potential power differential of the author in which the participants constituted the dominant voice, (Dunlop & Ward, 2014, p. 48). The participants comprised those from eight different nations in total encompassing Europe (including the UK), Asia, Africa and America. They were either British-born or first-generation migrants to the UK.[11]

A description of the Practical Theology methodology (based on Swinton & Mowat's (2006, p. 95ff) revised mutual critical conversation) employed in this research will then be provided, followed by a discussion of the fieldwork results. In these, the dominant motif of church as family emerges across all ethnoracial groupings. Indeed, the perceived 'familiness' of the church determines the degree to which all participants report their belonging. The research data will then be analysed using twin lenses: theories from social psychology as an interpretive voice and academic scholars' insights concerning Pauline familial metaphors as a normative voice. Finally, a set of recommendations for refined church praxis, based on the research and its analysis through psychological and theological disclosures, shall be offered to promote fortified mutual belonging within ethnoracially diverse churches.

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[11] Apart from the youngest female participant whose parents were first-generation migrants.

However, this is a highly sensitive area in which to undertake research. Indeed, the very concept of race and its associated terminology are controversial. For example, Stone's (2022, p. 9) report on the well-being of Anglican clergy settles on the term 'Global Majority Heritage' (GMH) rather than, for example, 'UK Minority Ethnic' (UKME) to describe and depict 'those who belong to minority ethnic groups in the UK.' The former is selected to challenge the 'language of "minoritisation", which can disempower' minority ethnic groups. Instead, it specifically recognises that the latter globally comprise the majority compared to white Europeans.

Haslam (2001, p. 5) is similarly sensitive to terminology, asserting that: 'Language is important. It expresses our attitudes and thought-forms,' and it is especially contentious concerning race.[12] He notes that for 'Christians there can be only one race, the human race.' By suggesting that there are multiple races, he insists, 'we are bordering on the blasphemous.' This author is certainly not attempting to blaspheme nor cause offence, unwittingly or otherwise, by any terminology employed.

The term employed in this study is 'ethnoracial,' but not with the intention of asserting a dogmatic view of the existence of discrete races, thereby transgressing Haslam's proscription. Neither it is attempting to marginalise those who comprise the global majority, (Stone, 2022). Instead, 'ethnoracial' is an attempt to embrace two elements that are found in the author's home church: the co-existence of different ethnicities, and those who would *self-identify* to be of different races from others.[13] For instance, regarding the latter, Newfrontiers' author Lindsay (2019, p. 18) describes himself as 'Being black,' but within a white-dominated congregation.[14]

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[12] See also Ganiel (2007, p. 557).

Indeed, in his book *We Need to Talk about Race,* his chosen subtitle is: 'Understanding the black experience in white majority churches.' Lindsay (2019, p. 17) asserts that the naming of his book is deliberate and not a cause of offensive to him because 'it is time to have a conversation about race in the UK church.' His differentiation across white/black delineations is encompassed within the word 'race,' one he deploys to describe himself and others.[15]

'Ethnoracial' thus combines the two elements of diversity present and being researched within my church – ethnicity because it embraces people with 'shared culture, language, set of traditions,' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022) whose skin colour may not differentiate them from others with different national or intranational backgrounds, and race because it highlights sensibilities and specificities concerning skin colour. There is no intention whatsoever to imply superiority of one race above another, nor for its use to be considered pejorative. Haslam (2001, p. 21) further notes that 'there is a high degree and even fear' about engaging with such issues around race and ethnicity, but he also implores white people to '*listen* to what people from black and minority communities say.' This has been the objective of this author throughout this research, and more detail about attempts to satisfy this objective is discussed in Chapter Two.

My intentions thus need to be explicit and unequivocal: I wish to attend to the experiences of belonging of multi-ethnoracial participants by facilitating an environment that enables these to be freely articulated on the terms of those expressing themselves. Terminology deployed in this study is intended respectfully to reflect the diversity of those participating. Future readers may possibly find such terminology either enduring or anachronistic depending upon how societal or academic discourse on such diversity unfolds. However, I can only write within the lexical sensibilities contemporaneous with the period in which this research was conducted. As noted earlier, it is an attempt to treat participants firmly within Browning's (2005, p. 284) injunction for 'love and positive regard.'

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[13] As will be seen later, this is evident in the self-ascriptions of some of the participants in the fieldwork.

[14] See also theologians (Reddie, 2012) and (Jennings, 2020).

[15] The epithet 'Black' is also self-ascribed by GMH theologians like Reddie (2012, loc. 1419) and Jennings (2020, p. 9), the latter explaining that he is 'a black man in America' who assumed positions of leadership in academia.

The research is located within a Newfrontiers local church. It should be noted that I make no claim that ethnoracial diversity is a unique feature of Newfrontiers, nor that it is absent or deficient within other parts of the UK Church. However, what is being acknowledged is that such diversity is specifically embedded within Newfrontiers' ecclesiological commitments. What differentiates Newfrontiers ecclesiology, and its approach to multi-ethnoracial belonging, shall thus be considered in Chapter One.

This thesis will investigate the following: how do participants self-report their own sense of belonging, and which elements do they identify which either promote or hinder such belonging? Within this broad question, it will also consider which metaphors are deployed to frame these self-reports of belonging? For instance, how do, citizenship, corporeal or familial metaphors feature and how do these inspire and explain mutual belonging, and how do these differ across ethnoracial boundaries? In terms of entry into the church, what is the effect of water baptism on ecclesial belonging for participants and observers? Furthermore, what is the influence of leadership on belonging, and which qualities of leadership promote or dilute belonging? How does serving of others within the church and to those outside through evangelism influence belonging? It shall also consider what is the role of ethnoracial background in determining what participants are gaining and losing as they negotiate community life in a diverse ecclesial setting, and how does the balance of these affect belonging? Furthermore, how does an ecclesiology which promotes uniquely male senior leadership influence belonging across male/female delineations, and which gains and losses are consequently experienced?

This thesis shows that the degree of participants' belonging is dependent upon their experience of the church as a coherent, loving, nurturing and performative family. This is because participants conceptualise belonging within principally familial metaphors, such as fictive siblings and parents.[16] Within these, leaders are perceived as spiritual parents, guides and exemplars of Christ, expected to model qualities such as authority, approachability, prayerfulness and adaptability, all of which are conducive to participants' belonging. Fellow congregants are viewed primarily in siblingship (but more occasionally in parenting) terms in which belonging is promoted when familial relationships of positive affect and depth are established and mutual care simultaneously experienced: ecclesial belonging can even exceed that within biological families.

Siblingship comprises a dialectic of similarity and difference, both of which are required. Similarity of status as mutual fictive siblings is greatly appreciated, whilst differences (across intergenerational, believer/non-believer, male/female and ethnoracial delineations) are anticipated and salubrious when harmonious. The ecclesial fictive siblingship is also expected to comprise a locus of performative serving of others in which spiritual and practical gifts are expressed and developed. As such, belonging is dependent upon an 'expansionary' instinct in which relationships and serving competence are undergoing constant, positive and additive transformations.

Conversely but consistently, any sense of relational or performative contraction compromises belonging. Therefore, illegitimate imbalances in leadership representation across ethnoracial and/or male/female delineations are aversive because they are perceived as contractions of relational and performative engagement, and contrary to egalitarian siblingship commitments. The latter is especially problematic in Newfrontiers ecclesiology, historically wedded to privileging uniquely male senior leadership. It further considers that the balance of gains and losses is different for non-British-born congregants requiring specific attention from incumbent leaders to address. Finally, this thesis highlights 'Ephesian moments' comprising salubrious theological and sociological disclosure uniquely made possible by ecclesial ethnoracial diversity including refreshed revelations of God's nature and character, combined with enhanced discipleship and enriched sociality.

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[16] The term 'fictive' in this thesis is used to denote 'the lack of biological relatedness between individuals or groups in contexts that are nevertheless deemed important enough for affinity to be designated,' (Qirko, 2012, p. 311) such as that between 'spiritual' siblings in an ecclesial context. For example, in considering Luke 12:51-53 and Jesus' assertion of potential division within believers' biological families, Malina & Neyrey (1991, p. 86) highlight that neophytes' faith may precipitate 'a conflict over blood ties/natural kinship and fictive kinship.' See also (Elliott, 2002, p. 77), (Meeks, 2003, p. 88), (Atkins, 1991, p. 173).

Recommendations for future praxis are then made and these include how leaders should remain close and accessible to congregants, the need for leaders to steer congregants quickly into suitable areas of expansionary serving, how to connect congregants into immersive small group communities and the need to discern God's presence and direction in common worship settings. It also recommends a clearer articulation of theology around male/female leadership roles so that women's experiences are not experienced as contractionary and aversive. Furthermore, it recommends diligence in the appointment of leadership representative of the congregation demographics, and the establishment of a 'council of reference' to alert leadership to the unique sensibilities and needs of those from different ethnoracial and generational backgrounds.

However, what is distinctive within Newfrontiers' ecclesiology in influencing participants' experiences of belonging shall be considered in the following chapter.

1. NEWFRONTIERS HISTORY AND MULTI-ETHNORACIAL ECCLESIOLOGY

1.1. OVERVIEW

This chapter will consider how Newfrontiers' multi-ethnoracial ecclesiology could influence participants' experiences of belonging. It will explain how Newfrontiers, as a relatively new evangelical movement emerging most notably in the 1970s from British Restorationism, embraces a dual commitment to evangelical biblical normativity and contemporary Pentecostal experiences intertwined with a conviction to build ethnoracially-diverse congregations. Its ecclesiology is based upon a complementarian view of differentiated male/female roles in leadership, privileging the former, combined with an expectation that congregants prioritise believers' baptism and devotion to church community and activism over other aspects of lifestyle. As such, alongside others in Restorationism, it has been criticised for excessive leadership authoritarianism and hegemonic oppression of women.

To comprehend the distinctives of Newfrontiers ecclesiology from academic sources, this chapter will draw principally upon perspectives from theologians Walker (1998), Kay (2016), Bebbington (1989), Hunt (2009), Nigel Wright (1997), Tidball (1997), feminist theologian Aune (2004) and theologian/historian Jeffery, (2019). It will then consider the internal espoused theology of Newfrontiers from its own practitioners including founder Virgo, apostle Devenish, and influential church/UK movement leaders such as Tibbert and Stroud, church leaders Benham and Hylton from the UK and Pettit and Kpikpi from Africa.[17]

Swinton & Mowat (2006, p. 27) note that all situations (including the church being investigated in this study) 'have cultures and histories… traditions and expectations and they contain specific forms of practice' that reflect these foundational elements. The specific forms of practice will be investigated in the research phase. However, the distinctive foundations of culture, history, traditions and expectations that Newfrontiers embraces require identification. The normativity of evangelicalism in framing Newfrontiers' theological, ecclesiological and missiological instincts will be investigated first.

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[17] As will be outlined later, Benham's church left Newfrontiers in the early 2020s.

1.2. NEWFRONTIERS: EVANGELICALISM AND PRECEDING MOVEMENTS

Aune (2004, p. 35) opines that Newfrontiers comprises a movement of 'tension and contradiction.' This apparently dialectical nature is inherent, Aune argues, within its expression of 'an older Enlightenment rationalism with newer, more fluid and late-/postmodern experientialism,' (p. 35) combined with its commitment to key aspects of classical evangelicalism, especially the impulse 'to proselytize all non-believers' towards spiritual salvation, (p. 21). It hence blends historic and enduring evangelical church commitments, such as high priority on Scripture for doctrine, discipline and governance, with its expression of Christian sung-worship sympathetic, at its outset at least, to contemporary emotion-laden cultural sensibilities, (Briers, 1992, p. iv).[18]

Bebbington (1989, p. 1) asserts that evangelicalism took shape out of the Great Awakening, the Protestant revivalist movement of the late 1730s and early 1740s,[19] associated most closely with George Whitefield and John Wesley in Britain. For Bebbington (1989, p. 1), evangelicalism is not located within a single Christian denomination, but it is trans-denominational comprising four distinctives, ones which became evident in Newfrontiers' emergent ecclesiology:

conversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed;

activism, the expression of the gospel in effort;

biblicism, a particular regard for the Bible;

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[18] See Ward (2017b, pp. 176-7) for the shift in British evangelical sung worship from objective doctrine to 'the language of relationship and encounter.'

[19] Although others, including McGrath (1995, p. 19), date evangelicalism to earlier sixteenth-century and Catholic authors.

and what may be called *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.[20]

McGrath's (1995, p. 56) six 'controlling convictions' of evangelicalism overlap strongly with Bebbington's four components, but his expansions emphasise the lordship of the Holy Spirit, and the gathered church as central to 'spiritual nourishment, fellowship and growth,' both elements central to Newfrontiers' distinctive ecclesiology.[21] Newfrontiers emerged from broader Restorationist networks, each of which was distinguished by the personal idiosyncrasies and 'guiding ministry of an apostle,' Kay (2007, p. 20). Consequently, both Restorationism and the different streams within it need mutual consideration but clear differentiation. Broadly, Restorationism's central tenet was that the church, informed by an unwavering commitment to evangelical Biblical authority, should be restored to 'its primitive glory… and to return to the pattern laid down in the New Testament,' (p. 21), (see also (Walker, 1998, pp. 39-40)).

Wright (1997, p. 63) asserts that Restorationism emerged as 'a later development of the Charismatic Renewal movement,' from the 1960s. Thus, it could appear that Restorationism is tightly aligned to the Renewal of charismata within the existing denominations. However, Bebbington (1989, p. 270) correctly distinguishes between the two, pointing out that 'Restorationism antedates renewal. Its origins have been traced to groups of independent Evangelicals, mostly Brethren in background,' especially the influential 'father of Restorationism,' Arthur Wallis, (Hunt, 2009, p. 354) (see also Walker (1998, p. 52), (Jeffery, 2019b, p. 19)).

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[20] Larsen (2008, p. 25) points out that Bebbington's definition has somewhat remarkably 'become the standard one.' Others, such as Carson (1996, pp. 449-450), Williams (2008, p. 346) and Hunter (1983, p. 7) argue over the order of its key constituents, with the latter prioritising the belief that 'the Bible is the inerrant Word of God'.

[21] Wilson (1970, p. 270) considers historic sects and factions in the church that have sought to assert viewpoints different from mainstream denominations noting that they frequently revived core concepts from scripture, regarding themselves as 'reformed churches (or, more typically, as *restored* churches)', from which Walker (1998) would later draw his epithet for Restorationism.

Consistent with Bebbington, Walker (1998, p. 51) decouples Restorationism's genesis from Renewal's, asserting instead that the former comprises 'a hybrid strand of Pentecostalism that began to emerge in the 1950s' theologically and socially, thus dissociating much of Renewal's influence on Restorationism. Furthermore, he asserts that Restorationism imbibed commonalities from two preceding movements: first the Catholic Apostolic Church's appointment of apostles, and second, alignment with Brethrenism's ecclesiastical structures, imbibing the latter's evangelical reflexes, emphasis on male leadership, aversion to denominationalism, and its insistence of believers' baptism, (Walker, 1998, p. 247).[22] He concludes that Restorationism thus appears to comprise a hybrid of both antecedent groups. However, Millward (2003, p. 30) cautions that care should be taken to avoid 'over-emphasising a human chain of influence between movements whose greatest similarity is their desire to be true and obedient to the teaching of the scriptures they hold in common.'

Furthermore, Walker's conjunction between Pentecostalism, Brethrenism and Newfrontiers specifically, rather than Restorationism more generally, is rejected by its founder, Terry Virgo. He is clear that 'neither Pentecostalism nor Brethrenism affected me personally… Baptist was the more predominant' influence, not simply for Virgo himself, but for most of the cohort with whom he initially co-operated within the inchoate Coastlands,[23] from which Newfrontiers was to emerge, (Virgo, 2021). Furthermore, the autonomy of the local church, believers' baptism, the use of charismata were not intentional imports from Brethrenism and Pentecostalism at all: they occurred because of independently-discerned convictions based on the normative structures of the Early Church (Virgo, 2021), consistent with Millward's (2003, p. 30) conjecture.

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[22] (Bebbington, 1989, pp. 235-243) also considers the Oxford Group in the 1930s whose unstructured corporate worship and disregard for ecclesiastical hierarchies presaged a foretaste of a movement like Newfrontiers.

[23] Newfrontiers original epithet prior to rebranding to New Frontiers International (NFI) and then Newfrontiers, (see (Jeffery, 2019a, p. 6) for an overview of the changes to the movement's nomenclature).

Underpinned by the bedrock of bible-centric evangelicalism and elements of Brethren ecclesiology, Kay (2008, p. 33) traces Restorationism's pneumatological influences directly to Pentecostalism. However, as will be seen shortly, Pentecostal experiences, rather than the Pentecostal denomination, were foundational to Newfrontiers' genesis and subsequent praxis. This was mainly due to a revolution in the evangelical church in the early 1960s, namely the Charismatic Renewal. This catapulted the charismatic movement 'to become the prevailing form of Protestantism in twenty-first-century Britain,' (Bebbington, 1989, p. 247) and Renewal influenced the pneumatological commitments of New Church movements, such as Newfrontiers.

Indeed, Newfrontiers' founder, Terry Virgo speaks of its profound effect on his early Christian discipleship: 'It was 1962 and the charismatic renewal had barely started… and I was to have the privilege of being part of it,' (Virgo, 2007, p. 22). Aune (2004, p. 23) points out that Renewal 'constituted a religious counter-culture or "Expressive Revolution."' This charismatic derivative of evangelicalism drew much from contemporary culture, especially modernism and its desire for frank self-expression of the unconscious, with its emphasis on subjective experience, (Kay, 2007, pp. 6-7). Whilst preceding evangelicalism had been 'austere and traditionalist' and resistant to change, (Guest, 2007, p. 32) the Charismatic Renewal stirred a desire to reconsider the dynamics of personal relationships with Christ and with others. Cultural modernism fostered a 'challenging of existing structures, formalities, authorities and truths which had been taken for granted… The parallels with the charismatic movement are hard to resist,' (Tidball, 1997, p. 53). This was based on two foundations: subjective charismatic experience, and its subsequent authentication and interpretation by scripture.

Unlike the classical Pentecostals, Renewal was non-sectarian and based on the premise that 'God wanted to renew existing churches and denominations rather than create new ones,' and its audience, unlike the working class proclivity of Pentecostalism, was generally young and middle class, (Aune, 2004, p. 23). Sociologically, inter-personal relationships within renewed churches were typified 'by warmth, informality and networking' as well as an evangelical commitment to community activism and evangelism, hallmarks which Newfrontiers was also to imbibe, (Tidball, 1997, p. 52), (Morgan, 2006, p. 7). This inevitably led to ecclesiastical tensions.

Millward (2003, p. 226) observes that, in many denominational churches 'the process of renewal and the rediscovery of the charismatic gifts was achieved amidst tremendous pain and upheaval,' not least because charismata potentially disrupted predictable, liturgical worship.[24] However, it was not simply Sunday collective worship that proved problematic. The revitalised evangelical reflex towards scriptural normativity, in some circles, foregrounded concerns 'that the church, institutionalized and corrupted as she is, is not what… Scripture makes plain she can be,' (Wright, 1986, p. 13).

Consequently, tensions were rapidly to manifest. Not least because a movement which surfaced in the 1960s sired some of the most 'numerically robust churches', with charismatics producing a disproportionately high number of growing congregations, (McBain & Hunt, 1997, p. 44). Maintenance of such growth, combined with a deep commitment to scriptural patterns for ecclesiology, precipitated an unavoidable dilemma: whether existing denominational ecclesiastical structures should be defended, or new churches spawned to mirror those exhorted by interpretation of New Testament norms. A clash of ecclesiologies was to emerge in which it was 'not easy to see how these two visions could be reconciled,' (Hocken, 1986, p. 174), (see also (Morgan, 2006, p. 10)).

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[24] See (Steven, 1989, p. 6) for Restorationist parallels.

In 1966, at a meeting of the Evangelical Alliance chaired by John Stott, former Congregationalist Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones 'issued a clarion call to evangelicals to leave their historic, mixed denominations and form a pure church,' (Tidball, 1997, p. 52), (see also (Kay, 2008, p. 35)). Division was thus explicitly endorsed, and factionalism arose: Restorationism was forthrightly to assert itself into the evangelical ecclesial landscape and to fashion its own distinctive ecclesiology. This ecclesiology would then foster ethnoracially-diverse congregations, a distinctive Newfrontiers would specifically embrace.

1.3. THE EMERGENCE OF RESTORATIONISM

Lloyd-Jones' schismatic exhortation was not a lone voice from within what would morph into Restorationism, from which Newfrontiers would subsequently emerge, (Jeffery, 2019b, p. 4). In 1974 former Brethrenist Arthur Wallis who was an Advisory Board member of Michael Harper's ecumenical Fountain Trust (Kay, 2007, p. 27)[25] issued a call 'to charismatics to have done with their compromising associations' with denominations, (McBain, 1997, pp. 75, 77).

Bebbington (1989, p. 230) notes that the seeds of Restorationism predate Renewal but they originate from a group of 'independent Evangelicals. mostly Brethren in background, whose leaders held a series of conferences in Devon from 1958 to consider how to restore the pattern of church life found in the New Testament,' with Arthur Wallis one of the key protagonists. By the 1970s, Wallis (2015) was contemplating the role of the church in fostering future revival and concluded that denominationalism 'could never be a suitable receptacle for all that God was wanting to bestow.'

His objections were twofold: first, a resolute rejection of ecclesiastical traditions 'however ancient, which made biblical principles of none effect,' and second a more pragmatic observation that the effects of the Lewis Revival under Duncan Campbell had been ephemeral. This was because, he opined, the traditional ecclesiastical structures restrict and 'preclude the maturing of the believer and of the body of which he is a part,' necessitating the creation of a new wineskin, (Wallis, 2015).[26] The seeds of Restorationism were thus sown through 'a theology that presumed the reacquisition of the life, power, operation and structure of the church of the New Testament… [and] belief in the gift-ministries including especially the ministry of the apostle,' (Kay & Dyer, 2003, p. 24).

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[25] Harper, curate at Stott's All Souls in Langham Place, London, promoted ecumenical Renewalism. He established the Fountain Trust in 1964 to overcome any proclivity within Renewal to 'establish new structures outside of the mainstream churches,' (McBain & Hunt, 1997, p. 48).

The 1960s saw the emergence of house churches touched by Charismatic Renewal but meeting outside the main denominations, (Aune, 2004, p. 24). Then between 1970-4 leaders of such 'house churches' came together to meet in London, and this group eventually included Terry Virgo, when he was invited to join a group of twenty independent leaders, (Wright, 1997, p. 63). To Virgo's (2007, p. 81) surprise 'this was not a united group at all. There were deep differences of opinion among them.'

A split occurred in 1976 into two principal Restorationist groups which Walker (1998, pp. 39-41) entitled R1 and R2 (see also (Jeffery, 2019b, pp. 25-27)). Virgo (2007, p. 82) aligned himself with Wallis and the R1 group 'which actually reflected my values more,' (p. 82). Walker (1998, pp. 301-302) sees R1 as remaining true to the Restorationist vision of the 1970s and its key shepherding doctrines, and as such constitutes restorationism 'in its purest form, [with] a tendency to exclusivism.'[27] However, scepticism over the robustness of Walker's bifurcated R1/R2 taxonomy is directly expressed by Bayes (1988, p. 341) and (Briers, 1992, p. 11), and indirectly by Turner (1989, p. 103).

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[26] This mirrors Virgo's (2002a, p. 6) pragmatic convictions that, after his own baptism in the Spirit, a new ecclesiological 'wineskin' was exigent because 'Church services had to be radically changed to accommodate the new life.'

[27] Kay (2007, p. 288) asserts that R1 became more exclusive, bounded and structured, with R2 comprising a more 'liberally minded and anarchic stream,' (Wright, 1997, p. 70).

Specifically, categorisation of the main components of R1 (including Newfrontiers) as more exclusive appears too forced. Turner (1989, p. 103) points out that, right back in 1989, there was a tendency 'particularly within R2 and in Terry Virgo's churches… to engage with denominational congregations in an advisory capacity.' As will be seen in the next section, it was Newfrontiers' openness to others outside Restorationism that would shape its theology and ecclesiology, quite distinct from other elements which Walker grouped within his narrow R1 taxonomy. This openness to outsiders would shape its distinctive ecclesiology that would 'reach across ethnic and cultural divides,' (Jeffery, 2019b, p. 15).

1.4. MAJOR INFLUENCES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEWFRONTIERS

The shaping of Newfrontiers ecclesiology was unique within Restorationism. Such ecclesiology would promote strong adherence to charismatic experience shaped by biblical normativity and reformed theology. All these would ultimately coalesce to shape early adherents' experiences of belonging, although the degree to which they influence those in this study needs investigation. Stanley (2013, p. 197) summarises influences unique to its founding apostle Terry Virgo, noting that he emerged from a 'conservative evangelical background: a sermon from John Stott played a part in his conversion; he was raised as a Baptist at Holland Road Baptist Church in Hove, Sussex, and while a student at London Bible College from 1965 to 1968 regularly attended Martin Lloyd-Jones's ministry at Westminster Chapel.' Key distinctives thus shaped Virgo's formation in preparation for the sculpting of his apostolic network, one which would subsequently foreground its commitment to multi-ethnoracial congregations.

Whilst studying for his BA in Theology, Virgo would enjoy significant formative influences both in charismatic worship, and in foundational reformed theology. In his first undergraduate year, he started attending a new church near Charing Cross in London and the 'atmosphere of praise was totally exuberant and unlike any I had previously encountered,' (Virgo, 2007, p. 47). Other components were vivifying for Virgo, especially 'the flow of the gifts of the Spirit [which] surpassed anything I had previously encountered,' including spoken and sung prophecies, and physical healings, encouraging Virgo to take his own first steps into charismata, (Virgo, 2007, pp. 47-49).

Whilst the Charing Cross morning meetings nurtured Virgo's passion for corporately-expressed charismata, the absence of Sunday evening meetings led him to attend Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones' Congregationalist[28] Westminster chapel services which, by contrast, were significant for their 'formality and impersonal nature,' (Virgo, 2007, p. 49).[29] Notwithstanding, Lloyd-Jones' influence was considerable, a counter-balance to the pneumatological emphasis of the morning meetings.

Scott (2014, loc. 2115) points out that under the 'influence of Martyn Lloyd-Jones and others, Terry became convinced of Reformed theology,' (see also (Jeffery, 2022, p. 7), (Cooper, 2009, p. 68)). Aune (2004, p. 34) thus summarises Newfrontiers' distinctives within Restorationism as embracing 'Reformed theology that emphasises the Bible as the Word of God and final authority… [whilst] advocat[ing] openness to the supernatural intervention of the Holy Spirit.' Virgo's early faith influences were thus to fuse his dual commitment to pneumatological empowerment and biblical normativity in areas of worship, doctrine, mission and ecclesiasticism, (Cooper, 2009, p. 70), (Jeffery, 2019b, p. 86).

Within weeks of finishing studies at LBC in 1968, (Jeffery & Kay, 2018, p. 242) Virgo was contacted by leaders from the newly-formed Evangelical Free Church in Seaford near Brighton: significantly 'they were not charismatic,' (Virgo, 2007, p. 59). Nonetheless Virgo led the church into charismatic renewal, (p. 60) and his influence started to draw other churches. Soon after, he 'found invitations coming to him from other charismatic groups in various stages of uncertainty or disarray,' triggering the birth of an emerging and growing network (then entitled Coastlands) which, by the end of the 1970s, comprised between 20 to 30 churches, of which three were from Baptist backgrounds, (Jeffery & Kay, 2018, pp. 242-243).

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[28] Although Lloyd-Jones took Westminster Chapel out of the Congregationalism in 1967, (Brencher, 2002, p. 50).

[29] See (Atherstone & Jones, 2011, p. 159) for the centrality of preaching to Lloyd-Jones' ecclesiology.

As noted previously, Newfrontiers evinced an openness to other denominations. Smith (2003, p. 147) argues such receptivity to other church influences in embracing 'those with a different perspective without losing his or the movement's distinctiveness,' eschewed more prevalent Restorationism reticence to become involved with established and emerging denominations. The latter included John Wimber from the Vineyard movement, Aune (2004, p. 34) (Jeffery, 2019a, pp. 105-106), (Kay, 2007, p. 72), precipitating a refreshed dynamism in Newfrontiers' healing and evangelism, (Virgo, 1986b, pp. 3, 1). Kay (2007, pp. 72-73) considers Wimber's influence was a mutually salubrious one, propelling Newfrontiers from being a fringe movement and into the charismatic mainstream.[30]

By 2011, Newfrontiers comprised a movement of around 700 churches in 60 nations, (Jeffery, 2019b, p. 3). Four years later, it had grown to over 850 churches, (Robertson, 2015, p. 146). However, this burgeoning movement was to embrace a firm commitment to the creation of ethnoracially diverse ecclesial communities. How these were to emerge from its initially very British origins will be discussed next as they continue to influence current ecclesiological commitments and thus the potential experiences of participants in this study.

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[30] For other cross-movement interaction including Anglicanism and the Toronto Blessing, see (Virgo, 1998, p. 3), (Hilborn, 2001, p. 8), (Kay, 2007, p. 214). For a criticism of the latter, see Sizer (2001, p. 45), and Stackhouse (2004, p. 167) who considered it 'infantile, romantic spirituality.' For a defence, see (Paloma, 2001, pp. 101-2).

1.5. MULTI-ETHNORACIAL ECCLESIOLOGICAL CONVICTIONS OF NEWFRONTIERS

This study is an exploration of multi-ethnoracial ecclesial belonging within a Newfrontiers church. The commitment to embracing and promoting such diversity became embedded with Newfrontiers normative commitments in the early 1990s. In its seminal *Vision and Values* magazine of 2009, the fourteenth point states that the movement is committed to an ecclesiology which 'wholeheartedly embraces the New Testament teaching of the one new man, demonstrating love and respect between the races, cultures and sexes,' (Newfrontiers, 2009, p. 2). Blending of differing racial and ethnic groups within common congregations thus became foregrounded within Newfrontiers espoused ecclesiology, (Jeffery, 2022, p. 20).[31]

Jeffery (2019b, pp. 7-14) attempts to determine the chronology of Newfrontiers' progressively developed commitment to such multi-ethnoracial ecclesiology. He attributes it to a bidirectional flow of interaction between its UK and overseas leaderships, (pp. 4-5). These mutually reinforcing 'transnational flows intensified a consciousness of the world… [it] compressed the distance between geographically separate co-religionists,' propagating the influence of ecclesiologies originating in cultures geographically and culturally distant from Newfrontiers' original British locus, (Jeffery, 2019b, p. 248).

Consequently, the reverse absorption of overseas ecclesiological cultures was to shape Newfrontiers' commitments to ethnoracial diversity in the UK. Jeffery asserts that this was precipitated by two key leadership figures: Simon Pettit, a close companion of Virgo's who left the UK to plant churches in South Africa, and John Kpikpi, an attendee of Virgo's Brighton church in the late 1980s when he was a PhD student at the University of Sussex.[32] Regarding Pettit's influence, Jeffery (2019b, pp. 10-12) notes that Newfrontiers established contact with a church called the Vineyard Fellowship in Cape Town in the mid-1980s, before it joined Newfrontiers formally in 1994 and changed its name to Jubilee, (Ganiel, 2007, p. 560). Its then leader, Graham Ingram, was committed to racial reconciliation across contentious Apartheid Black/Coloured/White delineations, (Petitt, 1990, p. 11), (see also (Ganiel, 2007)).

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[31] The 'one new man' was not a misogynistic reference but a metaphor for the gathered Church embracing men and women, (Pettit, 2004, p. 38).

Jeffery (2019b, p. 12) argues that these reconciliatory commitments were imbibed by Simon Pettit, and subsequently promulgated back into the mainstream Newfrontiers network: the Pettits emigrated from the UK to South Africa in August 1990. By 1993, the influential Pettit was writing in Newfrontiers' *Frontline* international magazine: 'Reconciliation is at the heart of the gospel… He has "destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" because "his purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace" (Eph. 2:14, 15),' (Pettit, 1993, p. 20). Furthermore, the Pettits were convinced that 'building multi-ethnic congregations was a "distinctive of the New Testament church" to be emulated,' in the wider contemporary Church, (Jeffery, 2019b, p. 12). Pettit's ambitions were far from unfruitful: by 2007, Jubilee had transformed from being nearly all-white to being racially mixed, (Ganiel, 2007, p. 561).

Pettit's use of Ephesians 2:14-15, and the term 'one new man in Christ' were to become adopted by Newfrontiers as a standard motif to spearhead its commitment to ethnoracially-integrated congregations, extending its application beyond the original Ephesians paradigm of Jew/Gentile division to encompass the erosion of hostility across any and all ethnoracial classifications, (Jeffery, 2019b, p. 12). For instance, Steve Tibbert, leader of King's Church London,[33] cited Pettit's teaching as foundational to his own endeavours to build a multi-ethnoracially harmonious church, (Jeffery, 2022, p. 17). Indeed, as will be seen in Chapter Three, it is a commitment embedded into the convictions of the author's home church.

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[32] (Jeffery, 2019a, p. 119) also recognises Kenyan leader Edward Buria and his wife Fridah as others who influenced the transnational flavour of the movement through their connection with Ben Davies, leader of Bracknell Family Church (later to become Kerith Community Church), (Newfrontiers, 1990, p. 12). See also (Jeffery, 2022, p. 16).

[33] One of Newfrontiers' largest churches gathering around 1,400 each Sunday as of June 2016, (Jeffery & Kay, 2018, p. 252).

Meanwhile, John Kpikpi returned to Accra in Ghana from his UK-based postgraduate studies, where he planted the City of God Church, which subsequently affiliated to Newfrontiers. Jeffery (2019b, p. 13) summarises that Kpikpi's biblical convictions underpinning his multi-ethnoracial ecclesiology extended beyond Ephesians 2:14-15 but right back to the book of Genesis 12, where God calls Abram to become the seed of a new tribe, one that is promised from the outset to be multi-ethnoracial. Kpikpi expands this narrative-thread into the account of Ruth and Naomi, in which the Moabite Ruth adheres to her Jewish mother-in-law in order to presage 'the coming together of different peoples and tribes as a single community in Christ,' (Jeffery, 2019b, p. 13).[34]

Newfrontiers church leader Hylton (2009, p. 19) was later to expand the purview of the biblical narrative beyond these Old Testament and Pauline ecclesiological themes by considering eschatological ones, noting 'diversity is pervasive throughout the Scriptures… there is a theology of diversity which begins in Genesis and finishes in Revelation.' Concerning the latter, he cites Revelation 7:9-10 in which a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language assemble and worship to conclude: 'I believe it should be at least [the Church's] aspiration to replicate a glimpse of the heavenly community here on earth,' (Hylton, 2009, p. 105).[35]

The propagation of Pettit's and Kpikpi's convictions was to find expression at Newfrontiers leadership conferences in the UK, and their writings were promoted to the network though Newfrontiers' newsletters, (Jeffery, 2019b, p. 14).[36] Virgo (2005, p. 6) himself explicates the motif of 'One New Man,' and similarly threads in the themes of the Abramic promise in Genesis 12:3,[37] but he then builds on Pauline injunctions in Galatians 3:26-28 (drawing on Lloyd-Jones) in which there would be 'no distinctions' across Jewish/Gentile boundaries.

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[34] See also (Hylton, 2009, p. 47).

[35] A theme also highlighted by Benham (2012, loc. 2184) (leader of then-Newfrontiers Kerith Community Church based in Bracknell).

[36] See also (Jeffery, 2019a, pp. 119, 152-157) and (Virgo, 2003a, p. 25).

The simultaneous new creation of Jew and Gentile post-conversion dispenses with 'a Jewish section of the Christian church. There is no such thing as a Gentile section of the Christian church,' (p. 8). Consequently, unity is embedded 'in their common experience of God. Together, they are part of the one new man,' (p. 8). For Virgo, common pneumatological, soteriological and sacramental experiences (including baptism) transcend all divides (including ethnoracial), confirming the formation of this metaphorical new 'man.' Restorationism in Newfrontiers terms thus now embodies restoration of ethnoracially diverse churches in the UK and abroad as normative within its ecclesiology and a key component of congregants' experience of ecclesial belonging, (Jeffery, 2022, p. 20).

However, whilst Virgo affirmed and rearticulated the 'One New Man in Christ' motif, his leadership of the Newfrontiers was to undergo a major shift as he planned for leadership succession in 2011, (Robertson, 2015, p. 146). It would be a test of the temptation to succumb to denominationalism Walker (1998, p. 253) had earlier insisted would be the ubiquitous fate of Restorationism. This will be considered next because shifts in the governance of the movement post-Virgo, and potentially also in its normative commitments, could significantly alter current congregants' expectations and experiences of belonging. It would also emphasise his ecclesiological commitments to the church as a fictive family.

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[37] See also Benham (2012, loc. 1365)

1.6. NEWFRONTIERS AFTER TERRY VIRGO: NEW SPHERES AND A GROWING FAMILY

Virgo's retirement would constitute a test for his anti-denominational reflexes. How he handled his leadership departure would prove pivotal in the emergent ecclesiology of the local church and may well determine the associated experiences of belonging for its congregants, such as those in this study. Wagner (1998, p. 18) points out that for 'almost 500 years, Christian churches have largely functioned within traditional denominational structures.' New apostolic networks comprise a potential disruption to this paradigm, Wagner asserts, offering an opportunity to reshape Protestant Christianity and its ecclesiology across the world.

Kay notes (writing prior to Virgo's leadership transition) that the local church aims to constitute the locus of all activities within Newfrontiers, fortified by Ephesians 4:11 translocal ministries, such as apostles. He asserts: 'There is no denominational structure to join... and there is no hidden hierarchy,' (Kay, 2007, p. 81). What glues the local and translocal in its missional imperative is 'the re-establishment of charismatically-ordained apostles,' (Walker, 1998, p. 148).

Turner (1989, p. 96) points out that Restorationism recognises two types of apostles of Christ[38] in the Early Church: 'the "apostles of the Lamb" (those appointed before the ascension, or by resurrection appearance (often restricted to the twelve and Paul, despite 1 Cor 15:7 which makes it clear they were a wider circle)) and "apostles of the Ascension" given *subsequently* to the church by the ascended Lord,' as stated in Ephesians 4:8-11. Paul bridges the two groups. The former grouping 'alone had the authoritative role as guarantors and canonical interpreters of the Gospel', (Turner, 1989, p. 96) thus avoiding elevating contemporary apostles to the same level of direct and infallible divine inspiration.

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[38] Although Scott (2014, loc. 2135) points out that 'Virgo believes there are three types of apostle mentioned in the New Testament,' the first type being Jesus.

Contemporary apostles (as well as evangelists and prophets) are believed to be given for the upbuilding of the church (Ephesians 4:11-13). The Restorationist view is that these foundational ministries, 'lost during the early institutionalizing of the church, are what God is now restoring,' (Turner, 1989, p. 96).[39] This aligns closely with Virgo's (1988b, pp. 43-44) own perspective that all the ministries of Ephesians 4:11-13, including contemporary apostleship, are essential 'if we want to see the church come to the fulness of the stature of Christ, to a mature man.'[40] The apostle, according to Virgo (1985, p. 128), is one who is sent as a messenger and delegate of God, specifically 'entrusted with a mission and has powers conferred upon him,' to proclaim the Gospel to unbelievers through the planting of new churches, (Cooper, 2009, p. 84).[41] Furthermore, for new and existing churches, the apostle acts as a 'plumb-line to church life to see if it matches biblical revelation,' in matters of doctrine, governance, comportment and mission, (Virgo, 1985, p. 138). However, Virgo's insistence is that apostolic oversight of local churches should not warrant the establishment of denominations.

Indeed, Newfrontiers from its outset eschewed denominationalism which was a 'bogey word' because it implied an intermediate structure (with associated stultifying institutionalism) between the local church and the apostolic team, (Jeffery, 2019a, p. 109). This is rooted in its fundamental commitment to just 'two levels of familial identification in the ecclesiastical landscape – the local church "family" and the worldwide "family of faith,"' (Jeffery, 2019a, p. 224), (see also Virgo (1985, p. 143)). However, Wagner (1999, p. 133) (like Walker (1998, p. 253) noted earlier) insists that the 'historical trend is for sects to evolve into churches… there is no way for apostolic networks to avoid eventually becoming denominations.'

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[39] For an exegetical critique of what comprises an apostle and a variety of typologies, see Barrett (1972). For a Newfrontiers perspective, see (Devenish, 2011, loc. 494).

[40] Virgo (2003b, pp. 112-3) recognises dissenting voices including Lloyd-Jones (1985, p. 48) who argued that a contemporary 'apostle is not necessary.'

[41] Drawing on J.B. Lightfoot.

Wagner (1999, p. 110) further notes that what constitutes apostolic networks is local churches' individual and voluntary affiliation with the network, combined with the networks' translocal operation in which 'their *spheres are limited*,' (my italics). Wagner's spherical terminology would prove prescient. In 2011, at Newfrontiers' International Leaders Conference in Brighton '15 new apostles, leading different "apostolic spheres" – both within the UK and overseas – were recognized as having emerged from within the movement,' (Robertson, 2015, p. 146), and Virgo stepped back from overall leadership.

Newfrontiers conceptualises apostles as spiritual fathers, buttressed by its view of Pauline ecclesiasticism, (Jeffery, 2019a, pp. 110, 195-196). For example, Newfrontiers apostle Devenish considers Paul's leadership example in 1 Thessalonians 2:8. He argues that the transparency (and absence of aloofness) of Paul's life before Thessalonian believers is significant in establishing enduring apostolic cultural norms in which Paul was 'an involved father who really shared his life with his children,' (Devenish, 2011, loc. 1088).[42] Whilst idealisations of Pauline norms are offered as normative, what is not known is how such idealised conceptions of ostensibly benign paternal leadership are identified and experienced by Newfrontiers congregants: the research data will be sensitive to this.

Furthermore, this concept of spiritual fathering has garnered criticism, especially against broader Restorationism. Accusations of excessive authoritarianism comprises 'perhaps the most infamous issue surrounding Restorationism,' although it 'was administered in varying degrees throughout the different "streams"' including Newfrontiers, (Hunt, 2009, pp. 365-366). Influenced by links to the American Shepherding Movement and especially to the Fort Lauderdale Five[43] in the 1970s,

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[42] See also (Warnock, 2008).

[43] Comprising Ern Baxter, Bob Mumford, Derek Prince, Don Basham and Charles Simpson (Hunt, 2009, p. 365). Stanley (2013, pp. 198-199) points out that the influence of the FLF was diluted by 'mounting criticism and a very public controversy between the Five in 1975-6, the American Shepherding movement lost momentum, and was formally dissolved at the end of 1986.'

(Smith, 2003, p. 146), (Walker, 1998, p. 183), congregants' discipleship was to comprise a 'patriarchal pyramid in which all male members were to be "covered" by an authority within the Church' (Hunt, 2009, p. 366).[44]

This is a sensitive area in the history of Newfrontiers partly because it clearly suffered from 'guilt by association' (Smith, 2003, p. 146) with broader Restorationism's possibly excessively 'authoritarian and intrusive tendencies among church leaders' influenced by Fort Lauderdale Five praxis, (Stanley, 2013, p. 198). Virgo (2021) counters with his assertion that the heavy shepherding proclivities of the Fort Lauderdale Five never 'got into Newfrontiers or into our ranks,' because of his reflex caution against them.

Significantly, many of the participants in this study have formative experiences of ecclesiologies from outside Newfrontiers, especially those from outside the UK. Indeed, none of the non-British-born participants had any preceding experiences of Newfrontiers (or Restorationism) prior to their arrival at King's. Consequently, their view of Newfrontiers-influenced leadership may well be shaped by contrasts with other ecclesiologies, and their experiences may not align with Virgo's sanguine analysis of his movement: the research shall be attentive to participant accounts of leadership styles (including authoritarianism) and how these influence belonging.

This is especially important in a multi-ethnoracial context as different groups will have had different formative ecclesiological experiences which may determine their sense of belonging and cohesion with others and with church leadership. Notwithstanding, Devenish insists that the success of Pauline-inspired apostolic fathering is in its ability to reproduce successors in ministry areas, including apostleship. This would be a theme upon which Virgo would elaborate as he morphed Newfrontiers into its next incarnation.[45] Within the UK, Newfrontiers 'divided into six roughly equally sized "spheres", each with their own leadership, websites and charitable status,' and individual churches were free to select which apostolic sphere to join, (Jeffery & Kay, 2018, p. 244), (Kay, 2016, pp. 17-18).[46]

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[44] Hunt also notes that some Renewal churches also adopted similar practices, (p. 366).

[45] See (Virgo, 1985, p. 134) and (Virgo, 2007, p. 251), for example, for similar paternal qualities concerning apostles.

These 'apostolic spheres' constituted a reconfiguration of Newfrontiers from '"a family of churches"... [to] a "band of brothers,"' (Jeffery, 2019a, p. 138). The family metaphor was extended to explain and justify the transition, with Virgo having emerged as the patriarch nurturing spiritual sons. These were to shepherd their new spheres effectively as '"fathers" of their own "families,"' each having received affirmation of their apostleship from Virgo, (Jeffery, 2019a, p. 138).[47]

The aforementioned 'family of churches' tagline was central to Newfrontiers' self-definition: for instance, it appeared on its UK magazine covers and in numerous articles describing itself.[48] The rhetoric of 'family' was threaded into much of Newfrontiers' self-ascribed terminology, referring to the superordinate network itself as a familial group bringing kingdom values into an unredeemed world. Furthermore, familial language cascaded down into relationships between churches, relationships between those holding positions of leadership (such as a 'band of brothers'),[49] and to frame relationships between believers themselves within local churches (the latter will be discussed in the next section).

However, the concept of family is also complex and contestable. Newfrontiers' application of this metaphor has possibly been constructed too rigidly upon a Western conceptualisation of nuclear family to describe the relationships between apostolic team members. This is because it triggered tension and contention within Virgo's teams. First, for those who became former members of the Newfrontiers leadership team lamented that, on departure from it, 'the "fellowship" and relationship ceased,' (Jeffery, 2019, p. 257). Consequently, the joint mission of outreach and church-planting may have been more transactional and transitory than enduringly familial in practice.

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[46] Although Kay incorrectly reports five, not six, UK spheres.
[47] See also (Newfrontiers, 2020).
[48] For instance, (Newfrontiers, 2010a, p. Front cover): 'a worldwide family of churches together on a mission to establish the Kingdom of God by restoring the church, making disciples, training leaders and planting churches.'
[49] The metaphor of a 'band of brothers' was also extended to intra-eldership relationships too, (Hosier, 2010, p. 27).

Second, the transition to 'spheres' operating in multiplied units precipitated pain and disorientation for both Africans Kpikpi and Buria, with the former leaving after the network's multiplication and the latter holding onto the epithet by forming his own 'Newfrontiers Keyna' sphere (Jeffery, 2019, p. 255). What is unknown is how such cross-cultural expectations of familial norms cascades down to congregants themselves in a diverse ethnoracial context. The research will attend to such concerns, and especially the deployment of familial metaphors which underpin or erode intercultural belonging.

Furthermore, Newfrontiers' conceptualisation of family was built on differentiated male/female roles within it. These embraced culturally contentious practices such as 'complementarian views on men and women,' (Scott, 2014, loc. 2123) in which women are precluded from eldership and apostolic roles, (see also (Jeffery, 2019a, pp. 96-97)). As Newfrontiers morphs into independent spheres, an opportunity arises to reconsider what Aune (2004, p. 256) considers anachronistic 'discursive and material oppression' of women, an issue which influences congregants' attachment and belonging within local churches, especially participants in this study.

Virgo insistently frames the differentiation between men and women in ultimate positions of leadership (such as eldership and apostleship) not as a delineation of *status*, but instead of *role*.[50] Regarding the former, Virgo (2007, p. 235) asserts that Jesus' own example, and the ensuing ecclesiology in the early church (evinced by Pauline praxis, for example), constituted a 'revolutionary breakthrough in attitudes to women and their full acceptance and equal value to men in the churches,' but that solely male headship was validated by Jesus; the absence of women in church governance was intentional. He claims that it is based on an argument from the original order of 'creation rather than looking forward to our ultimate heavenly state,' in which there will be no male or female, (p. 235-236).

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[50] See also Devenish (2011, loc. 5051ff) who similarly argues that soteriologically 'men and women are equal in *status* in Christ but [with] different, or complementary, *roles* and functions,' considering Galatians 3:28 (my italics).

What unifies men and women is a common status of being 'priests' and thus able to serve alongside one another, with women free to exercise ministries such as writing, prophesying, leading sung worship, exorcism and prayer, for example, (p. 235). Aune (2004, p. 260)'s specific assessment of Newfrontiers' position is less sanguine, noting that its own literature shows that women are 'less often preached or written about and they have far fewer opportunities to exercise their talents in building the church and serving its mission,' despite their manifest over-representation in key areas like hospitality, prayer, administration and social action, (see also (Wignall, 2023, p. 68)). However, Virgo's more recent position shows both mutability and enduring rigidity on this issue. For example, he acknowledges that many Newfrontiers churches have women preach regularly, and he claims to be content with this emerging and increasingly prevalent practice, (Virgo, 2021).

Furthermore, some women (particularly those with prophetic gifts) are acknowledged as leaders within apostolic teams in the new spheres (for instance (ChristCentral, 2021)). This does not perplex Virgo (2021), he insists, because Jesus had women as part of his support entourage (Luke 8:1-3) and their involvement has biblical precedence. Notwithstanding, Virgo (2021) is also insistent that church 'governance at eldership and apostolic levels is still male.' However, more recent developments may erode Virgo's confidence in this male-only legacy.

For instance, Kerith Community Church advertises two female elders within its leadership team, (Kerith Community Church, 2023): notably, it no longer advertises any links with Newfrontiers. Furthermore, certainly one sphere within Newfrontiers is re-evaluating its position on women's authority and legitimacy within apostolic roles, and it appears that it may be open to diverging away from Newfrontiers' and Virgo's original exclusionary position.[51]

The role of men and women constitutes one area of ecclesiology which could strongly influence participants' experiences of belonging, and its effect on current congregants' experiences of belonging will be considered in the research. Indeed, Francis, et al., (2009) contrast the psychological types of 134 lead elders (all male) in Newfrontiers with male clergy in the Church of England. They highlight key distinctions between the two deploying Myers-Briggs personality typologies. For example, Newfrontiers leaders showed a stronger proclivity towards extraversion over introversion, sensing over intuition, and thinking over feeling-based decision-making.

They boldly assert that Newfrontiers male leadership may possibly have been more efficacious in drawing men into its ranks because of these personality traits, in contrast to the 'underrepresentation of men in Church of England congregations,' (pp. 62, 67). Indeed, according to Aune (2004, p. 141), the female:male membership ratio within Newfrontiers was 57:43 in 2004, as opposed to the British then church average of between 61:39 and 65:35. The author's home church had a ratio of 63:37 in March 2024, according to its congregational database of over 1,100 adults. Of course, these data are snapshots, and apparent correlation does not inevitably demonstrate causation. As will be seen in Chapter Four, leadership representation across male/female delineations is highly contentious and, for some (possibly younger) participants, potentially deleterious to belonging and thus requires serious consideration.

Notwithstanding, Newfrontiers emerges from an eclectic Restorationist background. How it conceptualises belonging within the local church, intertwined with its reformed, charismatic and evangelical commitments, will be discussed next to discern key aspects of its espoused theology. The latter is exigent because of their potential influence on the experience of participants' belonging who form part of this study.

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[51] I am personally aware of this process. No formal open-source documents were available at the time of writing.

1.7. NEWFRONTIERS' ESPOUSED BELONGING

Hunt (2009, p. 368) insists that life in Restorationist churches like Newfrontiers 'is essentially about community and dedication… A high level of commitment is expected.' Walker (1998, p. 131) agrees asserting that to 'become a Restorationist is to adopt a total way of life,' (see also (Kay, 2007, p. 345), (Jeffery, 2019b, p. 201)). Newfrontiers' founder Virgo's (1990b, p. 3) injunctions cohere with Hunt and Walker's observations in which Christian followers' lifestyles should essentially centre around commitment: prioritisation of the church over other secular activities, strong adherence to others in tight relational groupings, and superordinate activities that the congregants are exhorted mutually to pursue.

For instance, Virgo asserts that congregants commit to 'a radical alternative lifestyle,' rooted within the community of the local church, (p. 7).[52] Citing the togetherness highlighted in the normative interactions of the early church in Acts 2:42-47, Virgo (2003a, p. 39) insists that 'being part of a church involves far more than casual attendance. There was clearly a sense of "belonging" that radically affected every aspect of their lives.' Whether such expectations are present in current participants' experiences will be explored in the research, as will whether they are salubrious or oppressively authoritarian and aversive.

Virgo further contends that belonging is predicated upon Christians' common understanding 'that this world is passing away… and that they are strangers and aliens here. They belong to another society where friendships are rich, where righteousness is the norm and where Jesus is central. They are looking for His return,'

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[52] See also (Virgo, 1985, p. 112), (Virgo, 1990b, p. 7), (Virgo, 1991), (Virgo, 2006, p. 5).

(p. 7). Belonging, in Virgo's view, comprises deep and affective relationships centred around imitating Jesus as exemplar. This latter entails each adherent's active pursuit of God within the person of Christ, situated within an eternal horizon, temporally located in a local church. Of course, such guidance to pursue close interpersonal relationships and imitating Jesus may have been diluted over time. Therefore, the extent to which such commitments are salient to contemporary adherents' belonging is unknown and they will be investigated specifically in the research phase.

Notwithstanding, such belonging embedded in organised religious communities may well chafe against prevailing societal trends, some of which may influence the commitments of participants in this study. Virgo (2003a, p. 39) is circumspect towards what he sees as a 'believing without belonging' postmodern culture in which 'individualism, isolation and loneliness' prevail. Nicolet & Tresch (2009, p. 77) similarly identify 'a substantial decline in institutional religion, which refers to people's sense of belonging to the church as an institution.' Newfrontiers' ecclesiology stands in marked opposition to this paradigm: faith in Christ necessitates saturation within an organised and strongly relational community of fellow adherents. The research shall be attentive to both Virgo's idealised commitments to immersive belonging and to Nicolet & Tresch's circumspection of contemporary believers to institutional belonging.

Scott (1997, p. 12) highlights the elision that 'ecclesiology and eschatology are intrinsically linked,' in which the latter influences the former. Virgo's (2007, p. 230) eschatology (framed within his frequently articulated motif of Pauline-justified grace)[53] 'teaches me not to get my roots down too deeply in this temporary scene… I am a visiting alien; my citizenship is elsewhere.' Belonging in these terms thus also comprises a mutually shared divine attribution of kingdom citizenship.

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[53] Drawing on Romans 4:5, Romans 7:3 and Galatians 2:19-20, Virgo (1988a, p. 4) asserts that grace is imparted because Christ 'clothes us with His own righteousness as a gift… He sees us as positively righteous not just at the moment of our conversion but as a permanent arrangement.' See also (Virgo, 1988a), (Virgo, 2007, p. 94), (Smith, 2003, pp. 143-144), (Kay, 2008, pp. 66-67), (Jeffery & Kay, 2018, p. 243), (Jeffery, 2019a, p. 96), (Jeffery, 2022, p. 18).

It bonds adherents to an eschatologically-framed appreciation that together all enjoy a common identity and destiny: that of sojourners rehearsing kingdom values within an ephemeral world awaiting permanent re-creation. All thus share a common vision, purpose and destiny regardless of background. This is because kingdom citizenship is imputed through grace-given salvation: how significant or otherwise citizenship metaphors are in participants' belonging will be considered in both Chapters Three and Four. Furthermore, Virgo's (2003c, p. 3) belonging fuses Christological and pneumatological imperatives:

> God has established a new community on the earth, held together by their common commitment to Christ and their common experience of the Holy Spirit… Our sanctification is only possible in the context of relationships… His people are His dwelling place where He can be found and encountered.

An experiential prerequisite of citizenship is articulated here: that of the person of the Holy Spirit. Virgo's expects that experiences of the Holy Spirit shared across congregants should precipitate a reflex move towards community, (see also Grenz (1999, pp. 45-51) and Godin (1964, pp. 213-214)) and that sanctification is predicated upon the loving and accountable relationships within that community. Indeed, the community is the locus of belonging: belonging not just to one another, but also belonging so evidently to God that his immanent presence can be pneumatologically experienced.

Newfrontiers church-leader Galloway (1999, p. 33)[54] puts it (within the context of small groups) '[w]e pray, we worship, we receive gifts of the Spirit, we are taught, we grow in holiness, we evangelise, we befriend, we care, we serve the community, we reach nations!' Use of the first-person plural is significant: believers' activities and experiences are expected to be communal for them to be truly vivifying. Evangelism, both personal and corporate, is central to such Newfrontiers' activism, built on evangelical convictions noted earlier in this chapter. For example, former Newfrontiers UK leader Stroud (2009) is insistent that, whilst the Genesis 1:28 mandate to fill the earth and subdue it primarily refers to reproductive capacities to bear physical children, it extends as a calling 'give birth to "spiritual children" through evangelism, conforming people to the likeness of Christ through the gospel,' (p. 54). He considers that this should take place individually as well as corporately 'through social action projects and care for the poor,' (p. 54). The role of outreach and evangelism, through such social action, needs investigating as to how it influences current congregants' self-reports of ecclesial belonging. It will be attended to in Chapter Four.

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[54] Appointed Director of the Free Church Track at Cranmer Hall, Durham University in 2020, (Cranmer Hall, Durham, 2020).

Picking up on the energising qualities of activism, Virgo considers the early New Testament church claiming that the closest the world has ever seen of a community expressing a tight belonging to God is embedded within the ecclesiology of Acts 2-4. Virgo (2009, p. 6) asserts that this ecclesiology is 'not referring to a Sunday service, but a recognisable company of people whose lives were extraordinarily inter-related at a profound depth… Their needs became common.'

Generosity of mutual material provision and care is thus a manifest outworking of the pentecostal genesis of the Early Church, rooted in profoundly affective relational bonds. Activism within Virgo's paradigm has both an internal expression (material provision and mutual care) and an external one (evangelism). Appropriate provision necessitates an intimate knowledge of the circumstances of other adherents and a resultant desire to assist with those circumstances. It requires closeness between believers within small groups, therefore. Newfrontiers church-leader Tibbert (2011, loc. 1082) asserts that 'the primary unit of belonging is a particular group within the church — a ministry team or small group… [of] between ten and forty people.' Such units facilitate belonging because other members are well known and thus positioned to be well cared for. The influence of such small groups as a locus of belonging needs to be investigated from congregants' perspectives: it will be a theme that clearly emerges from participants' sense of belonging in Chapter Four.

Furthermore, spiritual empowerment is anticipated specifically within the locus of small groups, which in turn generates superordinate goals of sanctification and evangelism. Newfrontiers' norms of belonging thus constitute a mutually-shared *status* (of kingdom citizenship), a *process* (of sanctification) and a joint-mobilisation towards *activism* (such as evangelism and mutual care).[55] It thus frames belonging within a twin dialectic: that of Being and Becoming.[56] The former comprises the reality of the believer's reconfigured ontological status as a unique citizen, not within an ephemeral world, but within an eternal kingdom. The believer is a new creation: an existential change has occurred through the salvific power of Christ. Walker (2010, p. 12) writes that unresponsive and sin-laden hearts become renewed through spiritual rebirth: '"being born again" (John 3:3), or becoming a "new creation" - if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation… (2 Cor. 5:17).' It is a liberative act in which all new believers attain a common status: that of being free of the judgment of sin, (Jeffery, 2019a, p. 119).[57] However, it is not simply liberation from an old state of entrenched sinfulness, but a liberation towards constant transformation, or sanctification, by virtue of the combined activities of the Holy Spirit and the individual.

For example, Newfrontiers' Mahaney (1994, p. 6) is at pains to expound the difference between God's grace (justification) and alignment with God's will (sanctification). Justification is possible solely through the 'person and finished work of Christ'. However, sanctification is a partnership between the Holy Spirit (after salvific regeneration) and believers' response to His leading. The latter 'will take time and effort to change your lifestyle and habits,' (p. 7). Becoming thus is the intertwining of the Spirit's guidance, and believers' activism in following such leading which occurs in the community of the church. Becoming thus constitutes a constant state of transformation (towards the likeness of Christ, (2 Cor 3:18), (p. 7)) through concerted action in the community of close others. Lifestyle thus cements belonging because it prioritises and engages Becoming. Becoming is communal, and contingent upon the support and encouragement of the church body. Such a Being and Becoming dialectic needs investigation as to how it relates to current congregants' self-reports. It will be considered specifically in later chapters.

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[55] As asserted by Bebbington (1989, p. 1) is a characteristic of evangelicalism.
[56] See also (Stetsenko, 2012, p. 144) – to be discussed in Chapter Five.
[57] Simon Walker is leader of Emmanuel Church, Cardiff: (Emmanuel, 2022).

Furthermore, Newfrontiers' belonging embraces additional commitments: especially that of diversity in which the normative composition of the church members and its constituent groups should represent its community demographics. For example, Shaw[58] considers the need for evangelism by Christians within university campuses and asserts that effective evangelism needs to be rooted through the local church rather than parachurch movements.[59] His reasons are that thousands of students, in his experience, 'are discovering that life becomes all that God intends not through belonging to an organisation of similar-aged people, but only by giving themselves to a people of diversity! Old and young… become the best of friends,' (Shaw, 2006, p. 18). Diversity is thus an expression of profound belonging: belonging enriched because of, not despite, intergenerational differences.

Benham extends diversity in two other areas: socio-economic and ethnoracial.[60] He considers 1 Corinthians 12:12-14 and its expression of diversity across culture and race (Jew/Gentile). The Pauline metaphor of the church as a body illustrates its innately diverse composition whose distinct components constitute a coherently functional and integrated unit. From this, Benham (2012, loc. 2184) asserts his commitment that 'God wants us to build a church… where people from all the different nations and backgrounds within the community mix… without falling out.' Benham (2012, loc. 2184), explains that all believers have a single, unifying identity as citizens of the kingdom of God, and this 'trumps any national identity we have.' Once again, ethnoracial belonging is a consequence of common identity: that of citizens within God's eternal kingdom. It is this consistent kingdom theme that cements mutual belonging, (see also (Holden, 2000, p. 47)).

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[58] Newfrontiers church leader, City Church Canterbury for ten years, (City Church Canterbury, 2020).

[59] See (Virgo, 2007, p. 237) and (Kay, 2016, p. 14) for Newfrontiers' entrenched caution towards parachurch movements, and Tibbert's (2011, loc. 318) more conciliatory stance.

[60] Leader of Kerith Community Church, originating in Bracknell, Berkshire and formerly Bracknell Family Church, (Benham, 2012, loc. 2828). Shaw also sees diversity as transcending boundaries of 'rich and poor,' (p. 18).

Walker (1998, p. 35) was astute when he noted that Restorationists can appropriately be called '"kingdom people" [because it] allows us to go right to the heart of the new [Restorationist] movements,' like Newfrontiers. Multi-ethnoracial congregations are possible and desirable because they unite adherents within common kingdom citizenship. Whilst citizenship comprises a metaphor potentially rich in uniting differing demographics, and one which the author's church also promotes (see Chapter Three), the research will be attentive the degree to which it inspires mutual belonging, or whether it is subverted by more compelling alternatives, such as familial or corporeal ones.

Belonging extends beyond a status conferred by common citizenship, it can also be expressed and reinforced through performative components: congregants' common rites of passage. Believers' baptism by full immersion after affirming a faith in Christ is a requirement of membership (to be discussed shortly) in many Newfrontiers churches.[61] Virgo is unequivocal in his convictions that water baptism is non-negotiable for new believers. He opines that, upon conversion, 'the outward demonstration of response according to Scripture is baptism in water,' (Virgo, 1985, p. 101).

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[61] For the ubiquity of commitment courses across Newfrontiers UK and overseas churches, see for example (Kalderway, 1986, p. 4), (Bell, 1987, p. 7), (Virgo, 1988a, p. 4), (Wilthew, 1989, p. 18), (Coak, 1991, p. 17), (Merrick, 2004, p. 30), (Henson, 2008, p. 10). It is also a requirement of the author's home church.

Failure to do so, within Newfrontiers' ecclesiology, is 'to offer an emaciated gospel devoid of the content so obviously present in the New Testament,' (p. 101). Virgo cites the Apostle Peter's and Ananias' injunctions to Cornelius' cohort in Acts 10:48 and to Saul in Acts 22:16 respectively as normative for contemporary practice. Virgo (1993, p. 6) is consistently adamant that the practice of believers' baptism is fundamental: 'When believers are baptised, they… are joining the community of the King. They are then introduced to a family of believers.'

Baptism is thus a rite of passage into fictive familial belonging within the local church and, for Virgo, it anticipates, confirms and activates such belonging. Furthermore, Virgo goes on to assert that the ecclesial family should comprise 'rich relationships' in which 'Christian brothers and sisters will become closer than any blood relations,' (p. 6). Post-baptism ecclesial siblingship should thus foster relationships exceeding biological ones, Virgo insists. However, the degree to which participants experience such transformed intersibling belonging post-baptism is not known. The fieldwork will thus consider baptismal influences on belonging, as well as the familial dimension of participants' experience and the relative priority of both blood and ecclesial fictive familial bonds.[62]

Other common rites, beyond baptism, are also proposed by Newfrontiers in defining and enacting belonging. Walker (1998, p. 197) points out that joining a Newfrontiers church typically necessitates the undergoing of 'a commitment course.' In particular, Virgo (1985, p. 93) emphasises that new congregants enter 'as disciples of Christ and not simply "churchgoers"… The elders express their desire to love and serve the people and fulfil their role as leaders and the people declare their desire to follow,' to be discipled and built into the body where their gifts may be used to the glory of God.

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[62] For a further description of Newfrontiers' espoused theology of water baptism, see (Haslam, 1993, pp. 18-19), (Partridge, 2009, pp. 26-27).

Commitment is thus expected to be willingly reciprocal: the leaders are to serve the people, and the people are to engage in pro-active discipleship and deployment of their unique gifts as their service to God under leadership guidance. In terms of content, Virgo further explains that membership courses should include clear teaching on Ephesians 4 ministries (a major distinctive of Restorationism),[63] and the centrality of small groups to communal church life, (Virgo, 2007, pp. 102-103). Commitment (or membership) courses within Newfrontiers constitute an attempt to promote consistent group-level belief and comportment as core components of belonging. However, the role of membership courses and their nurturing of mutual care needs attention and it will be revisited in the fieldwork.

Of course, many of Newfrontiers' commitments originate in the 1980s. Therefore, the extent to which these constitute key factors in contemporary Christians' experience of belonging within Newfrontiers ecclesiology will be explored in Chapter Four. The fieldwork of Chapter Four shall identify areas of coherence and disjunction within the lofty ideals articulated by the first-generation of Newfrontiers pioneers, such as Virgo, to determine their contemporary salience, and especially to congregants whose formative ecclesiological influences originate from outside Restorationism generally, and Newfrontiers specifically.

1.8. SUMMARY

Newfrontiers' ethnoracial convictions have been shaped by ecclesiologies originating within its movement but located overseas, notably from Africa. Newfrontiers' ecclesiology is committed to the creation of ethnoracially diverse congregations representative of the demographics of the communities the local church serves. Its convictions are based on Ephesian 2:15 in which the writer speaks of Jews and Gentiles coalescing into a single ecclesial body: Newfrontiers extends this metaphor as signifying the end of division and hostility across all ethnoracial distinctions.

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[63] See (Virgo, 2002a, p. 7), (Aune, 2004, p. 25), (Walker, 1998, p. 40), (Millward, 2003, p. 45), (Robertson, 2015, p. 144), for instance.

As a movement, Newfrontiers emerged contemporaneously with the Charismatic Renewal but distinct from it. It is a derivative of Restorationism which ostensibly eschews denominationalism, promotes the office of contemporary apostleship and embraces pentecostal pneumatological experiences. It is based upon the ministry of its founder, Terry Virgo, whose early influences embraced reformed theology. Some academics argue that his movement demonstrated openness to external influences from established denominations in the UK, especially Baptist, as well as from others outside the UK, such as Vineyard.

Its expectations of belonging include common rites and experiences within the context of kingdom citizenship (such as salvific faith in Jesus Christ, Spirit and water baptisms, and commitment/membership courses). This citizenship is common to all adherents, thus promoting and anticipating diversity – generational, socio-economic and ethnoracial – as central to its ecclesiological commitments. It also views the church as a spiritual family, with fictive siblings potentially experiencing bonds closer than those within biological families. Its use of familial metaphors is broadened also to its church-planting movement, where individual churches are seen as part of a family of churches together on a mission to establish the kingdom of God: intra-leadership relations are also framed using fraternal terminology, whilst emphasising its (possibly waning) commitment to ultimately male leadership.

The latter is posited as exemplifying spiritual 'fathering.' It also embraces a view of believers' belonging within a dialectic of Being and Becoming in which the former comprises the believer's reconfigured ontological status as a unique citizen of an eternal kingdom, the latter a constant state of transformation towards the likeness of Jesus within the locus of the church.

This study is specifically investigating ethnoracially diverse participants' self-reports concerning ecclesial belonging. It will investigate the following: how do participants self-report their own sense of belonging, and which elements do they identify which either promote or hinder such belonging? Within this broad question, it will also consider which metaphors are deployed to frame these self-reports of belonging? For instance, how do, citizenship, corporeal or familial metaphors feature and how do these inspire and explain mutual belonging, and how do these differ across ethnoracial boundaries? In terms of entry into the church, what is the effect of water baptism on ecclesial belonging for participants and observers? Furthermore, what is the influence of leadership on belonging, and which qualities of leadership promote or dilute belonging? How does serving of others within the church and to those outside through evangelism influence belonging? It shall also consider what is the role of ethnoracial background in determining what participants are gaining and losing as they negotiate community life in a diverse ecclesial setting, and how does the balance of these affect belonging? Furthermore, how does an ecclesiology which promotes uniquely male senior leadership shape belonging across male/female delineations?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. INTRODUCTION AND REFLEXIVITY

This thesis is exploring how participants from different ethnoracial backgrounds self-report their own sense of belonging in a church within Newfrontiers, a movement which is committed to the creation of harmonious ethnoracially-diverse congregations within its 'One New Man in Christ,' motif from Ephesians 2:14-15, Jeffery (2019a, p. 52). This project aligns with Practical Theology's instincts and commitments to commence with 'human experience and its desire to reflect theologically on such experience,' (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 9). This Chapter will review the intrinsically diverse nature of Practical Theology, across both theological and methodological commitments, (p. 9).

It shall consider different Practical Theological methodologies (such as those based on derivatives of the pastoral cycle including those from Osmer (2008) and Browning (2005)) but ultimately it will settle upon Pattison's (2005, p. 217) Practical Theological conversational methodology, underpinned by Swinton & Mowatt's (2006) evangelical commitments. This constitutes a 'mutual critical conversation,' (p. 87) in which experience, psychology and theology shall be engaged in a dialogue 'to create the circumstances for transformative action,' especially in terms of harmonious ethnoracial belonging, (p. 13). It will outline the epistemological foundations of this project, namely that of a narratival and critical realist approach to scripture. The latter comprises a normative voice as a guide to what should be happening in the church, augmented by social psychology constituting an interpretive voice explaining why key behaviours related to belonging are occurring. The key academic practical theologians in this chapter shall include Ward (2017a), (2022), Root (2014), Johansen (2022), Tveitereid (2022), Tillich (1951) and Tracy (1975) in considering methodological options, and Cartledge (2003), van Deusen Hunsinger

(1995), NT Wright (2005), Gorman (2009), Barton (2005) and McKnight (1995) in determining engagement with scripture and other knowledge sources.

Furthermore, this chapter shall define the principal methods to be deployed to excavate participants' experiences of belonging. The unique suitability of qualitative methods for this project shall be considered through the views of practical theologians Swinton & Mowat (2006), Ward (2022), Davies (2002), Osmer (2008), Root (2014), Leach (2007), Astley & Francis (2012), alongside social scientists Denscombe (2003) and Robson (1993). It will justify why Dunlop and Ward's (2014) narrated photography was selected and consider ethnoracial sensibilities pertinent to this project, drawing upon counsel from Dr Joel Edwards (2020), former CEO of the Evangelical Alliance.

Of course, my background, my role within my workplace, my faith commitments, the motives which underpin this project, and the potential benefits and drawbacks of my combined role – as employee of the church and researcher – are all significant factors in this project that require reflexive consideration. Davies (2002, p. 4) defines reflexivity as 'a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference ... [mindful of] the ways in which the products of research are affected by the personnel and process of doing research.' It is a process in which we 'write ourselves into the picture' of our research so that biases and emphases are made explicit for both the researcher and reader, (Ward, 2017a, p. 160) (see also (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 59)).

This is because research is inevitably partly autobiographical, (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, pp. 59-60), and so factors such as motives and status require clarification. During the research phase, I was a full-time employed staff member (Executive Pastor) at a Newfrontiers church (the King's Church High Wycombe). I worked for the church in a strategic pastoral role from 2002 to 2024, and during that time I was responsible for a variety of departments: operations (finance, facilities), pastoral (including prayer, spiritual formation, adults' and children's ministries), and outreach (encompassing social action).

I was also a platform presence, anchoring many Sunday and midweek meetings, although I did not preach. Instead, I taught on many of the church's initiatives such as membership, baptism and discipleship courses, and I led and taught at leaders' meetings. As such, I was visible to many in the church, but subordinate to the Senior Pastor, who was responsible for Sunday preaching and ultimate leadership. As will be explained further in Chapter Three, my home church has been immersed in Restorationism, and it became adopted into Newfrontiers in 2007, after what constituted a two year 'courting phase' (Smith, 2003, p. 145): all its incumbent staff members were employed (apart from me and one other) after our adoption into Newfrontiers (KCHW, 2022b) As such, its staff and leaders are heavily influenced by Newfrontiers ecclesiology.

As will become apparent from participants' self-accounts of belonging, my home church is one that has undergone a huge shift in its demographics from predominantly monoracial in the early 2000s to a multi-ethnoracial church within a period of just over a decade: again, this will be discussed more fully in Chapter Three. My experience of this transition has mostly been whilst I have been employed by the church. My view is that we have been irreversibly transformed by such diversity. However, the journey to diversity has also been fraught with misunderstandings, miscommunication and, possibly, non-isomorphic attribution, (Triandis, 1994, p. 182), (Hall, 1990, p. 181). In the latter, two parties attribute different reasons underpinning specific behaviours or outcomes. These shall be discussed more fully in Chapters Five and Seven.

As Newfrontiers leader Tibbert (2011, p. 123) importantly highlights, ethnoracial diversity constitutes a huge leadership challenge because 'I have never been down this path before and have few reference points … most UK churches are established as white majority churches with diverse people coming in after the fact… It brings tension and we have to hold it together.' Thus, whilst there are significant gains richly to be appreciated, they come with concomitant losses and disorientation. Ethnoracial diversity, therefore, can be discerned as a new path lacking precedingly familiar points of reference or guidance.

Consequently, what motivates this study is, as Ward (2017a, p. 22) asserts, 'to know more.' As the church has developed such a diverse demographic, it is reasonable to ask what is going on in the church in terms of the experiences of others as they coalesce across ethnoracial distinctions. This study is rooted in a desire to pause, reflect and then consider praxis so that the Church can be a locus of harmonious multi-ethnoracial worship of Christ. Therefore, the experience of congregants from vastly different backgrounds and cultures within a single ecclesial home needs to be heard, considered and reflected upon to discern the activity of God, and to 'sense the Holy Spirit for our own time and place,' (Ward, 2022, p. 17).

A church is a community which holds the potential for profound mutual belonging, (Godin, 1964, p. 208), (Grenz, 1999, p. 49). Therefore, understanding how people from different ethnoracial backgrounds experience belonging, which elements are salubrious, and which elements detrimental, is pressing. Back to Swinton & Mowat's desire for foregrounding of research aims, mine are this: how church praxis can embrace a wide ethnoracial demographic to enable Jesus to be glorified more fully in the richness of his diverse ecclesial body so that the One New Man in Christ is as united and health-imparting as possible.

Of course, my race and leadership roles are significant: I am a white man, in a diverse leadership team which was nonetheless predominantly white at the time of my research; the visible markers of my own immutable characteristics are impossible to ignore. I was also in leadership throughout the research phase, holding a staff position and a visible platform presence too. These inevitably affect how congregants perceive me as a researcher. How I have attempted to address these, and the concomitant power differentials, will be discussed in the next section. As previously noted, this chapter will review the following: practical theological methodologies to determine how and why the research was structured the way it was within the discipline of Practical Theology, epistemological commitments (including the role of scripture), the structure of this thesis, and an overview of the specifics concerning the design and implementation of the qualitative methods that form the backbone of this study.

2.2. PRACTICAL THEOLOGY, METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS

Chapter One provided an overview of Newfrontiers' specific ecclesiology regarding ethnoracial commitments. From it, the key questions which emerged necessitating research from the participants in this study were summarised at the start of this chapter. This chapter shall consider both the methodology and methods deployed to uncover, examine and critique participants' data to answer those questions. Chapter Three will then consider the unique context of the local church, its overlap with superordinate Newfrontiers' ecclesiological commitments and its specific implementations of those. These are identified to provide context for the participants' lived theology: this is described in Chapter Four.

Chapter Five then considers key theories from social psychology concentrating on interpersonal and group belonging, and intercultural dynamics. It will frame these theories in the context of an overarching theological framework of belonging modelled on an interrelational trinitarian paradigm. Insights from social psychology are provided principally as an interpretive voice to explain why aspects of participants' disclosures of belonging are being manifest, (Osmer, 2008, loc. 88). Chapter Six will then consider some key scholars' views on Pauline familial metaphors, argued to be central to his ecclesiology embracing congregants from diverse ethnic backgrounds, and these will be set within broader scriptural narratives. These are normative in that they should describe what should be occurring within contemporary ecclesial experience, and they are provided to explain, correct and illuminate aspects of participants' experiences and Newfrontiers' theology/ecclesiology, (Osmer, 2008, loc. 88). Chapter Seven will then analyse participants' lived theological data by blending insights from multiple sources into a generative conversation, (Pattison, 2005, p. 217), (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 95ff). These sources comprise superordinate familial norms from scholars' views of Pauline ecclesiology, theories from social psychology (offering principally an interpretative description), and Newfrontiers' ecclesiological commitments. Chapter Eight will then consider how praxis can be refined based on the insights from Chapter Seven, before concluding in the final chapter.

Regarding Chapter Four, and the experiences of participants, these are significant because all practices are meaningful and '*theory-laden*,' challenging any presumption that theory is distinct from practice (Browning, 2005, p. 6) (see also (Tracy, 1983, p. 61), (Bretherton, 2002, p. 150), (Lartey, 2006a, p. 99), (Ward, 2017a, p. 16)). Practices instead are 'the bearers of traditions and histories,' and saturated with implicit and explicit theories, because belief is intrinsically embedded within all practices, (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, pp. 31, 32). Browning (2005, p. 7) advocates a methodology which 'goes from present theory-laden practice to a retrieval of normative theory-laden practice to the creation of more critically held theory-laden practices.' How this will be achieved shall be described later in this chapter.

For Swinton & Mowat, (p. 255) Practical Theology achieves Browning's methodology through a spiralled process of 'thick description' of practice, (see also (Denscombe, 2003, p. 163), (Bretherton, 2002, p. 149)) and its subsequent analysis and critique. Such a description constitutes a process of 'complexification' in which subtleties and nuances emerge to raise 'consciousness to previously hidden dimensions of everyday situations,' which create deeper understandings to refine subsequent praxis, (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 16).

As they note, the process of complexification of such practices is particularly suited to qualitative research, and this was deployed to understand participants' accounts of belonging in this study, (p. 16). Ward (2017a, p. 103) agrees, noting that 'particularly qualitative methods of enquiry are a means to explore situations in a more sustained and structured manner. They offer Practical Theology multi-layered and richly textured accounts of experience,' such as those related to participants' self-reports of ecclesial belonging. Indeed, use of these methods 'allows leaders to deepen their understanding of what is going on in particular episodes, situations, and contexts,' (Osmer, 2008, loc. 504).

Furthermore, qualitative research yields 'a disciplined and structured approach to hearing the voices of individuals and communities who have often been overlooked,' (Ward, 2022, p. 9) through unveiling their lived theology. Embedded within the use of qualitative methods within theology is a commitment that 'attentiveness to practices will equip us better to hear God's Word,' and the contemporary activity of the Holy Spirit, (Ward, 2022, p. 17). Such qualitative tools exemplify the typically interdisciplinary character of Practical Theology, (Ward, 2017a, p. 31), (Root, 2014, p. 268), (Reader, 2008, p. 7), (Lartey, 2006a, p. 132))[64].

Johansen (2022, p. 395) considers two principal components embedded within every qualitative research process. The first is participation, which involves a researcher's interaction with participants, and this often occurs within ecclesial communities with which the researcher may be extremely familiar. The consequence is that researchers carry so much 'preknowledge about our fields of research,' that there is a risk that 'we too soon find what we expect to find,' (Johansen, 2022, p. 395). The counterbalance to such a tendency instead is Johansen's second component of distanciation which constitutes a keeping of 'ourselves at a distance from what we research,' by seeking instead to 'play stranger with the old and familiar and to meet the Bible anew,' (p. 395). A key element in such distanciation embraces the use of 'theories from other scholarly fields… to insist on distancing ourselves from what we already know and expect and thereby to allow surprising insights to dawn,' (pp. 394-5).

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[64] Although the latter deploys the term 'multi-perspectival.'

To facilitate such distanciation, this project embraces theories from social psychology as 'tools' to 'illuminate our understanding of the social realities that we study so we are able to unfold the lived theologies' of ordinary participants, (Johansen, 2022, p. 394) and to facilitate 'deeper insight and knowledge,' (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 84). Consequently, understanding participants' experiences of belonging, and those factors which both promote and hinder it, shall be brought into conversation with the distanciating and illuminating tools provided by theories from social psychology, combined with scholars' perspectives of Pauline familial metaphors.

The aim is to uncover theology disclosed by participants' experience which constitutes 'lived theology.' This is the 'scholarly attempt to bracket and study theology and theologizing shaped by ordinary people's experiences in everyday life,' such as those in the author's church, (Tveitereid, 2022, p. 67). Lived theology, Tveitereid insists, is embedded in a focus on the life of the church, contrasting this with lived religion's proclivity 'towards non-institutional religious practice,' (Tveitereid, 2022, p. 68).[65]

Swinton & Mowat's conversational approach to Practical Theology embraces such disclosure from participants, and it is inherently 'hermeneutical, correlational, critical and theological,' (p. 84). It is hermeneutical because interpretation is central to the way that human beings encounter experience, correlational because it attempts to correlate at multiple levels: the situation, Christian tradition (including scripture) and another source of knowledge such as that drawn from social psychology. Thirdly, it is critical because of sin embedded within 'the reality of human fallenness and the complexity of the forces that shape… our encounters with the world,' (p. 84). Finally, it is theological as Practical Theology engages with 'the unfolding eschatology of the gospel narrative' within the specificities of concrete contexts, (p. 85). They argue that methods deployed in Practical Theology need to hold 'in tension' all these components, (p. 85). It is consequently a work of 'mutual critical correlation,' embracing these different elements, (Pattison, 2005, p. 217), (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 80).

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[65] For differences between lived religion and lived theology, see (Tveitereid, 2022, p. 68), McGuire (2008, p. 4) and Ward (2017a, pp. 56-58).

The roots of this approach emerge from a modified version of Paul Tillich's (1951) method of correlation in which he attempted to correlate questions arising from human cultural experience with answers derived from 'Christian tradition and divine revelation,' (Ward, 2017a, p. 77). Within Tillich's paradigm, the reason and experience expressed in concrete situations 'provide us with questions which we need to address to Christian scripture and tradition,' (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 84). It was committed to the principle that theology both formulates the questions from human experience as well as the answers 'implied in human existence,' (Tillich, 1951, p. 61) (cited in (Ward, 2017a, p. 78)).

Tillich's model was a unidirectional one of application of Christian truth sources to situations without permitting the latter to 'question particular interpretations of that truth,' (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 86). Ward (2017a, p. 80) points out that Tillich's approach was then developed by Tracy into a '*mutually* correlative and critical' model which no longer limited the questions to those from human experience but also the emergent answers. He considered there to be two sources of theology '"common human experience" and "Christian texts,"' (Tracy, 1975, p. 45). Therefore, for the situation to be given serious consideration, in his view, then 'its answers to its own questions must also be investigated critically,' within a mutually critical approach, (p. 46).

Pattison (2005, p. 217) develops this correlative approach to Practical Theology as comprising a 'conversation' in which 'religious belief, tradition and practice meets contemporary experiences, questions and actions and conducts a dialogue that is intellectually critical and practically transforming.' His preferred image of Practical Theology[66] comprises a 'critical, creative conversation' between the researcher's ideas, beliefs, feelings and assumptions, those arising from the Christian community and tradition, and the 'contemporary situation… which is under consideration,' (p. 230). Ward (2017a, p. 82) notes that Pattison's view of dialogue is one which builds upon correlation 'but it is not constructed as a particular method': it instead 'resists the development of an abstract series of tasks or moves,' (p. 82) such as various derivatives of the pastoral cycle, to be discussed shortly.

Such a correlative conversation instead moves away from a specific method to a more fluid or 'organic element in the live practice of faith,' within the Church, (p. 82). The motif of conversations means they are inherently unique in content and structure, and thus do not 'proceed in a straightforward direction,' or according to a prescribed flow or methodology, (Pattison, 2005, p. 230). Instead, such an intentional conversational approach facilitates 'a flexible and fluid form of theologizing,' (Ward, 2017a, p. 82).

Pattison's approach contrasts with other methodologies which prescribe a sequenced order of moves through which a project should transition, (Ward, 2017a, p. 79). For example, Browning (2005, p. 47) argues that his fundamental practical theology comprises four sub-movements: '*descriptive theology, historical theology, systematic theology*, and *strategic practical theology*,' (Browning, 2005, p. 8) within a telos of attempting to answer for Christian communities: 'What should we do? and How should we live?,' (p. 10). Different forms of the pastoral cycle are developed by other practitioners such as Ballard & Pritchard (1996), van der Ven (1993), and Osmer (2008).[67]

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[66] He terms it 'pastoral theology,' (Pattison, 2005, p. 219).

The latter considers four key movements for the investigation of praxis. These are framed as discrete tasks: the descriptive-empirical, the interpretive, the normative and the pragmatic, (loc. 88). These can be summarised respectively within the following questions: what is going on, why is this going on, what should be going on, how might we respond, (loc. 92)? Whilst these moves are distinct, Osmer also recognises that 'the four tasks of practical theological interpretation interpenetrate,' (loc. 182). The interpenetrative character of his methodology, and the significance of the four differentiated movements therein, shall be reconsidered shortly.

Limitations of the pastoral cycle derivatives are considered by Ward (2017a, pp. 100-102) (drawing on (Schön, 1983, p. 61) and (Cahalan & Nieman, 2008, pp. 84-85)) who notes that its 'orientation towards tension and conflict' (with its foundations in the 'social theory of Karl Marx') precipitates significant drawbacks. Indeed, this project is seeking to explore what promotes and hinders belonging in a multi-ethnoracial context in which there are moments of jarring disjunction combined with ones of genuine celebration. The balance of these is dependent entirely upon participants' emergent data. Second, the method has a proclivity to becoming overly 'programmatic,' (p. 101) and to 'dislocate theological reflection,' (p. 102) by synthetically siloing it into a contained sub-movement. In fact, the actual connection between action and theology, practice and theory, is a constant flow of interaction, (p. 101) in which no moments within it 'are theologically neutral,' (p. 102).

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[67] Osmer makes 'no claim to originality' of his structure which is a derivative of other similar staged approaches, (loc. 97). For a 'multi-perspectival' five stage process, see (Lartey, 2006b, pp. 131-133).

Pattison's model of creative, critical conversation embraces this less programmatic and more fluid interplay. Furthermore, it embraces the 'insights and practices of other occupations and academic disciplines' to inform ministry, (Pattison, 2005, p. 223) whilst mindful of the latter's proclivity to purge out the unique 'saltiness' of the theological voice. This project injects insights from social psychology to inform understanding of generic belonging whilst seeking to apply such knowledge appropriately to an ecclesial setting.

The correlation between these disparate disciplines therefore needs consideration in terms of the validity and boundaries of their interaction. Swinton & Mowat (2006, p. 87) note from Pattison's mutual critical conversation that the interplay between the Christian tradition and the social sciences is necessarily 'open and "dangerous."' This is partly because a conversation constitutes an environment of 'open dialogue' which 'genuinely seeks after truth, respecting the perspectives' of other disciplines, (pp. 88-90). This dialogue is intended to 'challenge both ecclesial practice and theological understandings,' (p. 90). This is because both qualitative research and theology 'carry in them an epistemological force,' but with the latter uniquely aligning itself 'with notions of revelation and rationality,' (Ward, 2022, p. 7). The issue of epistemological priority and the relative authority given to different forms of knowledge comprising qualitative methods, social psychology and theology require clarification thereby. As noted, this project engages four voices within its 'conversation': lived theology disclosed via qualitative methods, social psychology, Newfrontiers' espoused theology on its unifying 'One New Man in Christ' motif and scholars' views on Pauline familial metaphors.

The first two, according to evangelical epistemology, comprise 'a system of knowledge created by humans' and, whilst important, are subordinate to revelatory forms of theology 'that claim[] to be given by God,' (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 91). Contentions around epistemological priority are 'marked by the trenches and bunkers… between liberal and conservative forms of theology,' Ward (2022, p. 11) in which the first sees 'human experience as a site for theological knowledge.' Conversely, conservative theology tends to prioritise 'doctrine and proposition truth,' and thus the suggestion that qualitative research might evince knowledge of God is 'anathema or only acceptable if contained by a clearly defined correlational demarcation,' (p. 11).

Qualitative research and theology's 'uneasy relationship' is further complicated by 'what is meant by the term "theology,"' (p. 12). Ward argues that qualitative methods evince 'the embodied and cultural forms that make up theology in lived communities,' (p. 12). He also asserts that doctrinally informed theology rooted in scripture and revelation 'point[s] toward divine agency in the Church and in wider society,' (p. 12). Consequently, it is the role of qualitative research to be a medium through which to discern such divine agency because it is motivated by a conviction that such an undertaking takes such 'claims of doctrinally constructed theology at their word,' (p. 12). This process of discernment occurs because of such doctrinal commitments which precipitate 'prior faith in the Holy Spirit, and the possibility of discerning that Spirit' through qualitative research, (Watkins, 2022, p. 23).

Discernment of the Holy Spirit's activity thus requires an external and normative voice. Within reformed theology, this normative voice is scripture because every 'conceivable experience which the Christian may have to face has already been met and dealt with somewhere in the Scriptures,' (Sargent, 2011, p. 111) (citing reformed theologian Lloyd-Jones). Consequently, whilst the voice of lived theology has the potential to unveil the contemporary activity of God within the locus of the church and to correct, critique or illuminate aspects of Newfrontiers doctrine, lived theology has to be subordinated to scripture. Otherwise, as Swinton & Mowat (2006, p. 91) argue, 'the danger of idolatry becomes a real possibility,' because a system of knowledge created by humans cannot override a system of knowledge from scripture that ‘claims to be given by God,’ (p. 91). Furthermore, praxis *per se* ‘is insufficient basis upon which to know God and achieve human transformation. Any action-reflection may become distorted and self-serving,’ (Cartledge, 2003, pp. 46-47) owing to the potential but existential tendency for sin (see also (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 10)). Consequently, Cartledge argues (see also Newfrontiers theologian Ryland (2008)), this necessitates an external authority beyond the self, namely that of scripture.

Swinton & Mowat (2006, pp. 91-97) propose a paradigm which asserts this epistemological hierarchy, drawing on Reformed theologian Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger (1995) who, in turn, embraces the theology of Karl Barth, (p. 91). In the latter, van Deusen Hunsinger considers Barth’s interpretation of Christ’s human and divine natures debated at the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451.[68] In this, both natures were considered related ‘without confusion or change… but with conceptual priority assigned to the divine over the human nature,’ (van Deusen Hunsinger, 1995, p. 63). She then applies this Chalcedonian principle within Practical Theology to the relative positions of theology and psychology (and, by extension, the broader social sciences).

Epistemological priority is given to theology which ‘can identify itself with psychology, but psychology does not have the power to identify itself with theology,’ (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 91) (citing Barth). This is because social sciences are blind to ‘the meaning of life, the nature of God, cross, resurrection or the purpose of the universe,’ (p. 97) as unveiled by scriptural revelation. Swinton & Mowat reconsider van Deusen Hunsinger’s position in order to ensure that ‘Christian practice is in correspondence to the event of God’s self-communication,’ and hence the gospel as communicated in and through the purpose, person and mission of Christ, (p. 97). They assert that, even though theology is ascribed ultimate conversational priority, it is ‘not inconsistent to suggest that… theology can be… the subject of critical reflection and challenge,' (p. 97) through consideration of other disciplines' perspectives.

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[68] See also (Root, 2014, p. 277f).

To maintain the twin boundaries of appropriate epistemological priority and challenge, they propose three key components which should constitute mutual critical dialogue. The first is *hospitality* in which a subordinate discipline is welcomed so it can be 'heard, respected and taken seriously': however, this is done without insistence that theology must capitulate to the guest discipline's perspectives, consistent with van Deusen Hunsinger's epistemological boundaries, (p. 98). The second component is that of *conversion*. Within this paradigm, qualitative research is converted from one which lacks 'a specific telos or goal,' to one where it is 'grafted into God's *redemptive* intentions for the world,' and to the restoration of relationship between God and mankind, (p. 98). This conversion reconfigures the other discipline to recognise 'the reality of God… [so that] certain dimensions of the one converted are deeply challenged and changed,' (p. 99).

Swinton & Mowat's final ingredient is that of *critical faithfulness*. By this, they intend that the 'divine givenness of scripture,' whose interpretation is a grace of the Holy Spirit, and the critical process of understanding revelation embedded therein, has a telos of the 'faithful practices of individuals and communities,' (p. 100) respecting the commitments of such faithfulness embedded within traditions. Truth thus is 'dialectic [e]merging from committed, critical dialogue between these situations, Christian tradition and the knowledge we gain, inter alia, through the use of qualitative research methods,' (p. 100).[69] Whilst Scriptural commitments to redemption are ultimate, the use of other disciplines can precipitate richer insights into what Scripture discloses about the redemptive inter-relation between God and mankind through the deployment of empirical methods.[70]

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[69] For a specifically Newfrontiers perspective on the epistemological interplay between empirical enquiry and biblical priority, see (Ryland, 2008, pp. 23-28) who insists that the former (wisdom/law) is the prerogative of all humanity to discern, but the latter (ultimate salvific redemption) is unique to followers of Christ, in which both are required. He asserts that the 'Christian's wonder at the revelation of God's saving acts does not preclude God's people from making use of the wisdom lens also,' (pp. 25-26).

The mutual critical conversation partners include participants' qualitative data (their lived theology) and the discipline of social psychology. As noted earlier by Swinton and Mowat (2006, p. 98), they will be offered *hospitality* within the conversation of this project as a guest to be 'heard, respected and taken seriously.' They also need appropriate *conversion* whereby a convergence with the telos of higher order theological perspectives can be facilitated: how this is done for social psychology through a trinitarian paradigm of *Being* and *Becoming* will be explained in Chapter Five. This conversion is to resist the allure of 'naïve eclecticism,' (Root, 2014, p. 298 footnote 2) (quoting Osmer) in which theories from other disciplines are deployed in a 'haphazard fashion without any consideration of how they are appropriately related to one another,' (Osmer, 2008, loc. 1428).

Watts (2010, p. 201) considers the role of psychology noting that it assists theologians in telling 'how God's *redemption* of us has made itself known to the most secret places of our being,' (my italics) through a mutual dialogue as psychology reveals aspects of the profundity of the human psyche made in God's image and God's redemptive activity therein. Theologian/psychologist Bryan (2016, p. 135) considers the overlaps and distinctions between theological and psychological commitments to loving relationships, noting: 'Both psychology and theology affirm the centrality of love for human fulfilment and satisfaction in life, but approach it in contrasting ways.' She notes that both disciplines assert that love is found in relational attachments and mutual belonging: in Christian theology these founded upon a 'commitment to follow Jesus,' (p. 135). However, within social psychology, 'interest in love derives from an analysis of relationships… It measures the outcomes of attachment relationships, identifies what factors determine whether a relationship is enduring and contributes positively to our well-being,' (p. 135).

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[70] See also (Cartledge, 2003, pp. 14-16), (Root, 2014, p. 277ff) for the complexity of the interplay between, and prioritisation of, theology and empirical enquiry.

This project is similarly concerned with the factors which facilitate enduring relationships and commensurate belonging, both redemptively to the divine and to others in a richly diverse ethnoracial context. As such, social psychology shall be invited into the conversation as an interpretive and explanatory partner, but one which needs appropriate conversion and theological alignment. Notwithstanding, the superordinate voice in the conversation is that of theology. The dominant motif which emerged from participants' data was that of conceptualising belonging within familial metaphors, such as spiritual siblings and parents. Consequently, the theological perspective will be shaped around academic voices considering Pauline familial motifs. The lived theology disclosed by participants comprises a narration of the experience of God. Central to the interpretation of such experiences, Cartledge (2003, p. 49) asserts, are the Christian scriptures. These are ascribed authority, not as an abstracted and distant source, but because their veracity is reinforced by the experience of practice:

> For Pentecostals ... belief in the authority of scripture is not determined by cognitive constructs alone, rather it is greatly determined by the Pentecostal's immediate experiences of God in, and through the text. Pentecostal experience informs one's understanding of the text; yet the text testifies of the same experiences among the early church and the apostles.

As noted earlier in terms of Lloyd-Jones' conviction that scripture anticipates and describes the whole gamut of Christian experience, (Sargent, 2011, p. 111) a correspondence between the experience from 'within' the contemporary church with that of the early church, Cartledge contends, (p. 53) should thus emerge. Scripture thus constitutes 'an epistemological framework for understanding the experiences we've had with reality (with God)… because it faithfully witnesses in its epistemological operation to the being and act of God,' (Root, 2014, p. 228). Consequently, scripture is the authoritative voice to comprehend, critique, and correct participants' lived theology which should retain pneumatological consistency with the witness of the bible.

It is thus normative in that it should describe what **should** be occurring within contemporary experience. In that sense it corresponds to Osmer's (2008, loc. 92) normative movement within his pastoral cycle, drawing on 'theological concepts to interpret particular episodes, situations, or contexts, constructing ethical norms to guide our responses.' Meanwhile, the lived theology of participants' experiences corresponds to his descriptive-empirical task of gathering data that 'helps us discern patterns and dynamics' in a specific context, namely that of belonging in a multi-ethnoracial church. It is addressing the query of 'what is going on?' The deployment of social psychology assists in his interpretative task 'drawing upon theories of the arts and sciences to better understand and explain why these patterns and dynamics are occurring,' principally answering his question of 'why is this going on?' (Osmer, 2008, loc. 92). Social psychology is thus deployed as an 'epistemological force' of description of **why** the lived theology is being experienced the way it is, (Ward, 2022, p. 7). Of course, as noted earlier, such a taxonomy constitutes a simplification of epistemological interaction, with each movement to some extent interpenetrating the others. For instance, the normative epistemological force of scripture does not silo it to a role solely of prescribing ecclesial norms; it also carries with it a descriptive force useful in analysing participants' disclosures. Notwithstanding, scripture remains normative for ultimately determining what should be occurring within ecclesial contexts.

Of course, what constitutes appropriate engagement with the Bible when considering the metaphor of 'church as family' also requires clarification. For example, even within evangelicalism, (to which Newfrontiers is theologically wedded, (Virgo, 2007, p. 223), (Jeffery, 2019b, pp. 156-7), (Aune, 2004, p. 34)) ‘no one way of using the Bible in theology is likely to be agreed upon,’ (Walton, 2003, p. 135). Walton’s assertion is that engagement with the bible is inextricably linked to specific theological and ecclesiological convictions embedded within traditions. Consequently, the method of engagement with the bible as a normative source needs to be intentional and explicit.

As noted earlier, interpretation and application of biblical texts to contemporary contexts is epistemologically contentious, dividing across evangelical and liberal polarities, with the former foregrounding doctrine above experience and the latter transposing such priorities, (Ward, 2017a, p. 5). Regarding the liberal position, for example, feminist convictions regard the Bible as ‘pervasively hierarchical and patriarchal’ and ‘anachronistic’ in its validation of, for instance, intersex and intrasex engagement, (Barton, 2005, pp. 20, 34).[71] Feminist theologian Graham (1996, p. 197), for example, is unequivocal: ‘not even the canon of Scripture thus inspired is definitive for all time... Inasmuch as gender equality and feminist transformation are normative… Scripture is itself judged according to its conformity,’ and its authority subverted beneath a contemporary-framed feminist liberative paradigm, (see also Schüssler Fiorenza (1993, p. 127) and Ward (2022, p. 10)).

Furthermore, postmodern criticism of Biblical texts foregrounds scepticism concerning latent power agendas purportedly embedded within them, (Schüssler Fiorenza, 2021, p. 110), (Graham, 1996, p. 3) (Ward, 2017a, p. 150).[72] For instance, within feminist commitments, any theory which does not explicitly consider ‘the multiplicative interlocking structures of wo/men’s oppression,’ is foreclosed, (p. 116). Therefore biblical ‘texts of terror’ used to perpetuate and justify hegemonic subjugation of women are proscribed, (Wright, 2005, p. 71), (Graham, 1996, p. 196).

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[71] Although Schüssler Fiorenza (2021, p. 112) takes a more intersectional and nuanced view of oppression extending patriarchy into *kyriarchy*. The latter recognises ‘the multiple interlocking structures of wo/men’s oppression’ (p. 115), and it includes ‘marginalized and subordinated men,’ (Footnote 1, p. 109) subjugated by ‘the lord-master-elite male,’ (p. 127).

[72] For tensions between feminism and postmodernism, see (Graham, 1996, pp. 14-15).

Such commitments would eliminate much of the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline corpus,[73] including Ephesians and Colossians, as normative owing to the perceived 'patriarchy of the household codes,' (Wright, 2005, p. 74) (see also (Barton, 2005, pp. 43-44), (Graham, 1996, p. 190f)).[74] [75]

Conversely, theologian Wright defaults antithetically to 'fundamental trust in and consent to the text,' (Gorman, 2009, p. 20) in which 'a narratival and critical realist reading of scripture' provides a route out of what he considers to constitute a 'postmodern morass' (Wright, 2005, p. 74). Instead, he reverts to the reformers' emphasis on the 'literal sense' of scripture. He maintains that this is not in any way an uncritical and naïve literal hermeneutic of 'taking everything literally' but a literal *critique* in a twofold sense, (p. 97). First, exegeting the text diligently to discern what the original writers intended the text to mean, whilst, second, being alert and sensitive to the genre of the text – for instance, recognizing a parable as anecdote not fact, (p. 97) (see also (Wright, pp. 10, 135)). Furthermore, for Wright, honouring the following additional elements constitute key components for respecting the authority of scripture: biblical chronological narrative, consideration of the *entire* text, and attention to both tradition and contemporary scholarship, (p. 97).

Additionally, Barton (2005, p. 61) pleads the case for approaching the bible as a single book, and to avoid its becoming 'fractured and fragmented … into many isolated or even opposing parts,' which he regards as ultimately 'reductionist.' Whilst this project will draw principally upon Pauline familial metaphors, it will situate them within the broader canon of scripture. It will correlate Pauline familial metaphors with overlapping Gospel accounts and pre-existing Old Testament narratives (including those regarding familial themes, intergenerationality and adoption), attempting to honour the biblical chronological narrative, consistent with Barton's and Wright's exhortations.

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[73] What constitutes the Pauline corpus and what is Deutero-Pauline are contested. See, for example, (Petersen, 1985, pp. 32-33), (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 3), (Bartchy, 1999, p. 70), (Meeks, 2003, p. 92), (Atkins, 1991, p. 171), (Heim, 2017, p. 1) who rule out Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus from the genuine Pauline corpus, but instead as later developments aligned with aspects of preceding Pauline teaching. Authors, such as (Scott, 1992, pp. xiii, 269), (Lyall, 1969, p. 458) and (Burke, 2006, p. 21) embrace others, such as Ephesians. For instance, Garner (2016, p. 58) is insistent that 'myriad data afford persuasive evidence to uphold the authenticity of Ephesians,' as authored by Paul. See also (Banks, 1980, pp. 11-12). The Pauline and Deutero-Pauline corpus shall be abbreviated to Pauline corpus for brevity, acknowledging the contentions noted above.

[74] See also (Pattison, 2005, pp. 109-114) for further objections including cultural distance between biblical authors and contemporary contexts, and Reddie (2012, loc. 1419).

[75] Barton (2005, p. 249) wisely counterbalances his criticism of feminism/postmodernism noting that historic application of Biblical texts 'confronts us with performances which are depraved and appalling, as liberation and feminist theologies have helped us to see.'

Scriptural interpretation comprises an exercise in 'historical work so we can discern what the text meant' to original recipients, unencumbered by contemporary sensibilities, whilst comparing both antiquitarian and contemporary social worlds, (McKnight, 1995, p. 209). The intention behind theological analysis, therefore, is to discern the 'contemporary relevance' and thus application of any text, (Fee & Stuart, 2003, p. loc 490) (see also (McKnight, 1995, p. 19)).[76]

Such an undertaking, Gorman insists, requires a fusing of 'two horizons' of the biblical text itself, and the contemporary context, (Gorman, 2009, pp. 27, 159). It is a form of 'double listening,' both to the ancient Word and the modern world, (Stott, 1992, p. 13). The aim is that individuals and churches authentically apply enduring and normative Biblical paradigms, such as fictive familial interactions, to present-day contexts, (Gorman, 2009, p. 154) so that the community becomes authentic to 'the text it reads,' (Gorman, 2009, p. 163). This requires a justifiable linkage between 'what it meant' (textual meaning) and 'what it means' (textual significance), (Gorman, 2009, p. 159).

Reflexivity is central to the following analysis: as Barton (2005, p. 116) notes, scholarly reconstructions are inextricably dependent upon 'the hermeneutical presuppositions of the interpreter.' The following analysis derives from critical realist, evangelical commitments, embraced also by (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 37), (Root, 2014, p. 226), (Cartledge, 2003, p. 44), (Davies, 2007, p. 90), (Wright, 2005, p.

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[76] Which Fee & Stuart consider to be embedded within a narrow sense of 'hermeneutics' which also embraces exegesis, (p. loc 490).

74), (Middleton & Walsh, 1995, p. 167). It is confident in scripture's ability to guide contemporary Church praxis within such an evangelical paradigm.

How academics' insights on Pauline familial metaphors and associated ecclesiology are considered will be addressed in Chapters Six and Seven. However, these will draw upon participants' emergent data derived from the descriptive-empirical component of this project, (Osmer, 2008, loc. 88): namely the data participants shared about their own experiences of belonging in a multi-ethnoracial ecclesial context. As Osmer (2008, loc. 729) asserts, the empirical is designed to be a 'form of formal attending… to others in their particularity and otherness in a systematic and disciplined way.' It is an attempt to honour the richness of others' experiences and insights; how the research was structured to achieve this will be discussed next.

2.3. DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

This thesis is exploring how participants from different ethnoracial backgrounds self-report their own sense of belonging in a Newfrontiers church. It is considering the following: which elements do participants identify as promoting or hindering such ecclesial belonging? Within this overarching theme, it will also investigate which metaphors are deployed to frame these self-reports of belonging? For instance, how do, citizenship, corporeal or familial metaphors feature and how do these inspire and explain mutual belonging, and how do these change across ethnoracial boundaries? In terms of entry into the church, what is the consequence of water baptism on ecclesial belonging for participants and observers? Furthermore, what is the influence of leadership on belonging, and which qualities of leadership promote or dilute belonging? How does serving of others within the church and to those outside through evangelism shape belonging? It shall further consider: what is the role of ethnoracial background in determining what participants are gaining and losing as they negotiate community life in a diverse ecclesial setting, and how does the balance of these affect belonging? Furthermore, how does an ecclesiology which promotes uniquely male senior leadership influence belonging across male/female delineations?

This section shall outline how and why the researched church was chosen, the rationale for the qualitative methods deployed, how the participants were selected, and how the data were collected and then analysed. It shall also outline the options considered for data collection, and how power differentials of the researcher were mitigated.

I considered performing this research in churches not my own, but two reasons mitigated against this. The first was that lockdowns in 2020 and 2021 meant that researching in other churches was uncertain and hazardous owing to changing restrictions and caution from participants to engage with people from outside their restrictive 'bubbles,' (IfG, 2021). The second was that my own church afforded me much freedom: I was known to many potential participants, and organising focus groups could be expediently facilitated. I could also do these in-person or online, depending upon unforeseen changes through externally-imposed circumstances, without having to mobilise a cumbersome bureaucracy. Furthermore, I was familiar with the culture of the church, its internal lexicon, its structures and the richness and complexities of the pastoral histories of many of those being interviewed.

The qualitative methods deployed in this project include an assessment of the church's literature, website, courses (for example, membership, baptisms, discipleship), small groups, worship meetings (Sundays and midweek), outreach initiatives, as well as specific engagements with participants in focus groups and follow-up semi-structured interviews. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Terry Virgo (Newfrontiers' founder), Joel Edwards (former CEO of the Evangelical Alliance), and the King's Church's senior leader.

Prior to engaging in this research, I was aware of my role as a male, white leader. Furthermore, engaging with diverse groups to discover their experiences of belonging necessitated considerable sensitivity on two levels: the structure and format of such research, and my perceived influence within that context. To navigate these, I consulted three principal sources. The first were black researchers (one male, one female) familiar with my project, my position and with their own personal experience of being in an ethnoracial minority in British churches. The second was literature and practices which engaged specifically with research methods to empower minorities. The third was literature related to qualitative praxis.

Regarding the first, one of the black researchers was a former church member and friend of mine from my church who had left to relocate to another part of Europe.[77] Her advice was specific: to position myself as a 'learner' in which I foreground my desire to hear and learn from participants, (see Ward (2017a, p. 112)). She explained that minorities could feel misunderstood or not heard by majorities and by leaders, and she advised that a learner-researcher should be welcomed by many potential participants.

My second mentor was Dr Joel Edwards, former CEO of the Evangelical Alliance, (Lee, 2021) who was also a fellow doctoral student at the university. I also conducted an interview with Edwards in which he provided counsel. Edwards (2020) encouraged me to take a strongly listening response to participants, and to check my understanding with what is articulated, first with the original participant(s), but also with others from different generations, mainly because different generations have different perceptions of power differentials:

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[77] Her identity will remain anonymous. I confirmed with her that she is happy to be referred to as black, and that this is a non-pejorative epithet that she applies to herself, independently of this study.

> My generation [Boomers] is less sensitised by issues of intersectionality,[78] language of rights, identity politics, so there is a sense in which the politicisation of relationships has become a new hermeneutical approach in the last 25 years.

The potentially different responses of generations, Edwards suggested, was due partly to education and awareness. The younger generations were more likely to see the world through a politicised view of power dynamics, thus constituting a different hermeneutic from preceding age groups, he argued. Therefore, the creation of a multi-generational set of participants in which the influences of different backgrounds could be checked against each other was built into those invited to the focus groups. The issue of power dynamics and power differentials (see also (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 174), (Davies, 2002, pp. 98, 108), (Ward, 2022, p. 17), (Osmer, 2008, loc. 362)) was also discussed. Edwards (2020) was clear:

> The presentation of the one who is a learner is important… You are not trying to say, "I'm one of yous lot, just white." Neither are you disowning your privileged position, neither are you debunking it, and you are not coming from a posture of guilt, immobilised by guilt… I think that personal posture – the one of the servant, the one of the learner – becomes irresistible to anybody who experiences "otherness."

Edwards' injunction to acknowledge my leadership status but blend it with a servant/learner posture was one I took very seriously. It will be discussed a little later in terms of the design of the format of the focus group, and the approach taken with the participants in preparing them. Finally, Edwards encouraged careful consideration of the nature of the engagement between focus group participants and the process of research, and specifically to be cautious about reliance on 'shorttermism.' He explained that the conversation should constitute more than 'a conversation of convenience… [or] a pragmatic conversation,' (Edwards, 2020). Instead, he was clear that it should be transformative, in which participants could be followed up for more in-depth checking of points raised in the focus groups, as well as ones absent, to create the environment of deeper 'engagement and commitment.' These exhortations were also incorporated into the design of the research.

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[78] For an overview of the origin of intersectionality, see Crenshaw (1989, p. 140). She argues that the intersection of race and sex in which black women experience unique discrimination in the workplace occurs specifically because of compounded marginalisation. She asserts that 'any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated.' For a Newfrontiers perspective on the Christian origins underpinning such sensibilities to intersectionality, see (Wilson, 2020).

The longitudinal element of the research was helpful for following up participants and clarifying and complexifying points that they had raised in their respective focus group. However, it was also useful to determine changes over time in participants' self-reports of belonging and the reasons underpinning these. It was noticeable that self-reports of belonging were mutable and not fixed.

Of course, my role as pastoral leader makes my status unique: I am in some sense simultaneously an 'insider' and 'outsider,' not an average congregant by virtue of my leadership status. This also means careful attention to power differentials, as Edwards (2020) exhorted earlier. Also, contrasts and disjunctions which may be observable to 'full' outsiders (those who are not familiar with Newfrontiers/Restorationism and my home church's nested and implicit cultures) may be less apparent to me, (Denscombe, 2003, p. 80). Notwithstanding, bringing my own 'pre-understandings to the research situation does not necessarily discount the possibility of discovering knowledge. Indeed, such prejudices are the necessary context for the movement towards knowledge,' (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 169). It is partly as an insider, immersed in the complexities of my context, that I attempt this research. The outsider element is engineered via the structured nature of the research and the use of focus groups and interviews which constitute 'a disciplined way of attending to others,' (Osmer, 2008, loc. 794) and, as noted in the previous section, distanciation provided by analysis deploying theories from other scholarly fields, (Johansen, 2022, pp. 394-5).

In summary, the research needed to accommodate my power differential, my familiarity with my own church, and to empower participants to express themselves freely in terms of their experiences of belonging – both positive and negative. It also required attention to hear the contributions of different generations and socio-economic backgrounds, and to do so over an extended period to facilitate a generative conversation. The first two components will be considered now: power differential and the empowerment of participants.

A variety of options was considered to garner participants' knowledge of belonging: questionnaires, surveys, focus groups, interviews (structured and semi-structured) and participant observation, (see (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 54ff), (Denscombe, 2003, p. 234)). Two principal techniques were ultimately deployed: focus groups and semi-structured follow-up interviews. However, careful construction of my role within the focus group, and the method of knowledge disclosure from participants within the focus group, were important. Research based on semi-structured interviews (one-to-one and group-based) has developed into an 'important form of qualitative research,' mainly because respondents are 'encouraged to expand on a response, or digress… and introduce their own concerns,' (Davies, 2007, p. 106).

Such expansion, digression and idiosyncratic identification of concerns or issues were very important to the explorative nature of this research, and thus interviews comprised the principal sources of participant data for this project. Furthermore, interviews constitute a research practice that simultaneously allows 'the inquirer to understand what the individuals and groups are doing, saying and meaning about a particular situation,' (Mowat, 2022, p. 386). They are a 'flexible and adaptable way' of engagement permitting flexibility according to emergent data and themes, (Robson, 1993, p. 229) which welcome 'new directions and opportunities as they come,' (Root, 2014, p. 39).

The interviews were both group-based (focus groups) and dyadic (follow-up interviews).[79] Regarding group-based interviews, these facilitate an environment which is 'particularly helpful when working with people… who may be reluctant to talk freely when alone with the researcher,' (Davies, 2007, p. 116). Furthermore, focus groups are more conducive to permitting 'group discussion to develop its own dynamic and pursue topics as they arise and capture the interest of the group,' (Davies, 2007, p. 117) and to follow agendas of specific interest to the participants.

However, as Davies (2007, p. 117) also notes, such group-based work can create group-based consensus in which individuals may 'refrain from saying things they might say in a one-to-one interview.' Conversely, group-based interviews can trigger responses which polarise some participants who may subsequently 'present more extreme views than they would in an individual conversation,' (p. 117). Consequently, both group and dyadic interview methods were deployed to mitigate against these twin risks of synthetic consensus or polarisation.

As Denscombe (2003, p. 164) points out, interviews are especially important when 'the researcher wishes to investigate emotions, experiences and feelings rather than more straightforward factual matters,' because the former cannot be summarised briefly (for instance, deploying quantitative methods such as questionnaires) because they require expansion and elucidation. Furthermore, interviews 'provide evidence of the human heart which is anecdotal, intuitive, *and* systematic,' (Mowat, 2022, p. 384) and central to participants' abilities to expressing belonging.

As noted, whilst group-based interviews have their own strengths, dyadic interviews were used to supplement and expand data from the focus groups. Mowat (2022, p. 389) notes that theological inquiry about aspects of faith 'is well-suited to the face-to- face interview. In depth discussion with a willing participant yields the most authentic data possible,' with the proviso that participants can change their minds, or their life circumstances can change too which can influence disclosure. Consequently, disclosed data are 'always provisional and dynamic,' in which a 'planned return to the respondent for follow-up' facilitates opportunities for deeper understanding, (p. 389). As noted previously, follow-up interviews afforded an opportunity to elucidate or expound points made in the focus groups, as well as to inquire about new lines of inquiry. Furthermore, they were used to test how the absence, re-introduction or withdrawal of key elements of belonging which emerged in the focus groups could reconfigure belonging.

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[79] On four occasions, the follow-up interviews involved two interviewees (always close relatives) and the researcher.

The group-based interviews (focus groups) deployed narrated photography in which participants portrayed personal conceptions through images they have previously selected, (Dunlop & Ward, 2014). Through interviews and focus groups, the participant articulates a narrative embedded within the images. Importantly, narrated photography transforms that which is subjective into a medium 'that is perceptible, thus making the intuited concrete and open for study,' (p. 31). Dunlop and Ward note that using images during a dialogue yields 'data that is connotative and affective, rather than cognitively considered,' (p. 32), making space for potentially richly nuanced disclosure. Furthermore, it comprises a 'non-confrontational' technique which draws out personal reflection from participants, (p. 32). This is particularly valuable within my research context: because participants provided their own images, it could 'empower participants to produce visual images that "illuminate important aspects of lived experience that might otherwise have been overlooked or ignored by researchers,"' (p. 32). My role as both researcher and leader is mitigated through the two components of this approach: the selection of the images, and the method of articulation of their embedded meanings.

Furthermore, Dunlop and Ward (2014, p. 35) note that this technique is based upon a visual medium, thus making it uniquely suited to research that aims to empower the participants. This is because the process is collaborative in two facets: the choice of images and the invitation to endow the latter with the participants' own meanings and interpretations. It thus '"takes seriously the participants as knowers,"' (p. 35). Empowerment is also accorded to the participants since they can speak as personally or superficially as they wish, controlling the degree to which personal information is divulged. Use of images bypasses the traditional format of interviews which can feel intimidatory, (p. 35) affording a more relaxed interaction. The attention is on the image, not the participant, and because most people can access and discuss self-selected images, it equalises different levels of education and language proficiency. This latter was especially important for some of my participants whose English language skills were not as developed as others'.

The focus group component also facilitates a richer and more interactive conversation between multiple participants than possible in dyadic interviews. The group interaction can 'produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group,' (Davies, 2002, p. 105). Since focus groups are 'stimulating for respondents, aiding recall and the format is flexible,' the data that can emerge can be cumulative and elaborative, (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 240). Consequently, the attention is shifted away from the researcher and back into the group: the researcher is in the minority and dependent upon the dynamics of the group, diluting perceived power differentials of the researcher.

The focus group format was an attempt to relocate learning from the uniquely individual and into the collective.[80] Of course, Denscombe (2003, p. 169) is correct when he observes that focus groups carry the risk that 'extrovert characters can dominate the proceedings,' thus exerting undue influence over both content and time.

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[80] See black Theologian Jennings (2020, p. 19) who criticises the privileging of theological learning in predominantly individualistic contexts preferring instead to move it towards the 'glory in the crowd, think the crowd, be the crowd, and then move as a crowd.' For Jennings, the crowd is both a medium and a locus of discipleship.

This was mitigated in the narrated photography focus groups by providing all participants the same time allocation, and an identical number of images to present.[81]

Twenty-one people from eight different nations and four continents were asked to participate in focus groups. They were asked to collect four images to show 'how you experience belonging and participation in this church community. One picture should show in particular one thing that would *improve* your experience of belonging and participation in the church.'[82] Five focus groups were run with a different set of participants across a period of three months in the summer of 2021. Each participant was given at least five days' notice prior to the focus group.

Significantly, as noted, participants were asked to include at least one image that they believed would exemplify an enhancement or improvement to their experience of belonging and participation. This latter component was essential in inviting and creating a permissive culture of critique within the research. All but two participants cited specific areas of improvement and/or disappointment in their experiences of belonging through the provision of images critiquing church praxis. The two participants who did not express specific improvements were then interviewed later and given opportunity to do so. All the focus groups were held on Zoom, and both the video and audio recorded with permission of the attendees.

Prior to the focus group, I spoke with each participant, explaining the purpose of the research, provided an Information Sheet,[83] and explained the need for at least one of the images to represent an anticipated upgrade in the participant's sense of belonging and participation. Some participants sought reassurance that criticism was acceptable, and expressed relief they could provide such input. Any questions about this or any aspect of the focus group, its operation and objectives were also discussed with each participant well ahead of the relevant focus group.

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[81] Apart from the initial 'pilot' focus group in which no time allocation was imposed.

[82] See Appendix 1.

[83] See Appendix 1.

12 female and 9 male participants took part in the groups with an additional two females and one male in the follow-up interviews, making a total of 14 females and 10 males: the composition of the church was around 60:40 at the time of the research in June 2021.[84] In the subsequent interviews, eight females and four males were included: a reason for the imbalance was that uniquely female sensibilities (such as singleness, feeling misunderstood and leadership restrictions) were raised during the focus groups that warranted further clarification and follow-up. Furthermore, the issue of 'blackness' and its generational significance was raised by the second youngest participant (consistent with Edwards' (2020) predictions), who was female. The prevalence of females in the follow-up interviews also redressed any slight statistical imbalance favouring men relative to their proportion in the church in the focus groups.

The selection of the participants also included those whom I knew had previously expressed objections or reservations about church praxis. Twelve of the participants were known to me for previously having been critical of deficiencies in key aspects of the church's praxis, and who had approached leaders to express these. For example, included in the sample were a Nigerian couple who had criticised the individualistic style of sung-worship in a membership discussion, an African woman who had voiced concerns about the lack of fellowship over food and the lack of provision of New Year's Eve watchnights, a couple who had objected to the absence of culturally-sensitive newborn dedications, an unmarried participant who had been uneasy about the deficient inclusion of singles in the church, two non-UK-born participants who were reticent about the church's insistent stance on membership as a requirement to serve in certain roles and also critical of the lack of charismata practised in the church and the superficiality of relationships beyond Sundays, a UK-born participant who had shared disquiet about the lack of opportunities leaders facilitated for members to serve (including himself), one participant who disagreed with the church's stance on co-habitation, and a UK couple who had commented on the church's 'cliquiness' and the difficulty of making profound relationships.

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[84] This proportion was discerned by checking the declared biological sex of all adults on the church's database at the time of the research. It had shifted to 63:37 by March 2024.

The cohort was one evincing some strong personalities in whom I had confidence would not hold back on stating robust views. I was concerned to avoid any form of sycophancy that could mask underlying concerns to prevent hurting my feelings: as will be seen, some responses were appropriately (and refreshingly) critical of church praxis and my own specific involvement in them. I included other 'robust' congregants in the focus groups in whom I had high confidence in their candour and perspicacity, even if I had previously been unaware of specific concerns they might hold. Furthermore, four participants were almost completely unknown to me because they were relatively new arrivals (within the preceding 12 months), and another four only superficially known (I knew their names but very little about their backgrounds).

Leach (2007, p. 24) is acutely sensitive to the 'voices' (comprising their opinions, feelings, convictions) which are heeded in academic research. She asks attention to be paid to 'Whose voices are part of the conversation?' but also: 'Whose voices are absent or being silenced?' This research was an attempt to represent as wide a demographic as possible, attentive to the potentially absent and silenced voices, within the chosen bifurcation between British-born and non-British-born participants (see below). Therefore, the following criteria were also considered in terms of whom to engage in the research: socio-economic background, diversity of birth nation, age (to satisfy Edwards' (2020) injunction noted earlier), long-term congregants and those who had recently arrived – both during and close to lockdowns in 2020 and 2021, (IfG, 2021). Furthermore, I wanted to invite participants who knew me well, and those with whom I had had no, or merely cursory, engagement prior to the research.

All participants were either UK-born or first-generation migrants,[85] except one whose parents had moved to the UK from Nigeria just prior to her birth. All British-born participants were Caucasian. In the focus groups seven of the participants were UK-born, seven Nigerian, and one each American (of Afro-Caribbean background), German, Ghanian, Sri Lankan, Polish, Hungarian, Syrian. In the follow-up interviews, an additional two Nigerians, and one from the USA were included. The largest non-British-born demographic within the church is Nigerian, hence its larger representation. The oldest participants were in their early seventies, the youngest just 21. Four participants were in their twenties, five in their thirties, seven in their forties, four in their fifties, two in their sixties and two in their seventies.

The choice of British-born and first-generation migrant was deliberate. The former would be relatively unaware of the uniqueness of their nurture cultures – societal and ecclesial. The latter would most likely be very sensitive to societal and ecclesial specificities by virtue of two factors: newness and contrast. Insights of social psychology will be incorporated in Chapter Five. However, a transitory excursion into that field yields a key insight: 'Groups exist by virtue of there being outgroups… social groups are categories of people; and just like other categories, a social category acquires its meaning *by contrast with* other categories,' (Hogg, 2001, p. 56) (my italics). Differences in expectations and subjective experiences of belonging across ethnoracial lines could thus potentially be most acute within such a bifurcation of background. Furthermore, the church's composition comprises many, many more non-Caucasians who are *first generation* migrants, having joined the church in the last ten years, thus enabling anonymity to be much more easily managed.

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[85] The United Nations defines an international migrant as 'a person who is living in a country other than his or her country of birth', (United Nations, 2016). Use of this term is intended to be neither pejorative nor judgmental, but an accurate observation of origin of birth.

Participants were also chosen from a variety of different professions to ensure as mixed a socio-economic demographic as possible. These ranged from management consultant, full-time student, apprentice, hairdresser, chef, self-employed, teacher, civil engineer, charity worker, designer, sound engineer, project manager, two were unemployed, two were retired. Four participants had joined the church since the lockdown of March 2020, (IfG, 2021), of which two had first encountered the church when it was online. A mixture of married, divorced, single and lone parents was represented also. Seven participants were unmarried at the time of their focus groups: four were female, three were male.

A total of 70 pictures were presented by the 21 participants: one married couple provided four pictures between them rather than four each.[86] Most participants provided four, whilst others just three. A summary of the images is as follows. 23 showed groups of people, 13 showed physical or inanimate objects such as mugs, a bible, a dam, a 999 emergency code, a computer, a house number, a church building, a clock, a sound-mixing desk (there were two of these), a blackboard with the word 'commitment' in chalk. 7 of the pictures showed lone individuals, 6 showed couples, 5 contained pictures of fingers and hands, 3 included the word 'discipleship', another 2 the word 'leadership' embedded in a picture, 2 jigsaw puzzles, 2 of water baptism, and 2 pictures were of fireworks.

What was noteworthy was that very similar pictures did not always represent comparable concepts. Two examples will be given. The first of which unveils comparable themes, the second of which does not. As noted above, there were two images of baptisms both of which represented a seminal moment in expressing and deepening a participant's sense of belonging, thus articulating similar concepts (these will be expounded in Chapter Four). However, as also noted, there were two pictures of fireworks from two participants. One of these referred specifically to the cultural significance of New Year's Eve Watch Night Services to African congregants but the other to new life emerging after the death of a child. Both images of the fireworks held completely different salience to the participants.

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[86] They were given double the time in their focus group to discuss their images to compensate and had a follow-up interview together afterwards.

Astley and Francis (2012, loc. 306) are thus correct when they assert that 'it is often difficult to *infer* people's beliefs from their practice… In this sense, different theologies may undergird the same practice, and we must be cautious about imputing to people's practice a theology that they would not themselves claim to hold.' In this context, the practice of participants showing an ostensibly similar image does not inevitably evince comparable theological commitments or experiences. Astley and Francis (2012, loc. 306) emphasise the need for Practical Theology[87] to 'concentrate on people's beliefs as they are expressed in their words,' thereby circumventing the temptation of the researcher to impute erroneous motives and commitments to practices (or images) that appear, superficially at least, to convey similar themes or meanings. Chapter Four shall thus focus on what participants expressed that each image meant in their subsequent descriptions.

Regarding the facilitation of the focus groups, each group was run in the following manner: I explained that I was in pastoral leadership (this was already known by the participants), and that I was wishing to learn from the experience of the participants. I cited Acts 6 in which the inequitable distribution of food was known within the community of believers but not ostensibly by their leaders. It was the leaders' duty therefore to learn about the nature of the challenges being faced by congregants, and to engage with them to agree a mutually appropriate solution. I explained that my situation held similarities to the early church's leadership: not all experiences and difficulties are known by leaders, and it is the leaders' responsibility to engage appropriately with congregants to discern what was working and what was not working well for them. I also explained that I would follow up with some participants (subject to their consent) in subsequent interviews (either one-to-one or with pairs of participants) sometime after the completion of the focus groups (again consistent with Edwards' (2020) longitudinal recommendations noted above).

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[87] In their case termed 'ordinary theology.'

Each focus group comprised four participants excluding me (apart from the pilot which contained five), and all groups were mixed in that they contained both British-born and non-British born and a combination of male and female participants. Participants were then asked in which order they would like to present and discuss their images. The first focus group was run as a pilot to learn about the dynamics of the format and participants' reactions. It was a pre-existing small group in the church to which I was already well-known.

Uniquely, no time limit was placed on participants' presentation of images for the pilot: in subsequent focus groups, each participant was given ten minutes each, although most participants overran: in reality, participants took between eight and fifteen minutes each to present their data. A discussion of the data presented by the participant was then opened to the entire group, in which other participants shared thoughts about the emergent data – concerning similarities, misunderstandings, or alternative opinions. After this discussion, I summarised the main points of each participant's data and I checked that this summary was consistent with what they had said, and what they meant by what they said. A summary of the focus groups is given below in Table 1.

Focus Group	**Duration, minutes**	**Total participants**	**Participants**	**Images Presented**	**Transcription**
One	131	Five	Charlotte, Martha, Isah, Paula, Alice	20	Full
Two	70	Four	Mia, Robert, Steffi, Jeremy	13	Full
Three	79	Four	Dave, Yomi, Kemi, Akin	14	Full

Four	81	Four	Imogen, Maya, Carl, Nailah	13	Full
Five	81	Four	Carim, Amila, Arpad, Filip	10	Full

Table 1: Summary of Focus Groups

Apart from the first focus group which lasted over two hours, the other four focus groups lasted around seventy to eighty minutes. I selected all the participants of the five groups within the criteria already outlined. One of the focus groups (other than the first) was also a pre-existing small group which I had previously (but only occasionally) attended, having gained permission from the small group leaders (who also participated). The other three groups all comprised a group of participants assembled specifically for the research: they were not pre-existing small groups already meeting as part of the church's small group system. No-one I approached to be part of the research refused: all twenty-four expressed a willingness to participate.

Nine follow-up semi-structured interviews with ten of the original focus group cohort were conducted ten to twenty-four months after the original focus groups. Three additional participants also took part – spouses of two focus group participants and a daughter of another. In total thirteen participants contributed to the follow-up interviews. These interviews each lasted between fifty minutes to two hours (see Table 2). Each interview contained both unique content (for instance, based on the images and concepts presented in the original focus group) and generic content (I asked all follow-up participants what they had gained and lost as a consequence of being part of a mixed ethnoracial congregation). The semi-structured interviews all commenced by a summary of the content the participant presented at the relevant focus group and my understanding of this was cross-checked with the participant. The unique and generic content was then discussed: in each interview, I regularly summarised what I had understood from the participant's dialogue to confirm my understanding.[88]

Interview	Duration, minutes	Focus group participant(s)	New participant	Transcription
One	82	Isah	Miriam	Partial
Two	41	Jeremy		Full
Three	50	Steffi		Full
Four	51	Nailah		Full
Five	40	Martha		Full
Six	56	Mia	Crista	Full
Seven	45	Amila and Arpad		Full
Eight	44	Paula		Full
Nine	35	Alice	Sani	Full

Table 2: Summary of interviews

Astley (2002, p. 97) points out that semi-structured interviews 'may best provide us with the necessary full description and depth of understanding for the study of ordinary theology,' because they are interactive and understandings can mutually be explored and checked, (Denscombe, 2003, p. 167).[89] However, they are time-consuming – as is the subsequent analysis. As Mowat (2022, p. 388) highlights, transcription is a very lengthy process and 'decisions have to be made about how useful a full transcript is going to be in the analysis.' Eight of the follow-up interviews were transcribed in full, the lengthiest one in part (those parts of specific interest to the research), and all focus groups were transcribed in their entirety, (see also (Astley, 2002, p. 97)). The data from the transcribed focus groups and follow-up interviews were then coded into NVivo. The other interviews conducted are shown below in Table 3, including their purpose and how much was transcribed.

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[88] One impromptu discussion with Robert (2024) lasting around 20 minutes was also held, and his main points transcribed in real time and read back to him to confirm understanding and correct recording.

[89] See also (Davies, 2002, pp. 94-95), (Day, 2013, p. 207), (Root, 2014, p. 38).

Interviewee	Duration, minutes	Transcription	Purpose
Joel Edwards	52	Partial	To refine methods, to mitigate power differentials, and to understand participants' possible sensibilities differentiated across ethnoracial lines.
Terry Virgo	114	Partial	To understand his own perceptions on Newfrontiers' distinctive ecclesiology, and which influences shaped it, plus changing attitudes and praxis to female leadership.
John Harbour	50	Full	To understand the ecclesiological and theological influences determining King's Church leadership's commitment to ethnoracial diversity.

Table 3: Other interviews

One difficulty in performing such research is identified by Denscombe (2003, p. 116) who poses the question 'How much research is enough?' noting that a natural point at which to taper down or stop further interviews is when 'theoretical saturation' is reached, (see also (Mowat, 2022, p. 389)). This occurs when additional research 'no longer contributes to discovering anything new about a category,' and data are repeating previously discovered patterns or nodes, (Denscombe, 2003, p. 116) and 'no new information seems to be forthcoming,' (Mowat, 2022, p. 390). Follow-up interviews were stopped when identical or similar themes were being repeated without significant new insights. The data which emerged from this analysis within the three major data families noted above shall be considered in Chapter Four.

Regarding the analysis of qualitative data, Ward (2022, p. 14) notes that this is 'built around close attention and listening to the voices and themes that emerge.' Cameron, et al. (2010, pp. 98-99) also point out that such qualitative data analysis comprises categorisation of data snippets by assigning them a label that 'relates to a specific theme… themes may emerge inductively from the reading of the data and snippets of coded to illustrate that emerging theme.' This was how my data were categorised: by coding the data to specific nodes through 'open coding,' (Denscombe, 2003, p. 271). Each transcription was coded several times, and initial nodes (and categories) were 'refined as the research progress[ed]… approaching things with an open mind,' (Denscombe, 2003, p. 119). The nodes and categories were subjected to a constant process of refinement, (p. 271) whilst being sensitive not to distort data from original meaning by 'wrenching it from its location', (p. 281) in an attempt to force it into a specific node or category. Once nodes were established, common themes emerged from the data, (such as those referring to 'leadership'). Then themes were grouped together to form broader 'families' of nodes so as to 'provide analytic insights into the data,' (Denscombe, 2021, p. 333). Three major families emerged from the data: entry into the family, family life together and family distinctives.

In performing qualitative research, Davies (2002, p. 221) speaks of the difficulties of constructing narratives from such methods. Citing Clifford, she notes that researchers 'can only produce different stories… fictions in the sense of "something made or fashioned,"' which carries the risk of 'inventing things not actually real,' (p. 221). The fashioning of the data into the three categories of entry into the family, life in the family and family distinctives, as well as the interpretation of participants' voices could well, then, constitute a distortion, a 'fiction' deviating away from participants' original or subsequent intentions.

To circumvent this possibility, a late draft of Chapter Four containing participants' data was shown to two Nigerian participants, and a discussion held with a British-born participant. At this point, I was no longer in any form of church leadership: I had since moved to a new employed role outside the church. The two Nigerian participants were given time to read the chapter, comment on it in writing, and then discuss their reflections with me by telephone. The first participant was now in a senior leadership position in the church and thus likely to be sensitive to distortions of participant intentions (including her own, some of which were, at times, critical of my leadership): she had not been in this role at the time of her focus group.

The second participant had moved to a different Newfrontiers church since her focus group. The power differential between me and the participants in which I held leadership authority over them had eased, enabling both to be particularly candid about their responses. Whilst some small clarifications were made during these discussions, the first participant explained that she found the data description to reflect fairly and accurately the findings of the research and the intentions of the participant cohort. The second participant wrote that:

> Your reflections are very reasonable to me. You do a good job at shining a light on the nuances of our experience. And you are very clear in bringing context – noting the "wins" without setting aside the "losses"… Regarding my responses, you have accurately represented my perspective. And you have considered how my age and upbringing in the UK impact my sense of belonging in a church context, (Nailah, 2024).

Furthermore, I verbally discussed the main points from Chapter Four with a British-born participant who was similarly supportive about its content, structure and main conclusions: again, I held no leadership position over him at the time of this discussion.

It should be noted that in asking participants about their self-reported sense of belonging and participation in the church, definitions of neither were offered. How participants interpreted belonging or participation was entirely their choice. This was deliberate. As discussed in the Introduction, it enabled participants to discuss these terms within their own conceptualisations and within their own vocabulary: it led to some rich disclosures as will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Prior to consideration of the lived theology disclosed by the participants, the distinctives of the Newfrontiers church being research shall be discussed in the following chapter.

2.4. SUMMARY

This chapter has considered both the methodology and the methods being deployed in this thesis. The methodology comprises a mutually critical conversation between the lived theology disclosed by participants, Newfrontiers' ecclesiological commitments to multi-ethnoracial church and belonging, a normative voice principally comprising scholars' views on Pauline familial metaphors, and an interpretive voice of social psychology, (Pattison, 2005, p. 223), (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 87).

The methods selected are qualitative to provide 'richly textured accounts of experience,' (Ward, 2017a, p. 103) related to participants' experiences of belonging. These comprise focus groups, (Davies, 2007, p. 116) deploying narrated photography structured to mitigate power differentials between the interviewer and interviewees, (Dunlop & Ward, 2014), followed up by subsequent semi-structured interviews, (Astley, 2002, p. 97). This longitudinal element permitted participants to clarify and complexify points raised in the focus groups, (Edwards, 2020), and to discern changes over time in participants' self-reports of belonging and the factors underpinning these.

Participants' self-reports of belonging shall be considered in Chapter Four. Before doing so, the unique environment of the local church shall be investigated in the next Chapter. This shall identify specific elements of its ecclesiology that may significantly influence congregants' belonging, especially its welcome and integration processes, and its convergence or otherwise with Newfrontiers' ecclesiological commitments to promote ethnoracial diversity.

3. THE RESEARCH CONTEXT: THE LOCAL CHURCH

3.1. OVERVIEW

This project is seeking to pay close attention to participants' self-reported experiences of belonging, positive and negative, to discern which elements of ecclesial life hinder or promote belonging in a Newfrontiers church. It is primarily considering the following: which elements do participants identify as promoting or hindering such ecclesial belonging? This chapter shall specifically investigate the unique history and emergent ecclesiology of the local church being researched to identify elements which may facilitate or hinder belonging across such diversity. It shall also highlight that its ecclesiology and practices align closely with those of Newfrontiers, especially its commitment to ethnoracially diverse church based upon Ephesians 2, believers' baptism, small groups, membership and male eldership. Furthermore, it will consider how its structures enable new and existing congregants to become embedded in church life.

The data in this section comprise sermons from senior leaders and elders, its printed materials (including its history, vision, themed initiatives, courses), website, contact database reports, and an interview with the Senior Leader Harbour (2021).

3.2. HISTORY OF THE KING'S CHURCH

This section shall consider the history of the local church being researched from its inception to the period of the research, drawing specifically on material from the church's own biographical account documented in a self-published book, (KCHW, 2002). The church inadvertently started when five families moved to a new housing estate in Hazlemere, in the North of High Wycombe from Hayes, Middlesex in 1969 (KCHW, 2002, p. 11). The background of the believers included Baptist, Anglican, Congregational and Brethren, (p. 7).

In March 1971 one of the founding couples experienced Spirit Baptism, much to the bemusement and annoyance of then-leader, Matthews, who opined:

> I believed in the Reformed Faith… the only way to receive blessing was by way of truth from the Word. I thought Pentecostals were simple folk… excitable and emotionally unstable, (p. 17).

However, Matthews prayed at work and God filled him: 'Jesus was so wonderful, precious and glorious… What happy days these were!' (p. 18).[90] By 1980, the church had relocated its Sunday morning meetings into a local school building with attendance at around 100, (p. 25). Corporate Sunday meetings were augmented by midweek small groups which constituted 'the heart of the fellowship where people were nurtured and cared for,' and friendships formed, (p. 26).

Importantly, the church comprised: 'family – people shared their lives… as well as sharing practical needs,' (p. 27). In contrast to traditional denominations, the leaders sought no formal bible training: instead, like the early Pentecostals, there was an 'anti-intellectual emphasis… where study was viewed with suspicion and spiritual experience highly valued,' (p. 27).[91] In January 1981 a new congregation (comprising 15 people) was planted into the main town of High Wycombe, (p. 31).

After ten years of operating independently, a formal linkage with Derek Brown's Aldershot-based Restorationist movement was established in 1984, in which Brown assumed apostolic authority. With over 300 attending Sunday morning meetings, a building was sought, and a purpose-built town-centre facility was inaugurated at the end of November 1994, comprising a 600-seater auditorium and requisite side rooms, (p. 44).

In 2007, the church joined Newfrontiers, (KCHW, 2022b). The transition was seen as relatively seamless by its incumbent leaders, mainly because of Matthews' preceding tight interconnections with Newfrontiers leaders; Matthews and Terry Virgo were friends sharing a reformed theological background. The church now invited Steve Tibbert of King's Church London to provide apostolic covering. Under his guidance, the church moved from a single meeting to a multi-meeting format on Sunday mornings, spurred on by independent 'prophetic input' from other Newfrontiers leaders, (KCHW, 2022b).

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[90] See (Virgo, 2007, pp. 24-26) for his similar experience of Spirit Baptism.
[91] See (Walker, 1998, pp. 256-7) and (Hollenweger, 1997, p. 194) for Pentecostalism parallels.

With attendance growing to around 700 across the two meetings, a second site was launched in back Hazlemere in 2016 – its original location, (KCHW, 2022b). During the first lockdown, the church went entirely online, only restarting in-person meetings in October 2020, and closing them down again in January 2021 for an additional six weeks as a precautionary response to the perceived risks of SARS-COV2. The Hazlemere site never reopened after the lockdowns. King's joined the Catalyst Network within Newfrontiers in 2021 (Catalyst Network, 2023), overseen by apostolic leader Simon Holley.

3.3. KING'S CHURCH'S ESPOUSED ETHNORACIAL THEOLOGY

2021 marked a year of significant transition for the King's Church, not solely in its leadership accountabilities to Newfrontiers, but also within its own internal leadership. The latter also clarified its expectations and aspirations for ethnoracial (and other aspects of) diversity within its espoused vision, one which would then influence the reshaping of its eldership team. It would also influence the response of participants' experience of belonging in this study, as will be seen in Chapter Four.

In May 2019, new Senior Pastor Harbour (who had previously served as youth leader and in other senior leadership roles) was appointed as the previous leader retired, (KCHW, 2024). Six months later, a refreshed vision for the church was articulated through prayer and fasting events, sermons and written materials, (KCHW, 2019, p. 1). This vision was to become a 'diverse church of thousands that surrounds and saturates High Wycombe with the love of Jesus,' (p. 10). It rooted this vision in a conviction that God's plan from the outset was for the 'earth to be filled with people reflecting the glory of God in their diversity. This culminated in the glorious vision of Revelation 7 of "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language" worshiping [sic] God in unity,' (p. 12). Ethnoracial diversity was foregrounded within the church's vision: the church had morphed from a predominantly monoracial one in the early 2000s, to one which by 2014 comprised 48 nations, (KCHW, 2018b).[92]

A specific teaser was included in the Vision literature containing the assertion: 'Everyone is invited,' (KCHW, 2019, p. 12). This was a reference to a series entitled '*Invited'* which the church had run in 2018, inspired by Tibbert's King's Church London, (KCHW, 2018a, p. 1). In it, congregants were encouraged to invite to their home other congregants from a 'different cultural background,' (KCHW, 2018a, p. 3).

In commencing the series, then Senior Pastor Bartlett explained that 'God always had in mind of people from every nation, every tribe, every language,' (KCHW, 2018b). Bartlett validated this citing Genesis 12 and God's promise to Abraham to bless all peoples, 'the wedding supper in Revelation' 19:9, combined with Jesus' own assertion in Luke 13:29-30 that many would partake of the feast in God's kingdom from all over the world. Bartlett's conclusion was unequivocal concerning this eschatological feast: 'my friends, this is for *everyone*,' (KCHW, 2018b). The emergent diversity of the King's Church, he asserted, was because: 'God has planned this… God has wonderfully brought us together,' (KCHW, 2018b).

Two years after the *Invited* series, Harbour specifically addressed contemporary racial tensions precipitated by the egregious death of George Floyd in May 2020. He was unequivocal that the antidote to pervasive discrimination and prejudice was an ecclesial one, insisting 'there are no gradations in the image of God,' (KCHW, 2020). He expanded upon this *imago Dei* imagery by referencing Ephesians 2:15-16,[93] asserting that through the death and resurrection of Jesus 'the dividing wall of hostility… between other ethnicities and other races… has been torn down,' making possible peace across racial and cultural divides within the Church, (KCHW, 2020).

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[92] It performed an analysis of attendees' nationalities through a church-wide questionnaire.

[93] As noted, one central to Newfrontiers' 'One New Man in Christ' ecclesiology.

Harbour explained that differences had the potential to contribute to a harmonious blend of different notes within an orchestral metaphor. He further cautioned that 'a symphony of course doesn't just happen… in rehearsal there will inevitably be some jarring notes… clashing notes,' ones that were evident in the book of Acts, but which were overcome through the active pursuit of unity, (KCHW, 2020). Harbour insisted that the example within Acts and scripture was normative and validated a similar contemporary mandate, one possible in twenty-first century Britain because of the unifying power of the same Holy Spirit.

Of course, both Bartlett and Harbour are both white British-born Senior Pastors. Other preaches, foregrounding ethnoracial integration, were offered by non-white leaders, outside both the *Invited* series and the intensity of the leadership's response to George Floyd's death. In a sermon in August 2021, entitled *One in Christ,* Nigerian-born Akinla (KCHW, 2021b) spoke from Ephesians 2:11-22.[94] He asserted that the passage constituted a 'blueprint of what church is and what it should be,' especially in terms of ethnoracial diversity in which reconciliation is inextricably embedded within God's ecclesial plan. Akinla (KCHW, 2021b) expressed his unswerving conviction that the Gospel in Christ 'can mend broken relationships,' asserting 'there is no institution more equipped and capable of bringing transformation to the course of reconciliation than the Church,' (KCHW, 2021b).

Akinla explained such rapprochement across ethnoracial boundaries was possible because 'we have become a citizen of a new nation of a new kingdom where God is the king, your background doesn't matter anymore,' (KCHW, 2021b), citing two key advantages of common Kingdom citizenship. First, a transformed relationship with God in that all have 'free access to, to the throne of God,' and transformed interpersonal relationships within the church, asserting ‘we are members of a family. There is now a deeper connection… we are now sons and daughters,’ (KCHW, 2021b). This familial connection, Akinla suggested, provided new opportunities for deeper community – embracing hospitality and meals, but also noting families ‘discuss deep things, secret things,’ (KCHW, 2021b) regardless of background. Akinla’s ecclesiology was thus founded upon a fusion of superordinate familial and citizenship metaphors.

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[94] Akinla was appointed into eldership in 2021, (KCHW, 2023).

The overlap with Bartlett and Harbour’s teachings is significant: the application of Ephesians 2:11ff as a generic encouragement to unity across ethnoracial classifications, and common sociological and pneumatological experiences across such boundaries. Akinla’s assertions were founded upon a conviction of a redefined identity founded upon common belonging – to a new King within an existential and eternal Kingdom, but within the temporal expression of a family of fictive siblings.

Combining the teachings from all three leaders, King’s overlap with Newfrontiers’ espoused theology is unsurprisingly tight. First, because it adapted the *Invited* initiative from King’s Church London which collated the latter’s ethnoracial commitments into a single series, many drawing from biblical convictions established by the Newfrontiers movement, of which Tibbert was a key figure, (Tibbert, 2011, loc. 2161).[95] Second, the deployment of Genesis 12 as justifying the cosmic plan of all nations being blessed through God’s covenant with Abraham, the centrality of Ephesians 2:11-22 and especially the ‘One New Man in Christ’ motif propagated originally by Pettit.[96] Third, eschatological commitments in Revelation 7:9-11 in which an innumerable diverse multitude unite in worship before Christ.[97]

In an interview, King’s Senior Pastor Harbour explained that Newfrontiers’ influence on King’s was indeed shaped by apostolic figures such as Tibbert from King’s Church London, (Harbour, 2021). However, he went on to note that

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[95] See also (Jeffery, 2019a, p. 176)

[96] See also (Devenish, 2005, p. 150)

[97] See (Hylton, 2009, p. 105), noted earlier.

Newfrontiers' influence went beyond imbibing common biblical doctrines on diversity, extending also to praxis. Harbour noted that inviting leaders from some of the larger Newfrontiers churches to lead and speak was transformative, specifically citing the influence of Tope Koleoso:[98]

> just seeing the response of those from an African nation… that changed how we lead prayer meetings… I think it shaped a little bit of expectation from the people as well. A prayer meeting wasn't just a quiet kind of … it can be noisy [and more participative], (Harbour, 2021).

The Newfrontiers influence on King's thus extends beyond common initiatives, such as *Invited*, in which embedded normative biblical texts propagate a consistent theological basis for ethnoracial ecclesiology: it encompasses the transformative effect of experiencing different styles of leading and interacting with congregants. It is a local manifestation of Jeffery's (2019b, p. 248) 'transnational flows' of influence from ecclesiologies originating in cultures geographically and culturally distant from Newfrontiers' original British locus (see Chapter One).

King's Church's espoused theology on ethnoracial belonging from 2019 onwards thus draws upon many common scriptural threads from its Newfrontiers tradition. Furthermore, it also draws upon citizenship and familial metaphors as inviting and reinforcing belonging across diversity. Beyond Newfrontiers' espoused theology, King's further anticipates diversity from Revelation 19:9 and Luke 13:29-30 in the post-eschaton wedding feast of the Lamb.

However, what is not known is the extent to which such espoused theology is reflected in participants' anticipated and actual experiences of belonging. For instance, how do participants consider eschatological themes to be relevant to their belonging, which metaphors predominate in their own accounts of belonging (citizenship, familial, corporeal or others), and to what extent do Pauline themes such as ‘One New Man’ arise in such accounts? These influences on participants’ lived theology will be considered in Chapter Four.

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[98] Leader of Jubilee Church London, (Jeffery & Kay, 2018, pp. 255-256).

3.4. MAIN ECCLESIOLOGICAL DISTINCTIVES OF KING’S CHURCH

This study centres on the self-reported experiences of belonging from participants from different ethnoracial backgrounds. The King’s Church attempts to provide pathways to integrate new and existing congregants into deeper community. These pathways will be discussed now in terms of King’s integration process and how new and existing congregants enter and engage with ecclesial community life. These should significantly influence congregants’ experiences of belonging, and the research in Chapter Four will be attentive to such influences.

Up to 2018, King’s had a dedicated integration team, staffed by an employed pastoral leader overseeing a team of volunteers. The latter would call attendees new to the church (and who had voluntarily filled out an ‘I’m New’ response card on a Sunday) bi-weekly to guide them into small group life and serving in the church. By 2018, it had disbanded, partly owing to the difficulty and associated frustration of maintaining contact with new people. The integration process underwent review by a new staff member responsible for the welcome and integration of newcomers, and she was appointed in October 2022, after all focus groups were completed, (KCHW, 2023).

The church offers multiple ways of connecting. It holds two Sunday in-person worship meetings, identical in content and in youth/children’s work. These Sunday meetings typically last around 90 minutes comprising around 35 minutes of sung worship, 35 minutes’ preaching, with the remaining 20 minutes including a variety of prayer (planned and extemporaneous), reflection, expression of charismata (prophecy, healing, words of knowledge), breaking bread and notices.

A livestream of the later of the two Sunday morning meetings is broadcast over YouTube. Average total Sunday morning attendance for the in-person meetings was just over 650 (adults, children and youth), with 140 unique views within 24 hours for the online livestream,[99] measured across 10 consecutive weeks in 2022. Children's work gathered an average of just over 100 under 11s, and the youth meeting around 35 aged 11 to 14 in the same 10 Sundays in 2022. Teenagers in school years 10 and above[100] are invited to attend the main adult meeting. Membership of the church as measured by its own database was 525 adults as of February 2023.

In addition to Sunday morning meetings, other church connection points include: a twice-termly Newcomers' Lunch in the main church sanctuary for welcoming new people, a plethora of serving teams (from hospitality/welcome, catering, sung worship, children's/youth work, outreach/social action and technical roles), and its small groups system. The church has employed a part-time small groups co-ordinator since 2013.

Small groups meet weekly throughout three school terms. Adults are encouraged to sign-up via an online system each term for a group of their choosing. Existing members of groups which are longer-term (some carry on indefinitely) are offered optional automatic sign-up. The groups comprise a variety of different types: from traditional bible study available to all adults and backgrounds, to more specifically targeted groups – for example, those who are lone parents, retired, young adults (up to thirty years old), students, children/youth (from school year 4 and upwards), those with life-controlling addictions/homelessness, and new arrivals.

Training is offered to all new small group leaders, as well as twice-yearly refreshers for incumbents. The purpose of small groups is emphasised in training, and it is 'to grow in knowing Jesus, knowing one another and making Jesus known.'

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[99] These constitute unique devices accessing the livestreamed meeting, which is recorded and available after the live meeting has finished.

[100] Aged 14 to 18.

This threefold vision encompasses discipleship through a deepening relationship with Christ, being in community with others, and to spur one another on to reach out to non-believers.[101]

Newcomers are specifically invited and encouraged to attend Chapter One. This is advertised on the church's website and during most Sunday morning meetings. Chapter One is a ten-week programme which covers what the church considers foundational 'rhythms' of Christian discipleship, including prayer, generosity, worship, power, outreach, freedom and scripture, (KCHW, 2021a). It is co-ordinated by an employed Discipleship Pastor through a team of volunteer leaders, each of whom oversees seven to ten attendees. On average, fifteen to thirty people attend Chapter One each term.[102]

Chapter One was rolled out in 2018. Prior to that, the first small group experience for newcomers was entitled 'Connect.' Connect began in late 2011 as a response to a specific challenge. The leadership had become aware of a large influx of visitors who had suddenly left without warning. The conclusion reached was that the inability of the church's integration process to feed newcomers into group life sufficiently quickly was responsible for the mass departure: Connect provided a specific group always available for newcomers to join instantly.

Each Connect group was hosted by up to four people (marrieds and singles) considered to be especially gifted in hospitality. The content was delivered by a variety of leaders (including staff members and elders) and gifted teachers, and it was based on the core values of the church, similar to Chapter One. In contrast to the latter, Connect met in a home rather than the main church building: multiple Connect groups would meet concurrently to cater for demand. Unlike Chapter One, Connect attendees could join the group at any time without needing to wait for the dedicated termly small group sign-up periods.

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[101] Via the church's BLESS paradigm, outlined shortly.

[102] Data for Chapter One were provided by the Head of Integration and Welcome in February 2023.

The current format of small groups at King's also includes courses for specific needs and ministry areas – such as Alpha, parenting, marriage preparation/enrichment, financial management, and training in supernatural ministries (prophecy, healing, street evangelism). These latter courses also meet at the church's town centre facility. On average, there are between 30 and 45 groups running each term (including courses and Chapter One) with an average of 400 adults signing up.[103]

Regarding corporate prayer, an online weekly Zoom Prayer Meeting is regularly advertised, meeting from 7:00 to 7:45am each Wednesday morning: this is in addition to corporate prayer times during the Sunday morning worship. Furthermore, week-long prayer initiatives are held two to three times per year. Small groups do not meet during these weeks, and a combination of prayer formats is offered depending upon the initiative. Alternate years, there is usually a six-week churchwide Prayer and Fasting event just prior to the school summer holidays: small groups are paused to prioritise corporate prayer.

Once per term, the church runs an Encounter Evening. This comprises an extended time of sung worship, testimonies, and encouragement to practise spiritual gifts such as healing, prophecy, glossolalia. It differs from Sunday morning meetings in that it is principally aimed at believers. Attendance varies from around 100 to 200. A trained Prayer Team offers prayer at the end of each Sunday meeting to anyone who wishes to receive this. The church has strategic outreach initiatives to the homeless/those with life controlling addictions, women exploited in commercial sex trafficking, those in unsustainable debt,[104] parents and toddlers, and those for whom English is a second language (KCHW, 2021c).

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[103] These data are from the church's small group administrator from September 2022 to February 2023.

The church encourages personal evangelism through what it terms BLESS. This is an acronym for: Begin with prayer, Listen, Eat together, Serve, Share your story comprising an ordered sequence of how to model and share the Gospel with non-believers. BLESS was launched in September 2018, and it was revisited in September 2022. BLESS centres on:

> Building meaningful relationships, the importance of your own story, and being God's… representative to those around you – impacting one life at a time… It's part of our culture, and part of what we do. (KCHW, 2022a).

In addition to corporate evangelism through social action, personal evangelism through BLESS, King's has strategic overseas missions initiatives, partnering with churches and parachurch missions organisations in these nations, (KCHW, 2021d).

At the time of the fieldwork research, the church was governed by a team of six male elders: three were employed (including me), three had full-time secular employment. Of the six, four were Caucasian, one was Afro-Caribbean and the other Nigerian, the latter being inducted in 2021, (KCHW, 2023). Membership is an important value of the church, and 'Exploring Membership' courses are run termly in which the vision and values of the church are discussed, and attendees encouraged to raise questions on any aspect of church life. Those wishing to pursue membership are offered a follow-up discussion with one of the church's employed leaders. During the membership course, full-immersion baptism for believers is emphasised, and its stance on uniquely male eldership and apostleship outlined (this latter point usually takes around thirty minutes).

In addition to eldership, the day-to-day running of the church is facilitated by a Senior Leadership Team (SLT), comprising the three employed elders (of which I was one) and the church's employed full-time Associate Pastor responsible for Pastoral Leadership. The latter was the first woman to become part of the SLT, and she was appointed in September 2022, constituting a significant moment for female leadership in the history of the church, (KCHW, 2022c). The potential influence of this appointment to participants' belonging will be considered in the next chapter.

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[104] Through its Christians Against Poverty debt centre.

3.5. SUMMARY

King's Church's history converges tightly with mainstream British Restorationism: experiences of charismata through Renewal, the establishment of a church through initially meeting in a home, governance by male elders, growth facilitated in part by moving venues to accommodate increasing numbers, belief in and deployment of translocal apostolic (and preaching) ministries into which groups of like-minded churches could mutually participate, and church membership. Its close alignment with Newfrontiers was possible through two key factors. First is its immersion in Restorationist movements from its early days. The second is its enduring relationships between the church's founder and key Newfrontiers leaders, and the subsequent appointment of Newfrontiers leaders to provide apostolic guidance and leadership counsel. Furthermore, it has also borrowed from resources from other larger Newfrontiers churches, and invited leaders of other large and influential Newfrontiers churches to shape church praxis.

King's espoused theology on ethnoracial diversity, like Newfrontiers, principally draws from God's promises to Abram in Genesis 12, 'one new man in Christ' in Ephesians 2:15, and the great multitude in Revelation 7:9. Belonging within the church is framed within both citizenship and familial metaphors in which distinctive characteristics (including ethnoracial ones) can be unified under a common citizen and sibling status. Performative components of belonging are expressed through serving and activism, the latter of which is to grow the church numerically through intentional personal and corporate outreach.

However, what is unknown is the influence that such espoused theology has on participants' self-reports of belonging. For instance, how do eschatological themes inspire belonging, which metaphors feature in participants' belonging (citizenship, familial, corporeal or others), and to what extent do Pauline themes such as 'One New Man' emerge? Additionally, how do the church's attempts to steer newcomers and incumbents into small group life, serving and outreach (personal or social-action based) influence participants' self-reports of belonging? These will be considered in the next chapter.

4. PARTICIPANT DATA: BELONGING AND FAMILY

4.1. OVERVIEW

This thesis is examining how participants from different ethnoracial backgrounds self-report their own sense of belonging in a Newfrontiers church by exploring those elements which participants identify as promoting or hindering ecclesial belonging. This chapter shall focus on the data from participants' disclosures through focus groups and semi-structured interviews. It shall show that the degree to which participants perceive their own belonging is dependent upon their experience of the church as a coherent, loving, nurturing and performative family. This is because participants conceptualise belonging principally within familial metaphors, such as fictive siblings and parents. Participants often arrive initially circumspect about immersive involvement and engage in a liminal phase of 'pre-belonging.' To overcome this successfully, leaders need to be perceived as spiritual parents and guides, as exemplars of Christ, expected to model qualities such as authority, approachability, prayerfulness and adaptability, all of which are conducive to participants' belonging. Fellow congregants are viewed principally in siblingship (but more occasionally in parenting) terms in which belonging is promoted when familial relationships of positive affect and depth are established, and mutual care simultaneously experienced.

Siblingship comprises a dialectic of simultaneous similarity and difference, in which both are required. Similarity of status as fictive siblings is greatly appreciated but differences (across intergenerational, believer/non-believer, male/female and ethnoracial delineations) are anticipated and salubrious when harmonious. The ecclesial fictive siblingship is also expected to comprise a locus of performative serving of others in which spiritual and practical gifts are expressed and developed. As such, belonging is dependent upon an expansionary instinct in which relationships and serving competence are undergoing constant, positive and additive transformations. Conversely but consistently, any sense of relational or performative contraction is detrimental to belonging. Therefore, unjustified imbalances in leadership representation across ethnoracial and/or male/female delineations are aversive when they are perceived as contractions of relational and performative engagement, and contrary to egalitarian siblingship commitments. The latter is especially problematic in Newfrontiers ecclesiology, historically wedded to privileging uniquely male senior leadership, and it can be considered anachronistic by younger generations attuned to greater societal egalitarianism.

The metaphor of church being analogous to family, and constituting a locus of belonging, was ubiquitous. It was consistently articulated by both British-born and non-British-born congregants. Nearly every aspect of church life, from initial exploratory ‘pre-belonging’ experiences to more immersive and resilient engagement and belonging within the church, was expressed in familial language. How newcomers enter a new ecclesial family, and the factors significant as they endeavoured to do so will be considered first.

4.2. ENTRY INTO THE FAMILY

As will be seen in this section, participants’ initial experiences were foundational to engendering an embryonic sense of belonging and adherence to the church, one which would be further developed by other elements considered in the subsequent sections. Initial experiences were determined by a variety of factors, including newcomers’ specific expectations, their experience of welcome, subsequent invitation into church life, water baptism, and the nature and quality of the interactions with leadership and the church culture. The extent to which newcomers wish to immerse themselves in a new ecclesial family will be considered first.

Many of the focus group participants expressed considerable caution during their initial experiences of church, often circumspect about their desire to engage in community. This was consistent across British-born and non-British-born participants. Many were clear that they arrived expecting to sit back and passively observe church life. Whilst all participants were actively involved in the church by the time of their focus groups, this transformation necessitated intentional pro-activity, principally from leaders, to draw newcomers into church life. However, newcomers could be initially circumspect, comprising a liminal state of 'pre-belonging,' in which they would evaluate the suitability of the ecclesial environment for richer belonging and engagement.

For example, during her fifteen years' membership, Ghanaian-born Martha had served on multiple serving teams and small groups. However, her recollection of her first visits to the church was stark: 'I came just to be a backseat bencher,' (Martha, 2021). She was adamant that her initial priorities were merely to attend and to avoid immersive engagement. Her initial posture resonated with British-born Paula (2021), 'I came in with the same thing… just wanting to be a pew-filler.'

Those who arrived during COVID-restrictions, when the expression of church was either exclusively online or with restricted (and smaller) in-person meetings, were no different. For instance, Nigerian-born Kemi's (2021) initial plans were to recover from burnout at another church and to seek 'a resting place' in which she could 'come, sit down, receive and go home.' She explained this initial phase comprised a 'kind of boundary,' (Kemi, 2021). Simultaneously, she also highlighted that this explorative phase could only be temporary in which 'all good things must come to an end… I had to make a choice,' about whether King's would constitute her ecclesial home, (Kemi, 2021).

As will be seen, first experiences and impressions were vital. The specific and intentional involvement of others, especially leaders, was often pivotal in shifting newcomers' self-perception from 'outsider' to 'insider,' thus overcoming initial and transitory reticence towards pro-active engagement. For example, Nigerian-born Isah spoke of the importance of his first visit to church in which he was wrestling with a significant personal decision – whether to stay in his native Nigeria or to move permanently to the UK. He met one of the elders, Simon:[105] 'When I met Simon, it was just like, you know, a burden, you know, lifted off my shoulder… I left, you know, everything in Nigeria,' (Isah, 2021). This encounter with Simon was transformative: Isah talked and prayed with Simon whose openness and approachability, Isah claimed, helped to resolve his uncertainty. Furthermore, Isah explained that his interactions with Simon were sustained beyond this initial engagement; Isah's experience of leadership was central to his subsequent commitment.

The profundity of initial welcome was also cited by Nigerian-born Maya (2021) who was relatively new to King's at the time of her focus group: 'I think, again it comes down to inclusion, but I have felt welcomed… and that's an extension of love… So I feel accepted.' Welcome for newcomers could thus signify something more profound: attractional qualities of love and acceptance. The power of welcome was also highlighted by British-born participants. For example, Carl explained that he and his wife had visited other churches. He discerned contrasts between them, asserting 'it was the welcome… that made quite a big difference for us,' (Carl, 2021). Simon welcomed Carl (2021) repeatedly helping him feel 'noticed' and valued. For Carl, a consistent experience of welcome shifted his initial perception from outsider to potential family member.

Sri Lankan-born Amila also spoke about contrasts, this time between her welcome at King's and her experience of engaging with others in her workplace noting that 'I feel like I'm in my, with my family, like my mom… [when] I come out the church, they're still people greeting and just asking me "how are [you]?"' (Amila, 2021).[106] The welcome she received was significant: she claimed it was not transactional, but it manifested genuine interest and caring. Notably, this welcome was at odds with her experience of interacting with people outside the church, from whom Amila sometimes felt ostracised. She also explained that she had experienced discrimination in her workplace because of her inchoate English-language skills. By contrast, church felt analogous to being with her family, reminiscent of maternal acceptance.

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[105] Simon is a pseudonym.

[106] Quotes from participants shall be provided as was, and without correcting grammatical or other errors.

These experiences of welcome constituted conversational engagement which facilitated some superficial sense of being valued and known. However, as previously noted, a significant proportion of newcomers spoke about initial plans of 'backseat benching,' assuming a detached observer role. Consistent welcome, whilst universally appreciated, in many cases did not precipitate immersive engagement into the church community. An additional and intentional step was required – that of pro-active invitation into specific areas of church life, mainly from leaders in the church. The strongest expressions of belonging in the focus groups occurred when a specific integration process had been experienced, steering newcomers into meaningful community. Generic verbal notices, for example, merely created awareness of community life but were inadequate per se.

For example, every week, during Sunday morning worship meetings, a verbal notice is announced by leaders with the intention of signposting newcomers into groups specifically designed to welcome them into church life. One incarnation of these groups was called Connect.[107] Nigerian-born Alice spoke about her and her husband's journey as relative newcomers into a Connect Group. She explained that, initially, their plan was to 'sit, stay in the back and just sort of be blessed,' (Alice, 2021). However, her passivity was disrupted by a leadership couple in the Welcome Team who 'told us about Connect and… introduced us to [the group leaders]… we joined the Connect group… We absolutely loved it… we really felt at home.'

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[107] See previous chapter.

Personal invitation from a leadership couple trumped generic and consistent verbal announcement: introduction into the Connect group transformed their sense of belonging. Conversely, where deeper bonds were difficult to form, this was seriously detrimental to any form of enduring belonging. Ghanaian-born Martha (2021) lamented that the church felt 'big' and even though, 'we are very welcoming … I don't think… everyone that comes through the door feels the same way.' She pointed out that, whilst the church could appear initially welcoming, such perceptions were not enduring because people had left owing to the failure to integrate them intentionally.

She opined that 'friendship in churches is becoming a bit more complicated these days,' (Martha, 2021) because of growth. The experience of connection for new people, and the creation of resilient friendships, had become more complex, Martha insisted, owing to the absence of a dedicated integration team, in marked contrast to her own integration experience. Thus, whilst friendship was pivotal in cementing people into the church, it could be contingent upon steering and guidance by a team skilled in connecting people beyond their initial Sunday welcome. This was especially significant for those who arrived without pre-existing relationships. Where these were lacking, so potentially was newcomers' sense of belonging.

Thus, the liminal state of 'pre-belonging' which many appear to engage on arrival appears to have a relatively short time span before it becomes unduly aversive. It also appears to reflect poorly on leadership to create a sufficiently efficacious process for introducing visitors into immersive group life. For Martha, the departure of others was grievous because it was contrasted so markedly with her own integration into the church. As a newcomer, she met Jennifer very early on, and with whom she would develop a very close friendship:

> Jennifer… would be at the foyer waiting for me… I had a phone call in the week to check, welcome me and asked how I found the service and asked if I was going to

> come back – and I came back… And I was placed in a homegroup and then the homegroup took over. (Martha, 2021)

Martha (2021) concluded that being invited into a homegroup was how she 'found friendship and community in the church… it became like a family.' For Martha, the whole process felt personal and orchestrated: Jennifer acted as a personal guide into deeper interpersonal relationships and then into group life. Furthermore, between Martha's initial welcome and introduction into homegroup, she explained that she had done the church's membership course which had been beneficial for her to understand the church and meet new people. However, ultimately it was the homegroup that helped Martha feel that she had joined what felt like 'family,' (Martha, 2021). The significance of small groups will be discussed specifically in the next section. What Martha was eager to articulate was the intentional process of 'integration' which constituted a specific path of invitation from leaders through from initial welcome into deeper community life – and in her case via a membership course.

Martha specifically cited the membership course as central to her integration: it afforded an opportunity to meet with leaders and to be signposted into new areas of ecclesial life. Indeed, how leadership appeared to newcomers and to congregants was an issue that was raised in every focus group. Leaders were expected not only to act as social 'guides' for newcomers into more immersive community, but they were also expected to embody qualities considered to be consistent with a status as Christlike exemplars. These qualities included the demonstration of cultural norms commensurate with a loving family. Thus, an early positive experience of leadership could produce an affective draw for newcomers – British- and non-British born. For instance, when leaders were experienced as approachable to newcomers and congregants, this was regarded as promoting loyalty and belonging.

Notably, feedback on leadership approachability (and its attractiveness to newcomers) came *almost* exclusively from non-British born participants, in which each recounted personal one-to-one experiences, sometimes in contrast to experiences from previous churches. In fact, how leadership dealt with congregants' concerns, especially at the outset of the journey into the church, could prove decisive. For example, Nigerian-born Kemi joined in 2020, drawn by what she perceived of the church's ethnoracially diverse composition.

However, she observed the following injurious disjunction when browsing the church's leadership webpage: 'I was like, everybody was white, pretty much, predominantly… this didn't sit down well with me,' (Kemi, 2021). She sent an email to the church's white senior pastor pointing out the disparity between congregational and leadership demographics. Kemi then went on to explain the content of his reply, noting '"yes… this is something that they're working on." And for me that was just so, so good. I thought: "that is a leader,"' (Kemi, 2021).[108] Kemi's encounter with the leadership on a contentious issue was, ultimately, surprisingly constructive. She explained that her complaint was discussed openly, but significantly with an action plan already in progress to remedy it: she was reassured by this interaction and the leadership authority being pro-actively exercised. She also considered this encounter to exemplify other leadership norms she valued, including openness and approachability. The modelling of co-operative leadership qualities was also raised by other participants.

For instance, Nigerian-born Isah was impressed that Simon, one of the elders, had made an effort to know him from the outset: Isah's initial experiences proved to be pivotal in his decision to join the church. Isah explained that, shortly after arriving in the UK, he wanted his first child dedicated. He was impressed that Simon had been pro-active in seeking to understand the cultural significance of Isah's (2021) request, 'and to my surprise, they accepted… the first impression that I got... they went, extra mile to make this happen.'

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[108] The significance of diversity and representation will be considered later.

Isah did not know Simon well at the time of his request. However, it became a vehicle for mutual exploration of each other's cultures – the leadership culture exemplified by Simon, and Isah's home culture in which newborn dedication is valued. Simon's approachability and pro-activity impressed Isah – he commented that he was 'overwhelmed' that he had been understood, his request considered and then contextualised, (Isah, 2021). Isah also raised a related matter of cultural significance to many Africans: Watch Night services which designate the end of one calendar year and the beginning of the next, straddling New Year's Eve/New Year's Day. He explained that 'I complained to Simon, "Why can't we have a Watch Night Service?"' His request to Simon was granted and Isah (2021) asserted that the Watch Night 'was beautiful…. I felt like, again… the leadership is listening to us,' reassured by leadership's approachability and decisive authority to effect positive change.[109]

Another Nigerian, Akin (2021), compared his previous experiences of church leadership with his at King's, and his views were shockingly forthright:

> You come to King's and you can sit anywhere... You talk to leaders, you have an issue, or you just have an opinion, you talk… My former church, when I was in Africa, the leaders are not accessible.[110]

For Akin, the absence of distance between leaders and attendees was refreshing, and he went on to state his confidence he could address issues directly, and without backlash. He explained why this was significant: 'Jesus was accessible to everybody,' (Akin, 2021) and having this modelled in contemporary leaders enabled Akin to impute Christlike qualities to them.

Another Nigerian – Maya – spoke of the integration process and her post-membership course follow-up conversation with a senior leader. In this, she was asked how she found church life: 'the fact that he actually wanted to know… that made me feel involved… because it helped me feel like, okay, these people are showing like they do care about my soul,' (Maya, 2021). Maya claimed she felt loved, appreciated and known – that her 'soul' was valued – because of her perception of leadership's approachability and concern.

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[109] Martha (2022) was also extremely appreciative of Watch Night: 'they came in, and it was very fun-filled… it was really interesting to see how diverse it was.'

[110] His wife, Yomi, expressed similar opinions.

Carl was the only British-born participant to raise approachability as a contributory factor to his belonging, centred upon the Connect Group he and his wife joined. He noted that having key leaders 'introduce themselves… it was really, really helpful in terms of actually feeling, from the very start, like you were a part of the church,' (Carl, 2021). Connection to leadership was equated with connection to the broader church collective, with leaders acting as exemplars of the latter. However, Carl was also to highlight an issue foundational to longer-term belonging – that of professionalism. Its potential to disrupt an intimate and relational sense of family was also consistently raised as undermining belonging.

Carl spoke about the church's Sunday sung worship as 'very professional … everything's organised,' (Carl, 2021). The 'professional' adjective could superficially appear complimentary – after all, Carl claimed that high standards of musicianship enabled him to enjoy a greater level of engagement with sung worship. Conversely, these standards – and how they were achieved – were highlighted as potentially highly disjunctive for belonging. This was especially so for newcomers, who seemed especially sensitive to an evaluation of leaders as fictive familial exemplars.

However, such evaluation was not limited to newcomers. For example, British-born Charlotte (a long-standing member of the church) contrasted her experience in two different serving teams – the children's work, and the worship team. Regarding the former, she asserted that the leaders are 'really good at making you feel very valued,' (Charlotte, 2021). During lockdown, Charlotte was impressed by the efforts the children's leaders made to keep the team connected through the high-quality pastoral support she asserted that they provided to team members. Others, including

Nigerian-born Alice, made the same point: caring, nurturing, and inclusive leadership was greatly appreciated. However, the children's work contrasted with the worship team, which was lacking both pastoral oversight and a 'kind of sense of togetherness of the team,' (Charlotte, 2021).

The pro-active care exemplified by leadership within the children's work appeared starkly absent in the worship team. Instead, it 'ran itself' without a sense of cohesion across the members of the various bands, (Charlotte, 2021). Charlotte's tone was pained – for her, worship team membership, whilst comprising members devoted to the church, was relationally deficient. Nigerian-born Alice agreed, and cited her husband Sani's experience claiming, 'it's very professional, like, you know, we don't pray together, we don't spend any time together… he's not loving it,' (Alice, 2021).

Alice's view was that the somewhat functional focus of the worship team led to a sense of clinical 'professionalism' and relational disconnection. This detached culture of serving was not limited merely to this single ministry group. Alice (2021) asserted generically that serving 'is very professional, almost it's like you serve and that's, that's where that relationship, you know, just serving that team… and that's where that ends.'[111]

Two years later, Alice's husband Sani spoke about his transformed sense of belonging to the worship team. Much had changed, including a new employed ministry leader. Sani (2023) was clear why his belonging had increased, 'I am more able than before to go out… in my worship band. I have some people come over here and we'll just talk. Or even we'll just go out for coffee after church.' The change in leadership style had precipitated increased social interaction amongst band members, some planned, some spontaneous, and this had reconfigured Sani's perception of the worship group, his belonging to it and to others. It no longer felt clinical or functional but had become much more relational: it felt much more like family.

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[111] I led the prophetic and prayer teams she cited as similarly deficient.

As noted in Chapter Three, the membership course at King's is promoted as central to deeper engagement. In this, leaders meet with newcomers to outline the vision and foundational values of the church. Of these, baptism by full immersion post-conversion is foregrounded, and it is a pre-requisite for membership (see Chapters One and Three). Those who are new to the Christian faith, or to the church, who have not previously been baptised as believers by immersion are invited to consider baptism early on into their journey into the church.

Nigerian-born Maya spoke of baptism's power and significance: 'baptism is… the relationship, the connection with God where you're accepting to be welcomed into God's family,' (Maya, 2021). Her assertion reinforced baptism's transformative power in two senses: first, in personal connection to God, and second in strengthening familial-type attachment to the church. Both upgrades in belonging were experienced in practice by British-born and non-British-born newcomers.

Whilst British-born Carl divulged his initial reticence to water baptism, he claimed that he had found it surprisingly positive: '[it] enhanced the feeling of being part… of the church, it was almost a turning point for me in terms of sense of belonging in the church,' (Carl, 2021). He was not alone. Syrian-national Carim's first focus group image was of his baptism. He connected his belonging with baptism, along with his salvation moment which occurred in a small group gathering. Carim linked both events – salvation and baptism – as equally significant because 'I'm surrounded by people who are welcoming and are like family… So, for me belonging, it's, it's physical, but also very much… spiritual,' (Carim, 2021).

Carim's baptism formed an essential part of his journey from external observer (he arrived at King's as an unbeliever), to ecclesial family member. His belonging comprised two components: enhanced attachment to God (it was 'spiritual') but also to others – the fictive family which encouraged and supported him. However, participants also explained that it was not simply the individuals undergoing baptism but also those witnessing it who experienced a reinforcement in mutual belonging. The language spoken was one of mutual participation and identification with, for instance, the baptisee.

For example, Polish-born Filip (2021) reflected on Carim's baptism: 'I think another part of belonging in the church is… you're all a family… I was part of your baptism; I got to witness the amazing day.' Baptisms were thus experienced as events creating and reinforcing familial bonds both for observers and baptisees. Other family events such as weddings and funerals were also experienced as cementing and nurturing belonging, and these will be discussed in the next section.

Deeper belonging, beyond initial engagement and entry into the church family, was pivotal to transform tentative attachment into sustained longer-term and more immersive engagement. It was specifically dependent upon a variety of factors which were expressed as constituting 'family life.' These essential elements in cementing and reinforcing belonging will be considered next.

4.3. FAMILY LIFE TOGETHER: RELATIONAL AND PERFORMATIVE

Whilst positive initial experiences of church and leadership were central in nurturing an inchoate sense of belonging to the church family, richer and more profound experiences were consistently discussed as stabilising and deepening individuals' and families' sense of belonging. The metaphor of church as family was consistently expressed in relational and performative language. Relationships resembling egalitarian and reciprocal siblingship were discussed in positive terms, and such relationships promoted an enduring sense of being known and cared for at depth.

Whilst interpersonal relationships which modelled those of an idealised siblingship were vital, commitment to a small group was also considered to be highly effective in nurturing deeper belonging. This was partly because both fictive sibling and parenting relationships could be established and sustained within such a milieu. Small groups could also facilitate performative elements which were foundational to participants' belonging, especially when serving in areas of perceived gifting. Indeed, serving was especially valued when it was conducted alongside others within a harmonious framework of common purpose, belief and teamwork. Furthermore, serving could often be discerned as 'expansionary,' in which fruitful engagement alongside others led to an expansion of inter-personal and intra-group relationships combined with expanded serving competence. Conversely, the absence of the latter could seriously disrupt belonging.

The promotion of belonging was not merely limited to interpersonal or group relationships and serving. Significant shared 'family moments,' such as experiences of God in corporate worship settings, as well as rites of passage (including weddings and funerals), significantly enriched self-reports of belonging, especially when these were 'expansionary' of relationships with others and with God. The importance of being known and cared for through enduring sibling-type relationships will be considered first.

British-born Paula discussed the need for deep disclosive relationships whilst lamenting a shortcoming in her sense of belonging within the church. This was due to her singleness, asserting 'it's an area that's not discussed,' (Paula, 2021). In a follow-up interview, Paula explained that 'for single people, the sense of belonging doesn't come on a Sunday morning,' (Paula, 2023). She insisted that it was illusory for those who 'might think, "you're serving, you're involved, and actually that's belonging,"' (Paula, 2023). Whilst she was actively engaged in a small group and Sunday morning worship, she did not feel well known or understood. Thus, small group involvement and serving were inadequate per se without deeper relational engagement beyond these. Her main point was that ‘it’s about being known,’ and at some depth in which others understand her ‘likes and dislikes, know what I'm like as a person, what am I *really* like,’ through tight relational proximity, (Paula, 2023).

The encouragement and support offered to heteronormative marriage foregrounded in the church was potentially problematic, Paula explained, because it established a default paradigm which could unwittingly marginalise single people. Consequently, Paula’s (2023) closest connections were mainly with other single people outside King’s, because ‘we’ve been able to come together to help each other.’ Whilst singleness constituted a huge challenge (Paula claimed was ubiquitous across the UK Church), she shared that the presence of ethnoracial diversity was a counterbalance to the exclusion that many singles could experience: this will be revisited in the next section. Married participants also expressed a similar sense of detachment concerning a lack of in-depth relationships.

Whilst singleness was a challenge to the construction of in-depth disclosive relationships, other familial-like relationships were foundational to focus group participants. For instance, Charlotte shared an image of her husband and three children on holiday with another family from the church. She explained why this exemplified belonging:

> These guys are fantastic friends to us, they like our family… you can be completely yourself; you can be honest. You can share the… most difficult times in life with each other… the ups and the downs together, (Charlotte, 2021).

Whilst her biological family comprised part of the church, Charlotte spoke of her fondness for this other family unit, whose closeness was so prized that they were equated with natural family. Charlotte (2021) summed up the inter-couple age-peer relationship thus: ‘having people like that in the church just helps you to feel, you know, connected in.’ Belonging necessitated close others with whom to be candid, accepted and to share both adverse and positive experiences. Charlotte's language mirrored that of fictive siblingship.

Conversely, Jeremy (2021) lamented the painful departure of close friends (again age-peers) during lockdown: 'people have left the church who I thought were good friends of mine and they never even said "goodbye".' The failure for longstanding friends to communicate their departure was analogous to a family schism: 'you know I wouldn't expect anyone to leave my family without saying "goodbye!"' (Jeremy, 2021), and thus to ruptured belonging. He concluded starkly: 'maybe I don't really actually belong in King's Church,' (Jeremy, 2021).

His manifest frustrations were re-evaluated a year later in a follow-up interview. In this he discerned a marked improvement, 'Aye and Mary call us "mum and dad"… and being treated as such, that makes you feel like a family,' (Jeremy, 2022). New and reinforced experiences of intergenerational connection with this African couple proved transformative. Being alongside close others within a pseudo-familial intergenerational relationship strengthened Jeremy's sense of family, and his associated perception of ecclesial belonging.

Such anchoring and enduring relationships were universally conducive to developing participants' sense of belonging. However, they were insufficient to nurture enduring belonging per se. Other factors typified by family were simultaneously necessary – especially a perception of being cared for. This was a principal component of belonging. It was, of course, contingent upon being known since it depended upon awareness of the circumstances of others' lives. Where this dual combination was deficient, it could be highly aversive.

For example, Alice (2021) showed an image of a sign bearing the message: 'In an Emergency: Call 999.' She insisted that she did not feel close enough to others who would assist her in a crisis, explaining that she and her husband had been in King's for many years, during which she had twice been rushed into hospital. This necessitated obtaining emergency care for her children, but she had called for assistance from people outside the church, concluding: 'I personally don't feel like I have anybody in King's that socially I can call, call on knowing their circumstances,' (Alice, 2021).

Despite her serving and leading various teams, Alice concluded that the church could foreground transactional serving over relational support, in which it could transition to appearing institutional and cold, exemplifying inadequate familial-type bonds. Alice's (2021) conclusion was stark: 'I think it makes us feel like we belong in terms of the serving side of King's, we don't feel like we belong in terms of relationships at King's.' Connection through serving without tight dyadic or group relationships in which others' circumstances were mutually known, and expressed through acts of care, was thus potentially injurious.

Two years' later, in a follow-up interview, Alice (2023) explained that 'I think I've made more individual connections with people, so I know that I can call someone. I also feel like I belong much more.' Closer interactions with others who were aware of her family's circumstances precipitated a significantly upgraded sense of belonging. Consequently, the church now felt 'like a family, cause it's always there… there's always help,' (Alice, 2023).

Whilst Alice spoke in hypothetical terms, German-born Steffi spoke about the practical assistance she and her family had received over many years in the church, and its contemporary relevance to her. She explained that 'there are still plenty of people I could call upon if there was an emergency... It's that kind of extended family,' (Steffi, 2022). The dependability of the church to provide pro-active support, and not just from close friends, was a major determinant in helping the church to resemble an extended fictive family.

Others, such as Sri Lankan Amila and her Hungarian husband Arpad, also spoke about the significance of practical support. Amila detailed her search for belonging in a British context in which her rudimentary language skills were a barrier to her developing relationships in her secular work. She explained that church provided a stark but salutary contrast to this, 'because especially they love… they never ask where you come from, which colour, I am… and which caste I am from… I just so grateful I belong to King's family,' (Amila, 2021).

Amila explained that love was received through physical demonstrations of care (such as being served refreshments, being welcomed and physically embraced), and through genuine acceptance irrespective of any familial or socio-economic background. Her belonging to King's was in direct the contrast to previous experiences of ostracism (religious and class-based), which she asserted were embedded within her home culture experiences. Her (Hungarian-born) husband Arpad (2021) concurred, again foregrounding contrasting experiences:[112]

> I never ever felt anything like this before… other Christians are our brothers and sisters. So he's a non, non-biological family basically that you sometimes actually is more stronger than any other family… we just love another and care and support each other.

Being loved and providing mutual support bolstered Arpad's sense of belonging.[113] Being cared for by others contributed to belonging because it authentically resembled 'family,' and it could potentially surpass biological ones. However, lack of depth of being cared for diluted belonging, even if congregants were apparently immersed in fruitful and purposeful serving. A key component that specifically facilitated such care was that of small groups.

Small group engagement was ubiquitously cited by British-born and non-British-born participants as central to belonging. Church as a fictive family was often experienced in the context of small group interactions, but different cultures or age-groups often had differing expectations of what healthy small group life should comprise. These could either reinforce or compromise the church's 'familiness.'

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[112] Arpad had accepted Jesus at King's, and married Amila a few months prior to the focus group.

[113] Additional reasons will be outlined later in this section.

For example, when asked why church felt non-familial and institutional to her,[114] Alice (2021) reflected 'maybe because we didn't go to those small groups that everybody has been talking about.' The absence of small group involvement was self-identified by Alice as a possible cause of relational detachment and a lack of being cared for. Conversely, UK-born Carl made a significant point, consistent with Alice's, when he observed of his own commitment to small groups: 'the more you participate and the more you put in, the more of a sense of belonging,' (Carl, 2021).

Immersion in and commitment to small groups thus appeared to promote adherence. This motif was picked up by relative newcomer, Syrian Carim. He spoke about his small group's fictive familial role as he faced a challenging change of employment. He noted that his small group prayed for him, 'like… a mother or father know that their child is having a hard time or something, they would still think about them, they would check up on them,' (Carim, 2021).

The small group represented to Carim a substitute family (he had no parents or siblings in the UK), one that he believed pursued his best interests. It was loyal, accepting, prayerful and enduring, he opined, affording him space to receive pastoral support that mirrored pro-active parental concern. Carim's small group comprised people from a wide age range – from mid-20s to mid-60s. The intergenerational composition of church life was a factor mentioned frequently by both British-born and non-British-born.[115]

However, barriers to small group engagement could disincentivise some newcomers. For example, Ghanian Martha (2021) was clear that the culture of the church could feel too 'white' for some African newcomers, causing them to leave the church after a short period of time: 'they keep asking, excuse me to say, "how do you enjoy going to such a white church?"' She explained that the deficiency for many new Africans was due to the absence of 'familiness,'[116] which was equated with 'white' culture in which community was too superficial, flimsily based on transitory verbal exchanges, often restricted to Sunday morning meetings, (Martha, 2022).[117] Inadequate 'familiness' was a shortcoming of a lack of in-depth group life, which Martha (2022) considered foundational to those from an African background: 'if small groups aren't done purposely, then we lose out on people.'

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[114] In her focus group, and prior to her articulation of strengthened belonging noted above.
[115] This will be considered specifically in the next section.

The challenge of group life, in Martha's view, was twofold: the process of joining a group, alongside its receptivity to newcomers. Regarding the former, its consumerist self-selection, combined with a lack of pro-active involvement of leadership assisting newcomers into group life, were significant barriers. Martha (2022) insisted that many Africans had come and then departed because they told her '"we didn't fit in."'

The shortcoming in shepherding newcomers into groups was exacerbated by a generational shift in sociality. She opined that a younger cohort was more likely to form relatively impermeable cliques, whose constituents were merely superficially welcoming on a specific Sunday morning. This was insufficient for building true relationship, she claimed, 'but if you were in a homegroup… then it's very easy for them to say "hello" and start building a relationship through that,' (Martha, 2022). Small groups thus constituted a vital locus of belonging through the deepening of interpersonal relationships beyond cursory interactions, and ultimately eroding impermeable, homogenous cliques. For instance, she cited two exclusive cliques: one comprising the 'younger generation' which perpetuated siloed relationships, and another which she termed the 'Nigerian Association… they started their own niche of group on the side,' (Martha, 2022). These could ultimately erode intercultural and intergenerational blending she found so vivifying in her own small group.[118]

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[116] Martha's self-coined term.

[117] Other reasons, including frequency and style of prayer, will be considered in the next section.

Whilst the 'familiness' motif was significant to Ghanaian Martha, and the opt-in and homogenous nature of more contemporary groups problematic, it should be noted that Nigerian-born Kemi found the self-selection aspect advantageous. She explained that she was 'shocked at the number of small groups… you could literally sign up to,' and being engaged in multiple groups enabled her to feel 'like I belonged to King's. I felt like I knew everybody, you know. And that for me is part of why I still am in King's today,' (Kemi, 2021). The variety of small groups had enabled Kemi to find a locus of relationships and being known. Whether group self-selection was positive or negative seemed to depend upon both preceding expectations, and subsequent experience of small groups. However, regardless of the process of group selection, small group membership was inadequate per se to sustain enduring belonging – purposive serving of others was required in which small groups could also constitute a locus of such service.

Polish-born Filip explained the centrality of serving to belonging through an image of himself serving at the church's homeless ministry – his mouth was full of food, and he was smiling enthusiastically. He explained that 'for me, this is like the King's Church kit, and my sense of belonging is serving,' (Filip, 2021). Serving was analogous, Filip explained, to sporting apparel worn by adherents of sports teams and foundational to his church allegiance. It was a theme frequently cited by others, but sometimes frustration in serving could prove profoundly disruptive to a conception of church as a harmonious family.

In his focus group Jeremy considered the experiences of others' serving. He was adamant: 'if gifts are not recognized then, you know, people can use them in their own family but they can't really use them in the church unless there's some sort of recognition,' (Jeremy, 2021). It was a given: in a functional family, members are known, as are their gifts. Deployment of gifts was thus foundational to a healthy expression of family, Jeremy insisted. Jeremy noted that his own sense of belonging at the time of the focus group was highly compromised by a variety of factors. One of them was the release of gifts within the church. He asserted that 'if this is really about belonging… it does really require the leaders to draw people's gifts out,' (Jeremy, 2021).

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[118] Ethnoracial diversity shall be considered in the next section.

This transformative potential of serving was highlighted by Nigerian-born Isah when he was asked by leaders to run an ethnoracially diverse small group.[119] For him the responsibility was foundational: 'Someone was talking about people come easily and some people leave easily. This may be because some people are not given enough responsibility,' (Isah, 2021). Release into expressing and developing gifting precipitated a positively progressive sense of belonging for Isah and others, requiring leaders to mobilise congregants into fruitful serving.

However, serving was not spoken of as simply a lone task to bring personal fulfilment through the identification and expression of individuals' gifts. Fulfilment and belonging were contingent upon goals bigger than individuals'. In fact, it was when unique personal contributions were blended with those of others that an upgraded sense of belonging was expressed, especially when others' contributions were complementary. Indeed, unity within diverse giftings was deeply valued.

For example, British-born Robert was eager to highlight the power of diversity, conformity and unity. He showed a picture of the backs of a group from diverse ages, sex and ethnicity/race. They were walking in unison, each person with an arm around one or two others. Robert (2021) explained that this represented 'a body of different people… being all in this together. Moving forward… knowing that we are united in belief and purpose is another important quality of belonging.' He contrasted this with disunity, asserting 'from past experience… there is something very unsettling about knowing that not all of the group are of one mind,' (Robert, 2021).[120] For him, unity of belief was a pre-requisite of cohesive action whilst the opposite precipitated uncertainty.

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[119] His leadership of the group shall be revisited in the next section.

Unity was also powerfully cited by Hungarian-born Arpad. He spoke about the brokenness apparent in many biological families contrasting this with church family. He asserted that Church could be stronger, 'because here is God,' (Arpad, 2021). He explained why: 'it's more because probably we… talk the same language and we understand each other more than the family itself,' (Arpad, 2021). The unifying presence of God, in his view, established not only common experiences but also a common language to articulate the former. The result was a profounder understanding of one another, precipitating greater unity and strength than that found in some biological families.

Whilst Robert and Arpad cited unity as embedded in common belief, experience of the divine, and common language, Robert (2021) also insisted that being 'united in … purpose' undergirded belonging. British-born Dave's experience corroborated Robert's assertion. His image comprised a defective lighting desk under repair. Dave (2021) explained 'it made me feel like I was belonging, here in this situation. I wasn't afraid of taking something apart and trying to fix it.' Deployment of Dave's skills heightened his perceived belonging – especially, he noted, when combined with others' diverse skillsets. Dave (2021) pointed out that everyone 'has a little bit of value to bring anything.' Dave spoke in generative terms: that individuals' distinctive but blended contributions were fundamental to cohesion and positive affect.

Similarly, Charlotte's image comprised musicians and vocalists in the church facing forward and performing together as a band. She explained that this was significant in her connection with the church: 'I love the teamwork side of it… to play well… I love being able to… inspire each other,' (Charlotte, 2021). The teamwork aspect of serving for Charlotte appeared again to be generative – in terms of developing a body of friends, but also its inspiration to technical advancement and growth. This concept of growth – being nurtured within a familial environment – was foundational to a positive sense of belonging.

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[120] Robert made it clear that this negative experience originated in a previous church.

Indeed, the language of growth was pervasive throughout the focus groups regarding serving. It was expressed as *investing* in which the serving of others was expected to produce an increase in a threefold sense: of personal satisfaction for the server, of competence and skill (again for the server but also for other group members), and of mutual relational depth between servers and those being served. Growth in all these areas was also presumed to be embedded within God's divine will for his ecclesial family.

However, when the opposite was experienced – stagnation or contraction – it was highly aversive. For example, Isah (2021) explained that there appeared to be two levels of servers on the sound-mixing team – the 'dogsbodies' who were given menial tasks, and more expert team leaders who executed weightier responsibilities. He explained his frustrations, 'you can't touch this, you can't do that. Just watch what they [team leaders] do. And if someone needs mic [microphone], you will be the one to just take the mic,' (Isah, 2021) in contrast to others considered more technically adept who undertook more demanding tasks such as sound-mixing.

The bifurcation into the highly and less competent was compounded by Isah's perception that 'there are some groups… where you… might not be able to, you know, grow. And the next plan is how you want to get out or leave the place,' (Isah, 2021). An absence of development underpinned Isah's exasperation. Having served on the sound-mixing team for six years, he felt disempowered and 'stuck,' (Isah, 2021). Furthermore, others who had experienced similar frustrations had left the church without explanation.

The expectation of growth of competence as a natural outcome was explicit in Isah's convictions about serving. Paula expressed similar presumptions when she showed an image of those whom she was co-leading in her small group. She was clear that the significance of the image was 'not about these people particularly… it's about… actually having people that you can start to invest in,' (Paula, 2021). Paula's view was that leading a small group was about *investing*. Like Isah, serving was done within a presumed paradigm of increase – of self and others. The opposite was deleterious and Paula (2021) was clear 'I'd hate to be stagnant… it's great to just always be growing, challenging – whatever – learning.' A failure to grow was equated with stifling and aversive stagnation.

Serving was thus an opportunity for expansion. Nigerian-born Maya (2021) explained that serving constituted 'an opportunity where God is growing me… to help us flourish as we carry on our own task.' Divine providence and human action thus were presumed to combine to produce healthy and vigorous growth in which serving was central to that development: for Isah, it should facilitate growth of competence, for Charlotte skill and deepened friendships, and for Maya – a divine nourishing of self and activity. Serving was thus salubrious when it was in essence expansionary: performatively and relationally.

However, it was not simply being released into fruitful serving that was salutary: a sense of being needed was another essential ingredient. Charlotte contrasted two situations. She spoke of serving with her husband as part of the children's work and noted that the children's work leaders worked hard at valuing team members.[121] However, this was in direct contrast to Charlotte's experience of serving as a musician within the church's worship group.

She explained that, prior to lockdown, she had been playing alternate Sundays, in addition to regular evening practice sessions. During lockdown, only a small subset of the musicians and singers was utilised. Charlotte lamented this sudden transition to online church: 'it was… like my arm was cut off almost… and I'm not needed anymore,' (Charlotte, 2021). Charlotte was close to tears, and she apologised for becoming distressed. Other members comforted her and corroborated her experience. Charlotte's language was that of amputation and severance – the experience of not being required felt injurious. Being needed, and discerning this, were foundational to belonging in the context of serving. However, this could also prove problematic, German-born Steffi highlighted. She cautioned that 'sometimes… it feels like, you know, 20% of the people are doing most of the, the serving… so it has positive and negative connotations for me,' (Steffi, 2021). For Steffi, a disproportionate distribution of serving duties diluted the church's family feel, with some siblings unfairly burdened with others simultaneously passive and unproductive.

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[121] Overlapping with similar concepts expressed in the previous section.

Other common family experiences were also considered as precipitating various types of growth. For instance, positive affective experiences in the presence of the broader church were often equated with enhanced belonging to God and to other congregants. Such events included sung-worship (and hearing God's voice in the latter), as well as key life-stage events, such as weddings and funerals. They were spoken of as initiating or upgrading a sense of connection to the church as a fictive family. Consistent with Restorationist commitments to sung-worship, (Steven, 1989, p. 4) high value was placed on this as a locus of divine encounter by discerning God's presence and hearing his voice: it was again discussed in 'expansionary' terms when positive.

However, it could also prove to be deleterious. For instance, Nigerian-born Yomi explained that the style of sung-worship could possibly chafe against some African congregants' sensibilities. She explained that, whilst she admired the teamwork underpinning worship, there was a potential downside: 'the kind of churches I've always been to, we've always had like church choirs… So, and that's something I have missed,' (Yomi, 2021). The absence of a choir was deeper than aesthetic preference: it could appear to be theologically- and performatively-constraining. Yomi (2021) explained the limitations of a lead vocalist-led band: 'All focus is on that one person… if you had a choir then nobody is really looking at anybody… [the] focus should be on God… or the lyrics of the song.'

Yomi insisted that a choir facilitated a different worship experience in which multiple vocalists enabled more acute concentration on lyrical content and engagement with God, diverting attention away from a small team of conspicuous individuals. Others (especially Africans) agreed. The emphasis on a few band members leading congregational sung-worship was thus viewed by some as a constraint on the wider family of the church. This restriction prevented more voices finding expression and blending with others. It also frustrated the gifting of potential contributors, diluting belonging for those who were precluded from participation. Finally, Yomi (2021) insisted that this was not simply an idiosyncratic African cultural preference, noting that 'if you go into even English churches, you do have a choir', reference to more traditional Anglican worship.

Such potential constraints were significant because sung-worship was often equated with encountering God's presence. Mia (2021) summed up her experience and expectations of sung-worship: 'I expect God to meet me at my point of worship… and then elevate me.' Nigerian-born Maya (2021) agreed: 'I mean, worship is a heavenly language anyway like, you know, it's what connects us to God.'

The forced transition to online-only meetings during the lockdown was thus likely to be problematic for Restorationists committed to in-person corporate sung-worship as a locus of divine encounter. Indeed, the deleterious effects of lockdown were mentioned by multiple focus group participants. Charlotte (2021) asserted that it was 'really difficult to think about my sense of belonging at church… without doing so in the context of the [lockdown].' She was unequivocal about its consequences: 'I felt the most disconnected from church… I just felt completely cut off… I really just miss being with, with God's people and being able to worship together and see people across the room,' (Charlotte, 2021).

The contrast of lockdown's online-only worship with in-person communal worship was stark: Charlotte had felt extremely isolated – her belonging significantly compromised and challenged. Even though she appreciated online church as a helpful stopgap, its inadequacy became progressively distressing. Her loss was acute, even if some of the preceding experience of in-person worship could superficially appear cursory – such as spotting fellow worshippers from across the auditorium. What had previously been accepted as inconsequential was subsequently re-evaluated as of immense value in sustaining her sense of corporate belonging.

Reflecting on a pre-lockdown Encounter Evening, Carl explained its value in connecting him to God. He was surprised at observing the strong turnout, especially because the primary objective was to 'praise God and see what he wants to do with that evening,' (Carl, 2021). Carl (2021) reflected that it had proved 'particularly powerful for me, it was the sort of collectiveness of it… I was surprised how much I got out of it,' including the experiencing of hearing God speak to him personally. He stated that this event (along with his baptism noted earlier) had upgraded his sense of belonging. It was due to the profundity of his unexpected personal encounter with God combined with the vital co-presence of others.

The significance of being spoken to by God was picked up British-born Paula. She was familiar with other Newfrontiers churches, but she had originally planned to remain in the background on arrival at King's. However, she recounted her first Sunday at King's and the sung-worship: 'God spoke to me really clearly and said, "I've finally got you where I want you!",' (Paula, 2021). Divine directive discerned by Paula through God's presence during sung-worship was a major factor in settling her sense of placement and subsequent belonging to King's. Ghanaian Martha (2021) agreed: 'what drove me to stay at King's – it was just God's presence in our worship.'

The common experience of congregational sung-worship was advocated strongly by multiple participants. Like healthy serving, it was 'expansionary,' in this case precipitating a deeper relationship with God and others by being experienced in the presence of both. However, other common experiences, ones with strongly familial underpinnings, such as weddings and funerals, were also cited as similarly unifying, some of these embedded within expressions of corporate sung-worship.

As noted earlier, water baptism reinforced belonging to the church of both baptisees and observers. Hungarian-born Arpad explained (responding to Syrian Carim's comments on baptism) that for him and his wife 'it is the same sort of thing because we got married in King's Church. And we belong to that place and, and they made us really welcome and, and it was just an amazing day.' Positive affective experiences in the presence of fellow congregants could be powerfully transformative of participants' sense of belonging, both to others and to God.

As noted previously, Jeremy was highly disaffected at the time of his focus group. However, a year later much had changed, including his serving and relational connections. Furthermore, he considered the transformative effect of his mother-in-law's death and funeral on his and his biological family's sense of church adherence. He noted that the church leadership served his whole family through visits to his mother-in-law[122] as she was dying, and through the subsequent funeral. He noted:

> [Leaders] came to the house… you couldn't help as someone standing alongside them [at the funeral] but think "I'm really proud to be part of this bunch," because they are doing a really good job here, (Jeremy, 2022).

Jeremy felt reconnected to the wider church collective because it upheld his smaller biological and extended family through acts of service and support. He expressed his upgraded adherence in familial terms: 'We are a family, and we need each other,' (Jeremy, 2022). Family occasions like weddings and funerals could thus potentially effect an upgraded sense of belonging to the ecclesial family and to God. This was due, in part, to the sense of being cared for and served in these key moments, but also because of the supportive presence and witness of others.

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[122] She was also a member of the church.

In summary, a common family life shared across congregants was vital in promoting deeper belonging beyond initial welcome and engagement. The experience of church as family was dependent upon a combination of both sustained relational and performative components. Whilst many of these common family experiences were unifying across gifting and age, the acknowledgement of distinctives was also central to participants' continued and fortified belonging. These encompassed intergenerational, believer/non-believer, ethnoracial and male/female delineations. The significance of these will be discussed next.

4.4. BEING DISTINCTIVE IN THE FAMILY: DIVERSITY

Whilst significant components of ecclesial family life were predicated upon mutual siblingship, within which elements of equality in both status and relationship were important, diversity and distinctiveness were also expected. In the previous section, some distinctive elements were highlighted, such as diverse serving and gifting. In this section, other key distinctives between congregants will be discussed. Such distinctives embraced intergenerationality, believer/non-believer, the differentiation between male and female (especially within leadership roles), and ethnoracial diversity.

The latter was either conducive or detrimental to belonging, depending upon congregants' experiences. It was also apparent that those from different ethnoracial backgrounds within the church experienced significantly different balances of gains and losses. These could precipitate varying attachments to the church. An especially important element of distinctiveness was consistently highlighted – that of reaching out to non-believers outside the church as a way of drawing them into the ecclesial family. This was to be achieved through acts of mercy and kindness, qualities considered foundational to the ecclesial family's normative behaviours.

When considering what constituted a healthy church environment, Nigerian Isah posited in his focus group that it was essential that 'your background, wherever you're from, who you are… young, old, black, white, whatever – you're accepted,' (Isah, 2021). Isah's assertion summarised a fundamental condition of belonging: the harmonious blending across multiple distinctions. His insistence on intergenerationality as foundational to a healthy expression of family was not unique to him, but ubiquitously discussed, and it will be considered first.

For both British- and non-British-born participants, the very presence of multiple generations was a pre-requisite for deeper belonging, and positive intergenerational engagement was salubrious. However, different groups had different experiences and expectations of intergenerationality. Notably, first generation migrants to the UK were often particularly sensitive to older generations around them. As such, they were often proactive in reconstructing a fictive intergenerational family support structure.

The importance of a fictive intergenerational family seemed to comprise three principal reasons for first-generation migrants: first, to replace the loss of biological parents and the practical support they would naturally have provided, second as a source of wisdom to impart spiritual insights and guidance to younger congregants, and third as providing socio-cultural competence in new and often inscrutable British secular and ecclesial contexts. Furthermore, positive and expansionary experiences within the church of participants' own offspring were also cited as reinforcing parents' attachment and loyalty to the church family.

Intergenerationality was foundational to some participants *anticipated* belonging. For example, Nigerian-born Maya (2021) (who had just arrived at King's) was clear about her priorities in selecting to join a church:

> I noticed, again, coming in as a new person was to see like the generational dispersing of people in there.... That's what I was looking for when my kids and hopefully I can call home.

Maya's desire was for her and her children to be immersed in intergenerationality. Experience of this could be either detrimental or transformative. For example, British-born Jeremy lamented the untapped potential within the church of intergenerational engagement. He opined that the biblical injunction (from Titus 2:2-4) 'says the older women should teach the younger… but we should all be teaching and helping each other,' (Jeremy, 2021). Belonging for Jeremy was inherently intergenerational, and with the express purpose of imparting knowledge, wisdom and experience. However, he believed that it was inadequately practised, claiming it contributed to his detached sense of belonging.

Jeremy was asked by one of the pastoral leaders (after, but separately from, the focus group) to mentor a man in his early twenties, George. Having met up several times over a period of a few months, Jeremy (2022) explained that this was transformative: 'I do feel more that I belong. Erm. I think we've developed relationships with people, even like… the thing with George, we're in the same small group now.' Jeremy was vivified by the intentional engagement with George. It enabled him to pass on age-acquired wisdom, precipitating a significant upgrade in Jeremy's sense of belonging.[123] The closeness had influenced his decision to join George's group and prolong the relationship.

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[123] This was combined with an increase in serving and use of other gifts such as speaking and evangelism, as will be discussed later.

However, profounder belonging was not linked solely to his relationship with George. Jeremy also highlighted that he and his wife had been invited by a Nigerian couple to act as spiritual mother and father. This couple, Jeremy explained, were pro-active in seeking guidance and support from Jeremy and his wife and they asked Jeremy to be present at significant events. The consequence was that 'things have improved' (Jeremy, 2022) in his belonging to the church since his original focus group, partly because of reconfigured intergenerational exchanges.

Ghanian-born Martha also spoke about intergenerational engagement embedded within her initial experiences of the church, some fifteen years previously. She explained:

> the older generation… took parenting and taking care of the younger generation… very seriously… I just felt like it was in a way like a mini family, (Martha, 2021).

Martha's fictive ecclesial family enabled her to feel parented, and thus to cope with the transition from a Ghanaian set of secular and ecclesiological cultures to British ones. The family she spoke of was a replacement family, one that mitigated the loss of biological family located back in Ghana – spiritually and socio-culturally. She explained further that the small group she first joined engendered a deep mutual commitment between its adherents, 'you had like a church family… not just a small group… people you could fall on during difficult times,' (Martha, 2022).[124] Martha spoke of the depth of interaction mirroring the qualities expected within a functional family. The intergenerationality – especially the spiritual parenting role facilitated by the older generations combined with age-group peer friendships – was highly valued, and it engendered deepened belonging.

The centrality of intergenerational engagement was also emphasised by Nigerian Isah. He claimed huge benefit from the presence of spiritual parents in the upbringing of his first child. He explained that 'we don't have parents here… we could only look up to, you know, people from church because they were part of the family,' (Isah, 2021). The church was navigated as a replacement family in which 'people they were always there. They would give advice and, you know, and this is more than just going to church on a Sunday, especially when you are inexperienced,' (Isah, 2021). He explained that he and his wife had found spiritual mothers and fathers who provided practical support.

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[124] Similar to what has been noted on being known and cared for in the previous section.

Miriam (2022), Isah's wife, explained: 'this is what our parents [in Nigeria] would do if they were here. That's where the family bit comes in… We felt welcomed and embraced… loved and cared for,'[125] in the same way they expected that they would have been looked after by biological family in Nigeria. Like Martha, Isah and Miriam[126] constructed a replacement and intergenerational family to support them – in their case with assistance to parent their newborn.

UK-born Robert similarly cited the importance of blending across the generations. He had previously discussed his own teenage experiences of church some sixty years previously in which generational divides had become entrenched. He explained that 'I would want us to work as a church very hard to encourage a connection between all age ranges, so that that promotes a sense of belonging, not just to one's own age range,' (Robert, 2021). Recognising that such relationality constituted a perennial challenge, it was nonetheless foundational to Robert's belonging.

His assessment of King's was related to his own longevity in the church (over 40 years) and the fact that his own children and grandchildren also attended. He claimed that his grandchildren 'give us much better connection with people who've got children of the same age, and the children of the same age relate to us,' (Robert, 2021). The strength of his relationships with his own grandchildren was generative: they facilitated connections with their friends and their parents, eroding intergenerational boundaries, thereby fortifying a sense of cross-generational belonging.

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[125] In a follow-up interview.

[126] Similar to Syrian Carim's description of his small group, above.

Nailah (the youngest female participant in her early twenties) also spoke about how intergenerationality could overcome intra-generational shortcomings. She lamented that ‘within the general collective of the church I feel like I belong, but I find that rarely, am I, as an individual with my peers, asked questions that invite real conversation,’ (Nailah, 2021). Nailah (2021) explained why the absence of in-depth disclosure with peers was disorienting: ‘asking deeper questions makes, makes me feel at least, that someone is, is interested in the deeper things of my person… it helps me to feel like I want to be known and belong.’ However, Nailah (2021) claimed that she had many ‘spiritual mothers and fathers which is amazing. And they challenge me,’ which provided healthy counterbalance to her peer group’s shortcomings.

The significance of intergenerationality was also linked to intra-family generational dynamics. Nigerian-born Isah spoke of the vibrancy of the children’s work and the effect on his own children. Isah’s children had been part of the children’s work for over six years, and he claimed, ‘the way they are now, growing, you know, as part of a group in the church, is also been extraordinary,’ (Isah, 2021). He explained that, in the week leading up to the first children’s meeting post-lockdown, his children were eager to return. He noted that ‘if they're excited about church, we're excited… it's not just about us but it's about our family as well,’ (Isah, 2021). Like others, spiritual growth of his children was linked to his and his wife’s profounder ecclesial belonging.

It was not just African-born participants who linked the development of their children to fortified belonging. British-born Charlotte (2021) reinforced what seemed to be an almost ubiquitous appreciation of the efficacy of the children’s work: ‘it helps the whole family to feel like you belong.’ The growth of a new generation of believers was foundational to the belonging of many. Of course, Isah and Charlotte’s observations were in the context of biological family. However, the growth of the ecclesial family through the addition of non-believers was highly significant for participants' reports on belonging.

A desire to grow the church family through personal evangelism, social action-based outreach and overseas mission was apparent in all focus groups. This was expressed by participants who were both pro-actively engaged within such initiatives – and by those who were not. The activity of reaching out to non-believers could significantly enhance belonging to the church as a fictive family. It was seen as something that expanded individuals' priorities beyond themselves to others not yet part of the church. It was considered to manifest integrity to the injunctions of Jesus, especially towards the disadvantaged, and lovingly to serve them. It was thus considered to be 'expansionary' on multiple dimensions.

British-born Paula (2021) spoke of the church's preaching about outreach as expansionary, not only in terms of outcomes of adding new people, but for practitioners, noting that 'the messages that often come across to me is that you build yourself up for what you're going to give out. It's not about me, me, me.' Paula was referring, not to social-action or mission, but to the church's BLESS personal evangelism initiative.[127] Her experience of such outreach was that it displaced self-absorption by instead considering the needs of others, ultimately building up the individual who did so.

Like Paula, Nigerian-born Yomi was also not involved in any of the church's corporate outreach initiatives. However, she agreed that the latter promoted her own sense of belonging to the church because they served the vulnerable to 'draw them into church, draw them to Jesus,' (Yomi, 2021). For her such activities were 'authentic to the, the commands of Jesus,' (Yomi, 2021) by connecting with people on the fringes of society. Her husband, Akin (2021) cited the overseas missions work of the church, noting 'it encourages me a lot… The point is that we are doing something, and we are doing well, we are touching people's lives.' His adherence to the church, he asserted, was reinforced by mission, even though he was not personally directly involved in any serving capacity.

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[127] See Chapter Three for a description of BLESS.

British-born Imogen spoke of the church's social action outreach, not as an observer, but instead as a practitioner: she prepared meals for the town's street homeless. She explained that this work 'is one of the reasons I love King's, because it's actually living the values of the Christian values, it's doing things to support people outside the church, and just love that,' (Imogen, 2021). Like Yomi, she saw this as consistent with evangelistic values and injunctions of Jesus. Furthermore, her belonging was strengthened by her involvement because it provided 'a really good chance to feel, feel like I'm contributing,' (Imogen, 2021) to the well-being of people outside the church family.

Sri Lankan-born Amila similarly spoke of the significance of outreach to the homeless to enhancing her own belonging. Her image comprised a group of climbers in silhouette, some of whom were at the summit celebrating, others still ascending but pulling one another up to the top. Amila expounded the significance of her image: 'everyone, have the, you know, the courage to do… and do as a big family to bring more people to bring into the, you know, God,' (Amila, 2021). She saw outreach as corporate and ubiquitous – one which drew in the leaders as well as regular members into co-ordinated activity with the objective of enlarging the body of Christ. For her, it was inherently expansionary: growing the church through outreach by acts of generosity and altruism within a culture of teamwork.[128]

Indeed, involvement in social action-based ministry could be positively transformative for participants' belonging. For example, at the time of his focus group, British-born Jeremy was clearly disaffected, and his belonging was compromised on many levels. A year later, in a follow-up interview, Jeremy stated that his belonging had changed. He explained why, partly in terms of his serving of the homeless: 'you feel part of the team, and you are doing something out there for people, and you build relationships with the people you are serving alongside,' (Jeremy, 2022). He contrasted this with traditional small groups in which he claimed, 'you just sort of sit there looking at each other,' (Jeremy, 2022).

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[128] See the previous section for further elaboration on serving and teamwork regarding belonging.

He opined that his experiences of traditional small groups were predominantly static: sitting and observing. The transformation brought by his involvement with the street homeless was that it was a performative engagement with others. Jeremy suggested that the reason for deepened relationships was that 'you're focussed on a goal… on other people, serving them. And… you have a part to play that is needed,' (Jeremy, 2022). He spoke of the invitation he had to speak at an outreach meal with the homeless guests: 'I am started to be developed and stretched into something, you know,' (Jeremy, 2022).

Being part of something altruistic, that brought together a diversity of giftings, bred tighter dyadic and intra-group relationships. It was also an expansionary opportunity to express and develop gifting – in Jeremy's case, speaking and serving. The overlap with the expansionary and performative nature of serving, noted in the previous section, is apparent. What is distinctive here is that the activity of social action outreach is expansionary, not solely of the individuals' gifts and passions, but also of courage levels, as Amila noted. Furthermore, it reflects an expansionary instinct of the church beyond itself – to embrace others who have need of the practical love of Jesus, as an invitation to join the family of the church serving them.

A clear differentiation was made between believers and non-believers: they constituted very different groups. Differentiation is intrinsic to family life. Indeed, it can be highly valued (as noted in the previous section concerning serving) but it can conversely prove contentious and divisive undermining familial unity. Another key distinction which was foregrounded was that between male and female, with its potential for considerable complexity and difficulty.

The roles of men and women within the church were only cited specifically three times.[129] Nonetheless, it became apparent that, for one participant, this was a core issue affecting many others. German-born Steffi highlighted in her focus group what would improve her sense of belonging with an image of a lone white woman on a stage. Steffi (2021) explained: 'I think there's been a few occasions where I've felt like my experience of something has been different because I'm a woman.' She referred to herself as a 'white woman' (to be discussed further later in this section), thus differentiating her own experiences from those from different racial backgrounds.

These distinctions were foundational to her. Steffi commented that being able to see someone like her, an exemplar with common characteristics such as biological sex, constituted an invitation to develop her own gifts within comparable leadership roles. She lamented that age-group peers previously connected to the church had left because 'of the lack of women,' in prominent leadership, (Steffi, 2021). Steffi (2021) was clear that this hinged around the church's stance on female elders, labelling it an 'elephant in the room.' She also articulated her mutable position, 'your views on it can change, it, you can feel more strongly about it,' (Steffi, 2021). In a follow-up interview, Steffi elaborated further. However, before doing so, Steffi (2022) was insistent, 'the funny thing is, I don't want to be an elder… this is more of a principle thing.' Whilst her personal aspirations did not include eldership, clarity on the rationale that determined which roles women could undertake was foundational: it constituted an impermeable 'limit… to how far in that leadership' a woman could progress, (Steffi, 2022).

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[129] The other cases were by male participant Nigerian-born Akin who made a general point of the benefits of many kinds of diversity including male and female, but his comments specifically on the latter were fleeting, and by Afro-American Mia to be cited shortly in this section.

Steffi's language centred around constraint and lack of empowerment: 'limit' and unfulfilled 'leadership potentials,' (Steffi, 2022). Uniquely male eldership was potentially problematic, not solely because of the default exclusion of women and perceived unfairness, but because it signalled a restriction around other leadership roles available. Steffi's main concern was that uncertainty, and a lack of role models, led to a stifling of female leadership talent. The tensions that the church's position created were both cultural – a sense of being anachronistic relative to secular discourses – and theological – the latter referring to its legitimacy based on biblical normativity.

Steffi expressed confusion regarding the latter: 'I probably would struggle to explain exactly why… I don't know, I find it a difficult one to grapple with,' (Steffi, 2022). The dilemma for Steffi was reconciling secular praxis promoting more equal representation,[130] with biblical passages which have been deployed within Newfrontiers to assert a delineation between male and female leadership. Steffi (2022) asserted:

> I don't think it necessarily impacts my sense of belonging if I'm honest… because I know pretty much all of the elders pretty well… I know the heart and desire of the eldership is to love God and do what is right.

Resolution on this issue was possible not only because of her lack of desire for eldership (noted previously), but also due to her close relational connections to the elders: she claimed that she trusted their motivations towards God and the church. Consequently, she insisted that her belonging to the church was ultimately little compromised. When asked to summarise her views, Steffi described the church as a 'kind of extended family,' (Steffi, 2022). However, the lack of discussion concerning female leadership roles, and their differential treatment, seemed to chafe against a harmonious egalitarian sibling ideal. Her conclusion was that increased diversity through the development of female leadership constituted an area requiring greater intentionality and clarity from the incumbent eldership team. Any lack thereof constituted a potentially unwarranted constraint on the growth of women, incompatible with the imperative of growth and empowerment noted in the previous section.

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[130] Steffi noted that 'most other institutions or workplaces are in some ways having those conversations [around female representation] more openly, whereas it's probably much more openly discussed and there's efforts made to, you know, to have equal representation of things.'

An appreciation of embracing diversity as both a pre-condition and a reinforcement of belonging was raised in areas beyond male/female. It was discussed in ethnoracial terms also, with participants sometimes linking gender and ethnoracial distinctions. The latter in terms of leadership could be especially contentious. This was because imbalances in leadership ethnoracial representation were cited as a cause of distress exclusively for non-British-born participants. However, when more balanced representation was either anticipated or experienced, a greater sense of belonging to the church collective was reported by non-British-born congregants. For example, picking up on Steffi's observations of male/female roles, Afro-American Mia claimed to be 'excited' about the congregational diversity when she first arrived at King's. However, she noted that the demographics of leadership was at odds with this 'both in terms of women, and also of people from other cultures,' stating that greater representation in the latter 'would have been one of my improvements… that's huge to me,' (Mia, 2021).

Ghanaian Martha made a similar point: she had joined the church in the early 2004 when the demographics of the church was predominantly white-British. She spoke about the transition the church had undergone in the seventeen years of her membership. When asked how satisfied she was with the ethnoracial representation of leadership, she commented that it was 'probably halfway there,' (Martha, 2021). Like Mia and Kemi, Martha was sensitive to the ethnoracial composition of leadership, which she thought still necessitated a substantial journey of improvement.

Martha was interviewed a year after her initial focus group. During the intervening period, two new elders had been introduced onto the eldership team – one British- and the other African-born. Furthermore, more African-born preachers and meeting leaders had been introduced into the Sunday morning meetings. These changes were acknowledged as beneficial, reflecting better the congregation's composition, and Martha noted that it was a positive progression in terms of diversity. She shared that she believed it to be 'happening off the back of George Floyd and all the issues that come from lockdown,' (Martha, 2022). The improvement was that 'we have started bringing people onboard… I am seeing it just by looking at online church service… which is very good,' (Martha, 2022). She explained why this was salubrious and contrasted it with her previous church experiences: 'you get people come through with a lot of giftings, spiritual giftings and they are not tapped into. I sat at King's for years and I felt like I was just marking time,' (Martha, 2022). Martha's distress at feeling overlooked was palpable (she said that she had stayed in the church despite this because of the depth of relationships she enjoyed).

She further asserted that being disregarded was not simply a matter of personal frustration. Instead, the failure to develop leaders from non-British cultures constituted a constraint on the growth of the church corporately. This was because gifted leaders were held back from developing and growing others in the church (in areas like prayer, for example). Finally, she explained that releasing leaders was a hallmark of their 'being known' relationally and performatively at sufficient depth by incumbent leaders, (Martha, 2022). A failure to know and release others' gifts was thus ultimately a failure of relational engagement, and one which disproportionately affected non-British congregants. It was a failure of siblingship in which some were treated differently from others, and this could seriously disrupt familial harmony.

Martha's reference to George Floyd was significant. She presumed that the upgraded ethnoracial representation in leadership roles (meeting leading and eldership) was a pro-active response to the injustices surrounding George Floyd's horrific death.[131] Martha never used the word 'racist' to describe the church or its leadership (in fact, no participant did throughout the whole research phase). However, a failure to be more pro-active in releasing more diverse leadership prior to George Floyd's death could well be seen as a decision to differentiate (wittingly or otherwise) on racial grounds. This will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.

Nigerian-born Sani spoke unequivocally about how the introduction of a Nigerian-born elder (two years previously) affected his own sense of belonging: 'Yeah, it definitely does, because it means that there's somebody up there that you can approach easily,' (Sani, 2023). The greater approachability was not due to idiosyncratic qualities of the elder, but instead to cultural ones. Sani (2023) explained that 'it definitely creates an opening to share… he really knows what angle I'm coming from in terms of that topic that I'm sharing,' because of a knowledge of the 'cultural side of things.' Sani claimed he was more likely to be understood, and thus more open to raise concerns pertaining to his own socio-cultural sensibilities.

The role of leadership was frequently mentioned as pivotal in the creation of participants' sense of belonging. This was also discussed in the first section of this chapter. What was striking about the contributions concerning the centrality and vitality of ethnoracial diversity was that they were all made by either African or Afro-Caribbean participants in the focus groups – with one key exception.[132] German-born Steffi showed an image of a white woman alone on a stage. Her main point (discussed earlier in this section) was to advance more women into prominent leadership.

However, an aside she made linked to this was: 'that makes me think of the number of other people who are from other kind of, I guess, minorities, and, you know, skin colour... I think for me that's that would… enhance my sense of belonging,'

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[131] The development of the African-born elder preceded the egregious events in Minneapolis in 2020.

[132] The other comments noted in this section from Jeremy (and Steffi) came during follow-up interviews.

(Steffi, 2021). Her observation was that representation of others with key characteristics similar to oneself (in her main point, women), would improve individuals' sense of belonging. Furthermore, she asserted that increased ethnoracial diversity (beyond white-British) would deepen her *own* belonging.

Steffi spoke of a balance of potential gains and losses caused by representation in positions of leadership. She anticipated a gain in belonging should the composition of leadership become more consistent with the congregation's. Indeed, the sense of gain and loss linked to ethnoracial background was often linked to heightened or weakened belonging. The differential losses across diverse groups were significant. In particular, concerns over disproportionately British leadership representation were made exclusively by non-British born congregants. Furthermore, losses in entering a multi-ethnoracial church were profoundly experienced, but they were more disjunctive for non-British-born participants. Some of these centred on deficiencies of the ecclesial culture, especially in its expressions of prayer and corporate worship. These were seen as lacking vibrancy compared to more committed and vivacious expressions in some BMCs.

Others highlighted sociological constraints including compromised expressions of hospitality, and the shallowness of relationships and of self-disclosure. British-born participants rarely expressed any losses in relation to the ethnoracial diversity of the church, instead emphasising gains (to be discussed shortly) implying a considerable disparity between the relative weight of gains and losses for different ethnoracial groups.

Ghanaian-born Martha (2021) explained that she loved being part of the church even though it was not ethnoracially diverse when she joined in 2004: 'it's my family and I'm happy… I love my family the way we are.' However, she contrasted her own contentment with others who had visited the church, and she noted that 'very quickly, they leave,' (Martha, 2021). Their objection very specific: the 'white' culture embedded within the church. Her own riposte was forthright: 'I tell them… it's not about skin colour, it is about the worship and the beliefs and the teachings that's in the church,' (Martha, 2021).

Martha's priorities were not to the ethnoracial composition of the church primarily (although, as noted earlier, she was sensitive to the church's leadership demographics), but more to the sung worship, to the doctrinal elements of the church and to its communication of the gospel. However, others she knew had viewed the church as 'white': what constituted 'white' was crucial here. Part of this has been mentioned previously concerning entry into the church noted earlier in this chapter.

However, Martha explained that there were further elements which made the church feel 'white.' She explained one deficiency thus: 'prayer: the style or prayer and the way prayer was handled… So it felt like there wasn't enough prayer… [Africans] are used to serious communal prayers,' (Martha, 2022). This absence of prayer outside (and even within) the Sunday meetings was deleterious. Additionally, the lack of *communal* prayer constituted a deficiency of community. British leadership was also considered to lack vibrancy in prayer. The addition of more variety (with more Africans providing greater dynamism, for example) was viewed by Martha as a helpful corrective. More intentional and regular weekly prayer events, added to the church calendar in the preceding three years, were also seen as positive adjustments strengthening the church's appeal to African worshippers.

Martha was not alone in citing a lack of vitality in British-born leadership. Nigerian-born Alice (2023) spoke about Sunday meetings being 'consistent… you know exactly what to expect.' They were lacking excitement, to the point that, occasionally, she would go home on a Sunday and access on YouTube 'a different service that is a bit more vibrant,' (Alice, 2023). She explained that the predictability of meetings (whilst far from universally negative – as will be outlined shortly) led her to think, 'this is how I would like to be when I'm in my 50s, but I'm already like that now,' (Alice, 2023). Alice was not even forty at the time of the discussion. However, to worship God in a way that was sufficiently vivifying, Alice considered it necessary to access other more dynamic corporate worship online. Whether British-born participants held similar perspectives is not known: they were not expressed during focus groups or interviews.

Expression of spiritual practices such as prayer and corporate worship were not the only sources of loss for participants. Socio-cultural losses were also mentioned. For example, Nigerian-raised Nailah (2023) expressed consternation at the expression of hospitality in the UK, especially the tendency to meet in cafés rather than the home, noting '"you're being so inhospitable!"' The attention to food preparation was another compromise of hospitality at a church bring-and-share dinner. Nailah noticed that the British contingent not only brought no hot food, but instead purchased pre-cooked items from supermarkets. This was disorienting, she explained, because 'our food takes three hours to cook… the way you present food and what you put on the table impacts what you think of me and your level of love,' (Nailah, 2023). Hospitality was thus discerned (initially, at least) as superficial, uncaring, unwelcoming and lacking love: it was thus unfamilial in her view.

Not only was hospitality potentially deficient, but social interaction was also thought to be somewhat cursory when visiting British homes. Nailah (2023) explained that 'I would only be there for an hour and a half,' in contrast to her expectation of many hours in African contexts. Sociality thus felt contracted and compartmentalised: she was not alone to remark upon the starkly different duration and depth of social engagement. Nigerian Alice (2023) commented that 'I don't have this expectation of super connectedness like where you would… [in] a Nigerian church', mainly because of differing boundaries in the depth of interpersonal disclosure. Alice noted that the consequence was a tendency for her to present herself as 'artificial… trying to make sure I don't cross this boundary,' (Alice, 2023) a boundary of dominant but potentially inscrutable social mores.

The contrast between British reserve and more fluid and permeable African social engagement led Alice (2023) to lament a loss of 'authenticity' of self-expression and self-disclosure to the point that 'you're not yourself anymore… Am I even me? Do they even know the real Alice?' Divergent cultural expressions of sociality led Alice to self-regulate and constrain her social interactions. She was, in her view, no longer herself to some degree and this was aversive: she did not feel well known or understood by others.

Coming from the USA, Mia (2023) agreed, explaining that 'people are only willing to go so far,' in terms of the depth of self-disclosure. Her daughter Crista (2023) further lamented that 'for some people, I think, small groups are just this day,' with little or no subsequent interaction precipitating a sense of social contraction and potential isolation. Mia explained that an associated loss was one of not being instinctively understood by others. Her background was one of moving between two continents – Europe and the USA. She explained that not being able to 'just be and be accepted, especially within the body of Christ, has been quite, quite painful,' (Mia, 2023). Mia (2023) then explained that the consequence was 'we do find ourselves like closing our mouth,' constraining her willingness to share her life and thoughts with others. Her daughter Crista agreed, asserting that 'we're concealing God… that's the painful bit,' (Crista, 2023). The pain constituted a contraction of their worship (concealing their love of God by keeping it to themselves).

Whilst the gains of British-born and non-British born participants will be considered next, the balance of losses and gains across the church does not seem to be equally shared. Instead, it appears to depend in no small part upon racial factors. For instance, when asked about losses they had experienced specifically because of the diverse cultural composition of the church, British-born Jeremy, German-born

Steffi and Hungarian-born Arpad had almost identical responses, the latter observing that he could not 'say anything is a loss for me,' (Arpad, 2023). Indeed, they each only articulated gains in recounting their experiences of diversity. Only British-born Robert and Paula articulated any losses specifically due to ethnoracial diversity. Paula (2023) claimed that a loss for her was 'around Christmas… I love it when we sing the regular carols,' but she found it disruptive when 'someone's trying to do something to make it completely different… or won't sing them at all.' This was due to the attempted incorporation of other cultural influences, ones which disrupted a more British expression of Christmas worship. However, Paula (2023) conceded that this perceived loss was minor and 'it's once a year.'

Robert (2024) commented that the 'African culture appears to quote myriad scriptures' during the leading of corporate sung-worship which appeared to be 'uncontextualised' and thus lacking the 'precision, clarity and inspiration' better typified, in his view, by British-born leadership.[133] He further lamented that 'because so many people turn up late' (a quality he attributed more to non-British congregants), this precipitated a 'disturbance for me,' distracting him from engaging in immersive sung-worship, (Robert, 2024). He concluded that 'it causes a loss of corporate and personal intimacy,' in encountering God in Sunday worship owing to the disruptive late arrival of others. However, both Paula and Robert conceded that their subjective losses were minor.

Whilst losses in entering a multi-ethnoracial church were disproportionately borne by non-British-born participants, there were counter-balancing gains. These held the potential to redress and overshadow losses especially for non-British-born participants, and they were specifically caused by exposure to different sociological and ecclesiological cultures. British-born participants (including Robert and Paula) were eager to express gains that were uniquely possible through the diversity they experienced. All such gains, both for British- and non-British-born participants, could reinforce the perception of church as a supportive and enduring family.

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[133] These comments occurred during an impromptu conversation over coffee, which Robert was happy for me to cite in this thesis.

Regarding the gains of non-British-born participants, Nigerian Isah spoke of the first group he led with his wife. It was a group of newcomers previously unknown to one another. He explained its composition and the sense of community engendered within it, 'I could count about eight… countries, in… our group then. And the way we integrated was so, so good,' (Isah, 2021). Isah (2021) expounded why the confluence of differing cultures was so vivifying:

> It's just so brilliant… everybody just wanted to learn. "Oh, so you do this – oh yeah, we have something similar." You know where someone who was a Dutch person, you know, having a similar culture with a Ghanaian person, you know, it's so interesting and that's love, that's extraordinary, you know, feeling… People can just a little, you know shedding tears, and just, you knowing that this is my brother from another nation, or my sister from somewhere else.

Isah enthused over the surprising commonality that was experienced across ostensibly very different cultures – for instance, Dutch and Ghanaian. The love that emerged was profound – it bridged geographical, racial and cultural boundaries – and it fostered sibling-type bonds, further reinforcing the experience of church as family. At times Isah appeared lost for words as he recalled the seeming transcendence of encountering people from such diverse backgrounds. He paused as he attempted to summarise his thoughts – it was 'beautiful, beautiful,' (Isah, 2021).

He explained that this beauty extended beyond unity across disparate backgrounds to the communal experience of learning from one another. It was, again, an expansionary encounter – relationally, sociologically, and affectively: it was 'enriching', he claimed, (Isah, 2021). Furthermore, it was consistent with Isah's prescribed requirements (noted at the start of this section) for healthy belonging within an idealised church community: acceptance within diversity.

A surprising gain of diversity was expressed by Sani, another Nigerian. He explained that his coming into a diverse setting was almost a contradiction of what his wife, Alice, had spoken about – the predictability of British-led corporate worship. He claimed that 'orderliness… structure is good,' (Sani, 2023). Alice agreed, noting that such orderliness, within the context of consistency, built confidence in their 'inviting people' to Sunday worship, (Alice, 2023). This was because Sunday meetings provided greater 'stability,' which she stated her whole family appreciated, (Alice, 2023). This contrasted with their previous BMC experiences where, she claimed, spontaneity could sometimes compromise quality, which in turn could be potentially off-putting for newcomers.

Nailah also spoke of the influence of two British-born leaders, one a preacher, the other a worship leader. She asserted that 'they are quite gentle in their approach to things, even though they can be direct as well. And it was just like, "Oh, I am experiencing life in God and in and with his people in a way that I haven't seen before… I gained so much,' (Nailah, 2023). She attributed these qualities of gentleness and quietness to God, claiming that it was the ethnoracial diversity that facilitated such revelation.

It was not simply consistency or quietness of corporate worship that could enhance confidence. Nigerian-born Akin (2021) explained that diversity was foundational to his adherence to the church, explaining that:

> It's a preview of what heaven would look like or what heaven looks like... It also gives a sense of belonging. You know, you are easily connected to other people… The church that is one colour does not appeal to me.

For Akin (2021), racial diversity was foundational, noting 'I've been in a church where you'll have few minorities, like me, and I've been in a church where the bulk of the congregation is like me,' (Akin, 2021). His conclusion from his previous experiences – mono-racial churches, and churches in which minorities remained just that, minorities – was that 'there's always a lot of things missing,' (Akin, 2021). The elements added by racial diversity comprised three principal facets beyond the foretaste of eschatological unity noted above.

The first was that it disclosed the nature and the purposes of Christ: 'different ethnic groups coming together with one sole purpose: Christ is the purpose… coming together in one accord in unity,' (Akin, 2021). He opined that diversity 'depicts togetherness. It depicts orderliness,' (Akin, 2021) through the mutual commitment of the people, but also because of the need for purposive leadership to facilitate such togetherness. He commented from his own experience of leadership in a London-based BMC comprising various Africans 'from different countries… I tell you, it was a very, very tough process: just people, various shades of black and brown,' (Akin, 2021).[134] Harmonious unity within diversity was, for Akin, a manifestation of success leading to unique disclosures of God's purposes.

This was, in his view, embedded within biblical injunctions from 'Ephesians and Corinthians, there is an emphasis, you know, the Jews and Gentiles coming together,' (Akin, 2021). Commitment to creating diverse communities thus represented faithfulness to such unifying New Testament injunctions. Thirdly, he drew on *imago Dei* convictions noting that diversity 'supports the fact that the Bible says we are all created in the image of God… regardless of colour,' (Akin, 2021) thus creating seeds of commonality and concomitant unity even across racial boundaries. Finally, he spoke of 'fun' – an addictively affective quality arising from diversity, (Akin, 2021). 'I've been blessed by diversity,' he asserted – a claim to spiritual enrichment, (Akin, 2021). For Akin, the gains of ethnoracial diversity were multi-faceted encompassing eschatology, unity, faithful disclosure of the Gospel, and positive affect (overlapping with Isah’s comments at the start of this section). All these cemented his sense of belonging to the church, he claimed.

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[134] Akin did not expound the reasons for the challenges he experienced.

Whilst diversity within corporate worship was cited as a potential gain for non-British-born participants, sociological gains were also discussed. For instance, Nailah went on to explain that she had lived with an older British couple in the church – the Hursts – for a few months, and that this had been transformative. She articulated this experience as expansionary: ‘I gained loads of joy just by being around the Hursts. They are wonderful. They are just very gentle and compassionate people,’ (Nailah, 2023). The contrast of a much louder home upbringing, Nailah asserted, with a quieter British family environment was surprisingly enriching.

‘Just seeing how they interacted with one another and just seeing what family relations could look like from a British perspective, I gained a lot,’ (Nailah, 2023). Nailah’s (2023) claim was that she was able to see how other families lived ‘their lives differently,’ and this was surprisingly liberative, and complementary to her own more vivacious childhood. Interestingly, Nailah did not discern this as undermining or contradicting the norms imbibed from her own upbringing.

Afro-Caribbean Mia and her daughter Crista similarly observed that their interactions with other (this time non-British) cultures were profoundly enriching: ‘watching how the Africans… how they do community - that's foreign to us. So when we look at that, we're like, “wait a second, that is just amazing!”’ (Mia, 2023). The simultaneous commitment of Africans to their nuclear families and to others from outside was revelatory. It promoted a deeper sense of belonging for Mia and Crista, not only to those from these different cultures, but to one another as mother and daughter. Crista explained that the values she had encountered in others’ cultures, especially those of mutual support and concern, were influential for how she and her extended family decided to live: ‘that mindset has rolled over into me and my mom now. We're very connected now,' (Crista, 2023). She considered this as constituting a 'bettering' of herself and her family, (Crista, 2023).

Ghanaian-born Martha also contrasted her own upbringing in a 'very strong Christian family' back in Ghana with her observations of Christianity in the lives of others, but this time concerning British-born Christians, (Martha, 2022). Martha (2022) was effusive that she had 'gained' significantly and had been transformed from being 'a Christian and a believer, to being an ambassador and a witness for God.' The reason for this transformation, she claimed, was her immersion in a community where she could closely observe the comportment of other believers. She asserted that she saw 'people I looked up to live a faithful live, true Christian life. There was no dilution about their walk with God… that was a good example for me to follow… That was the best thing that ever happened to me,' (Martha, 2022).

The gains Martha claimed were considerable: spiritual integrity and joy. These repositioned her from Christian believer to ambassador and witness. This was possible, she claimed, through proximity to the lives of many others. It should be noted that the gains of which Martha and Nailah spoke were also in the context of notable losses (as noted earlier).

Sociological and theological gains were not limited to African and Afro-Caribbean participants. For example, German-born Steffi declared that through diversity 'I have definitely learned stuff... But also in terms of friendships I have made,' (Steffi, 2022). These friendships had enabled her to avoid 'an environment with like-minded people who very much look like you,' (Steffi, 2022) one which was surprisingly enriching. Steffi (2022) also anticipated that experiences of diversity could provide substantive improvements in key areas of church praxis 'like bringing out that diversity in the way we pray, and worship and maybe lead the meetings. On a personal level I think I have gained more from that.' The diverse context of church was seen as liberative –

breaking out from homogeneity into expansionary experiences of others and their additive contributions to areas such as corporate prayer and worship.

British-born participants also commented on the energising qualities of some Africans in the church. For example, Robert (2024) spoke of 'the wonderful openness and loveliness of African members,' expressed in profound warmth and welcome towards him. Furthermore, Jeremy (2022) explained that 'Nigerian Christians are pretty passionate… their perspective on things is different, and that's interesting. I think they wake us up a bit,' specifically, he noted, in terms of the intensity of prayer. Europeans seemed to be most appreciative of the extra vibrancy that Africans' contributions injected into previously British-led corporate meetings, a counterbalance to the loss of vivacity noted by some African participants.

In fact, the experience of other cultures was appreciated beyond such vibrancy. For example, British-born Paula cited the diverse nature of the church as very attractive to her. This was based on her experience from her previous church: 'we can all, you know, learn things from each other as well… it challenges some of your own ideals,' similar to Steffi's observations above, (Paula, 2023). Engagement with other cultures afforded expansionary opportunities for learning, growth and challenge.

The gains for Paula also extended into upgraded sociality. As noted earlier in this chapter, as a single woman, Paula struggled with the exclusivity of the church's traditional family norms. However, her sense of isolation was counterbalanced by the inclusivity of non-British congregants to those outside the biological family. Paula (2023) experienced the influence of other cultures as embracing of her status, asserting 'there's the expectation you know life, um, sort of family life, is more community than just the nuclear family,' so that African friends, for example, had been consistently supportive. This continued even when those friends married and had their own children. The ethos of connecting with others outside the biological family and maintaining enduring relationships was cherished, providing Paula with a consistent and reliable locus of belonging by virtue of the greater inclusivity of others towards her through which she could be known at greater depth.[135]

As noted previously, diversity constituted a different balance of gains and losses for belonging depending upon background: it also appeared to be determined by generation. Another facet of possibly generationally-specific belonging, and its effect on the 'familiness' of church, was cited by the youngest female participant, Nailah: that of 'blackness.' Nailah was in her early twenties, daughter to Nigerian-born parents who were first generation economic migrants to Britain. Her experience was thus exceptional amongst the entire participant cohort because of the dual nature of her upbringing: immersion in a first-generation Nigerian-parent family whilst simultaneously being exposed to British social and educational cultures.

The reason for considering her comments more closely, and undertaking a follow-up interview to understand her better, was that she uniquely cited 'blackness' (Nailah, 2021) as a core component of her self-identification. Furthermore, she claimed that her attendance at a multi-ethnoracial church facilitated deeper belonging because of her 'blackness.' She explained that her race was central to her engagement with others and the different social environments in which she participated.

Regarding identity specifically, Nailah framed this within three key familial themes: 'I am my mother's daughter, I am of this tribe, I am of this family,' (Nailah, 2023). She explained the contrast of diversity she had experienced outside and inside the church, noting of the latter: 'it feels as if there's no kind of apparent majority or minority… I have been the racial minority in pretty much every space, besides the family gathering. It's, it's refreshing to be in a place where I go often, where there's diversity,' (Nailah, 2023).

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[135] See previous section.

Ecclesiological diversity was a component, Nailah (2023) asserted, which enabled her to ‘relax’ into a state of being ‘more herself.’[136] She claimed it fostered a liberative environment in which she could encounter others on common terms. Such diversity released her emotionally: ‘Rarely do I feel as if my blackness is under question, or it's unacceptable or it's “other,”’ (Nailah, 2021). Such blackness was of paramount significance to Nailah because she explained ‘my blackness, my ethnicity is very much linked to my identity, because it's, it's linked to my home,’ (Nailah, 2023) her primary locus of self-identification. Expression of her blackness within the church was neither subverted nor contested, she asserted. Instead, she claimed it was retained but also accepted. Consequently, she declared that she did not need to ‘prove my blackness nor defend it,’ (Nailah, 2021) enabling her to explore others’ experiences whilst retaining her own identity.

The presence of people from very diverse backgrounds facilitated liberation in a twin sense. First ‘there's no expectation to be a certain way so I find that in predominantly black spaces… there's a pressure to conform to stereotypical norms,’ (Nailah, 2023).[137] Conversely, Nailah asserted that in ‘predominantly white spaces, my visible difference makes it very hard to feel like I fit in,’ (Nailah, 2023).[138] Instead, the blending of multiple cultures within the church was ‘refreshing,’ precipitating intentional bridge building. This in turn nurtured a communal ‘humility and a lack of judgment’, qualities she equated with those of God, (Nailah, 2021).

When asked about the genesis of the term ‘blackness’ and its significance to her, she explained ‘it is in one sense a generational thing… I wouldn't say that my parents would really ever use the word “blackness,” they would say they are “Nigerian,”’ (Nailah, 2023). The origin of the concept of blackness for Nailah was a repurposing of a potential pejorative to one celebrating distinctives embedded within race. It had a strong North American influence in which 'blackness' acted as a blending and unifying umbrella for those from disparate national origins but with common racial markers. It had a uniquely generational salience to a younger demographic, irrelevant to her parents, for example.

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[136] Although, as noted earlier in this section, others could feel constrained and inauthentic.

[137] Like dressing or talking in a certain way, especially at a predominantly white school, or dancing in a Nigerian style at family gatherings.

[138] For instance, Nailah mentioned having to temper her proclivity to louder self-expressions than typical in white settings. This was also noted by other Nigerian-heritage participants such as Alice, (2023) who focussed on ‘not being too loud… and not being too chatty… then you focus so much on that… you’re not yourself anymore.’

As noted in this section, the absence of being known compromised her belonging. It was counterbalanced when Nailah had access to older leaders who could foster greater depth of disclosure and discipleship. The diversity of races, cultures and intergenerationality provided some elements which contributed positively to Nailah's sense of belonging.[139] This is because each seemed to empower her to freedom of expression which was expansionary: to be known and to know others at depth. This combination was one of 'family' – diverse and intergenerational.

4.5. SUMMARY

Participants across ethnoracial boundaries ubiquitously conceptualized belonging deploying familial metaphors, especially those of spiritual siblings and parents. Entry into the family was contingent upon overcoming a transitory and liminal state of 'pre-belonging' in which newcomers were frequently tentative about pro-active engagement. This was because newcomers' evaluated the 'familiness' of the church against pre-existing expectations of ecclesial family life. Consistent welcome and invitation into the life of the family were often key components in moving newcomers from observers to participants. The role of leadership was also important in representing the culture of the church to newcomers, especially when qualities associated with Christ were demonstrated by leaders, such as welcome, authority, approachability, prayerfulness and care. Conversely, professionalism was deemed detrimental because it could feel clinical and non-relational, antithetical to the idealised expectations of close intra-family interactions. Water baptism as a rite was experienced as enhancing belonging for baptisees and congregants.

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[139] Notwithstanding losses mentioned earlier in this section.

Relational components were vital in developing more resilient belonging beyond initial welcome: these included being known, having others in very close relationship, and being cared for. Such relational interactions were frequently conceptualized within a predominantly sibling metaphor, which anticipated tight mutual affection, commitment and support. Small groups were often experienced as constituting family units fostering both intersibling and intergenerational interactions through care, community and prayer.

Performative components were also pivotal in developing belonging: compromised belonging was associated with diluted or stifled agency. Having gifts identified, released and developed within an umbrella of common purpose, beliefs and teamwork was greatly valued, as was a sense of being wanted by others. Expansionary experiences of serving, for example, in which gifts and relationships were constantly being developed, were also central to deepened belonging – the opposite deleterious. Other communal fictive-family experiences could precipitate a growth in perceived belonging, including corporate sung-worship, experiences of God, and specific corporate family occasions such as weddings and funerals.

Whilst common experiences were foundational in promoting 'familiness,' so were the expression and honouring of key differences between others in the church. These included mutually positive interactions across different generations. The growth of the church family, through personal evangelism, purposive social-action based outreach and overseas mission, was often associated with a profounder sense of belonging, both to others involved in common ministries, as well as to the wider collective of the fictive ecclesial family. Furthermore, careful recognition and development of diversity within serving and leadership roles (especially across male/female and ethnoracial demarcations) could promote closer belonging. In particular, the presence of ethnoracial diversity precipitated differential losses and gains across ethnoracial boundaries, with some losses profoundly felt but other gains surprisingly vivifying and conducive to deeper belonging and refreshed revelations of God's character.

Key elements of these data require further explanation and clarification. For instance, why is leadership so significant in nurturing belonging, why do newcomers enter a liminal state of 'pre-belonging' and how typical are participants' experiences in navigating their way through such a transitory state? How typical are the requirements to be known and cared for to nurture belonging? Furthermore, why are performative elements such as serving and outreach so central to participants' belonging, and why do experiences of contraction or stagnation produce such strongly aversive reactions in undermining adherence? Additionally, why do newcomers select different criteria, such as those which determine the 'familiness' of the church, both individually and across cultural boundaries? Finally, which conditions best ameliorate intercultural differences to promote belonging across such different backgrounds? Chapter Five shall invite social psychology as a guest discipline and distanciating 'tool,' (Johansen, 2022, p. 394), comprising an interpretive voice (Osmer, 2008, loc. 88) to help to explain why these factors are significant, how they operate and how they may be optimised (subsequently to be addressed in Chapter Eight).

This interpretive tool of social psychology shall be considered next.

5. THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF BELONGING

5.1. OVERVIEW

This project is seeking to understand participants' self-reports of belonging specifically to discern what promotes and hinders such belonging in a richly ethnoracial ecclesial context. Social psychology is being deployed as an explanatory and interpretive, (Osmer, 2008, loc. 88) distanciating 'tool,' (Johansen, 2022, p. 394) (see Chapter Two) to comprehend better the experiences of participants in the preceding chapter. It is being offered 'hospitality' as a mutually critical conversational partner, converted to maintain the epistemological priority of theology and to promote critical faithfulness to the norms evinced therein, (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, pp. 91-100). As will be demonstrated in this chapter, drawing on Baumeister & Leary (1995), social psychology posits that belonging is a universal human need across all cultural groups.

This chapter will identify key factors to explain why participants' disclosures of belonging from Chapter Four are occurring, with a view, in Chapter Eight, to being able to offer praxis to optimise ecclesial belonging. It will consider how belonging forms the core of self-definition, considering theories from social psychologists Martin (2015) and Stetsenko (2012) alongside theologians Bland (2008, p. 13), Balswick, Ebstyne King and Reimer (2021) in which the self is conceptualised as a reciprocating self (within a paradigm of *Being* and *Belonging*), dependent upon simultaneous distinction, sociality and purposive collective action, mirroring certain aspects of the trinity. Other competing theories of psychological selfhood, such as Deci and Ryan's (2002) Self Determination Theory, will also briefly be presented. It shall then investigate how belonging transcending pre-existing group boundaries (pertinent to, for example, newcomer/established congregant, male/female, believer/non-believer, intergenerational and ethnoracial distinctions evinced in Chapter Four) is reconfigured through contrastive categorisation, perception of relative power differentials, intergroup interaction and superordinate goals, drawing on a model of functional dependence from Sherif et al, (1988) along with Social Identity/Self Categorisations theories from Tajfel (1970) and (1972), Turner (1982), Turner & Reynolds (2003), Hornsey (2008), Hogg and Abrams (2006). These theories also identify how leaders are considered to represent highly prototypical exemplars of an 'ingroup' (such as the church in this study) and thus fundamental to participants' experiences of belonging. A social psychological derivative theory from Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe (2016), namely Inclusion of Others/Groups in Self, which posits that the motivation for both interpersonal and group belonging is dependent upon performative and relational expansion of the self into close others, will also be investigated. This is in order specifically to consider aspects of the expansionary nature of belonging manifest throughout Chapter Four.

Finally, it will present acculturation theories from Triandis (1994), Liebkind (2003), Searle and Ward (1990), and Berry, Phiney et al. (2006). The latter assert that the most salubrious form of acculturation across cultural boundaries involves simultaneous immersion in twin cultures (that of a preceding heritage culture combined with a second, novel one), especially salient to the confluence of cultural diversity and backgrounds of the participants in this study; this could be either highly disjunctive or remarkably unifying. Chapter Seven will then proceed to consider how these theories explain important aspects of participants' self-descriptions of belonging from Chapter Four.

To start, what the self is for, and how belonging aligns with this, shall be discussed to offer the appropriate epistemological conversion social psychology requires to subordinate it to the redemptive purposes of God's theological self-disclosure, (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 98).

5.2. BELONGINGNESS AND SELF-CONCEPT

As noted in Chapter One, Newfrontiers' espoused ecclesiology prescribes and presumes close dyadic and group belonging as key foundations of adherents' discipleship, regardless of ethnoracial or socio-economic background. The preceding chapter considered how such belonging is experienced by participants from diverse backgrounds, and which factors promote and hinder such belonging, and especially the need for close sibling-type relationships which precipitate positive mutual affect and a sense of being cared for.

As a starting point, consideration of what constitute the self and its own concept of itself, and how these relate to belonging is pressing because these provide the foundation for conceptualisations of belonging; they are also widely debated within social psychology. Onorato and Turner (2016, p. 147) note that attempts to define 'self' have ranged from a focus on the innate social and relational components of the self to that of 'an intrapsychic, cognitive structure representing the core of personality,' (see also (Gross, 1996, pp. 271-2)). Their view is that the private, personal view of the self itself is made possible by virtue of group belonging because 'the psychological group plays a fundamental causal role in self-concept maintenance and change,' (p. 147). The individual self, within this view, is constructed and internally interpreted by group adherence, which is integral to the psychology of the self, (p. 156).[140] Group belonging will be considered shortly as it is explicated within Self-Categorisation Theory (SCT).

Sedikides & Brewer (2001, p. 1) propose that the self-concept comprises three fundamental self-representations: the individual self, the relational self, and the collective self. These components in turn express self-identity through idiosyncratic traits, dyadic relationships and group membership respectively, (p. 2).[141] Regarding the dyadic and group relationships, Watt & Badger (2009, p. 517) conclude that data consistently show 'that people seek social inclusion and avoid exclusion,' leading to many theorists concluding that social belonging is fundamental to human flourishing, (see also (Bryan, 2016, p. 117)).[142]

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[140] See also (Turner & Oakes, 1989, p. 270). Onorato and Turner argue that social and personal identity are distinct, with social identity displacing personal identity because, on occasion, salient self-representation is 'based solely or primarily on our group identity… it therefore follows that it is reductionist to equate the self with personality.'

Two contrasting views exist about the fundamental 'core' of selfhood. That based on Deci and Ryan's (2002) Self-Determination Theory (SDT) which presumes cognitive constructionism in which 'human agency is the exercise of autonomous motivation internal to each individual,' motivation which is foundational, innate and universal and which 'exists in advance of sociocultural experience,' (Martin, 2015, p. 33). However, this paradigm chafes against other models of selfhood, such as that of Martin, et al. (2003). For Martin, et al. the relationship between the internal self and external sociocultural environment is not so clearly delineated. Instead, the relation between psychological selfhood, agency and 'sociocultural experience is a constitutive one in which psychological selfhood and agency are emergent within… active participation as part of the sociocultural world,' (Martin, 2015, p. 34).

The flourishing of selfhood is context- and relationally-dependent, and it emerges most salubriously within a problem-solving community, in which 'members pool and coordinate their resources and capabilities to engage productively with each other in pursuit of shared projects,' (p. 34). The consideration and synthesis of others' divergent and possibly incommensurate commitments (in light of emergent possibilities) are what shape selfhood, and Martin is clear that he wishes to dispense with 'the causal hegemony of the human interior' privileged in SDT, for instance, (p. 35).

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[141] They also discuss the interaction and primacy of the individual components and the extent to which they are 'close partners, bitter opponents, or indifferent acquaintances', noting that psychologists' opinions differ widely.

[142] Bryan (2016, pp. 118-119) also takes issue with Maslow's hierarchy of needs asserting that the latter oversimplifies needs prioritisation, in which 'the evidence from questionnaire studies' can forcibly contradict the hierarchy,

Martin's paradigm is an activist one, in which problem-solving collective activities combined with relational interaction mutually constitute the shaping of self and self-definition. Stetsenko (2012, p. 144) underlines the duality of such self-definition within her concept of 'Being and Becoming,' in which Being comprises 'ontological existence (in the sense of "Being in the World") whereas Becoming is a type of being that implies… pathways of *constant transformations* in the states of Being… wherein transformations pertain to changes in the states of "Being *someone*"… [through] what the person does or accomplishes' via individual activism alongside others. Such transformative activism sidesteps individualistic, illusory self-sufficiency, she argues, but instead reinforces the significance of collective action to underline the 'relational social fabric as constitutive of human Being' in what Stetsenko terms *collectividualism*, (p. 152).

This approach has clear resonances with Newfrontiers' own commitments to belonging and selfhood as noted previously in Chapter One: an ontological status of being (through personal kingdom citizenship and sonship via faith in Christ's vicarious sacrifice), and a relationally-conditioned process of sanctification and activism (in terms of evangelism and mutual pastoral support). Both Being and Becoming, in Newfrontiers' ecclesiology, are intrinsically relational – to God and to other Christian followers, and yet demand personal agency in a committed pursuit of Christ and the service of others, (Virgo, 2007, pp. 229-230).

Of course, Martin, Stetsenko, Deci and Ryan's projects are secular. How such commitments diverge from, or mesh with, a Christian perspective of selfhood in relation to the divine is pressing in order for its conversion and alignment to 'recognize the reality of God,' and thus become useful 'in the service of God's self-disclosure,' (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 98). Bland (2008, p. 13) notes the intrinsically relational commitments within Christianity in which 'the self and its functioning are correctly understood as existing within the divine-human relational context,' in which the self can only 'properly conceive of itself "before God",' within *imago Dei* conceptualisations. Consequently, 'Being in God's image suggests that the self is intrinsically relational... [within] its theocentric relational orientation… *and it is this feature that most distinguishes it from all secular models*,' (italics original) (quoting (Johnson, 2000, pp. 6-7)).

Balswick et al. (2021, loc. 107) similarly challenge the solely naturalistic worldview which dominates secular social psychology noting that the latter's 'contributions may offer insights into developmental processes, but they do not provide a framework for understanding the goals or ends of development,' (drawing on (Grenz, 2001)). They assert that when '"individual self-contemplation becomes the basis of self, rather than the relation to the divine and human others on which our reality actually depends, the self *begins to disappear,*"' (loc. 107), (citing (Gunton, 1993, p. 118)). Like Bland and Johnson, Balswick, et al. insist that the telos of human development and selfhood is located specifically in the individual's relation to the divine and the human other.

Consequently, Christian theology and aspects of social psychology converge in asserting that 'the self does not need to be viewed from the perspective of being empty but rather as a *reciprocating self*,' (loc. 135). This reciprocating self is a reflection of the Trinity of the Christian Godhead in which the three persons are 'persons-in-relation and gain their personal identity by means of their interrelationality,' (Balswick, et al., 2021, loc. 148) (citing (Grenz, 2001, p. 9)). This is a template of human selfhood, and Balswick, et al. highlight the shift in contemporary psychology away from the self principally viewed in agential relation to objects, towards developmental theories in which the self 'is seen in terms of a person's embeddedness in relationships,' (loc. 148).

Balswick, et al. (loc. 209) draw on a trinitarian analogy of 'being and becoming… [as a] model for understanding the goal of human development as the capacity of being a reciprocating self.'[143] They believe that this draws upon more contemporary views of *imago Dei* in which the communion within the Trinity comprises a template of relatedness which 'is characterized by perfect reciprocity where the three live with and for each other' within which particularity of the constituent persons is retained alongside relatedness, (loc. 296). The reciprocating self is the goal of human development, and living within God's design is to 'glorify God as a distinct human being in communion with God and others in mutually giving and receiving relationships,' (loc. 299).

They draw on the concept of *perichoresis* in which all three persons within the Trinity 'dwell with and within each other' whilst embracing and manifesting difference and diversity, (loc. 300). The unity of church adherents is not intended for 'assimilation or homogenization but for relationship with others – relationship that does not subvert but establishes and affirms the other whether God or humans,' (loc. 327). Unity necessitates distinction between individuals, and relatedness cements completeness through diversity: of character, gift and calling (and ethnoracial background within this study), (loc. 331). For Balswick, et al., bearing *imago Dei* is to mirror the intrinsically relational nature of the Trinity, in which relational vitality 'is not represented within ourselves but *among* ourselves,' (loc. 390) (my italics). Within this paradigm, relatedness is the pre-requisite for the temporal unveiling of self and self-understanding.

Spiritual development is also posited as being contingent upon sociality, a pre-requisite of Newfrontiers ecclesiology noted in Chapter One. Through Balswick, et al.'s (2021)'s and Stetsenko's (2012) paradigms, trinitarian theology and social psychology can thus converge on the need for the self to be expressed, developed, realised, transformed and self-appreciated through sociality and activism in which distinctives (for instance, ethnoracial, male/female, generational) are expressed but not subverted. Furthermore, interpersonal relationships model a superordinate trinitarian paradigm.

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[143] Reinforcing Stetsenko's paradigm within a theological context.

Returning to secular social psychology, specific theories are offered to consider the development of the self-image through group adherence, and these draw on empirical evidence to support them. The primacy of the social dimension to self-definition is explicated by Tice & Baumeister (2016). For them, relating to others 'is part of what the self is *for*', with the 'self' monitoring its own social relatedness, and cognitively making adjustments to optimise this, (Tice & Baumeister, 2016, p. 71). As noted in Chapter Four, both single and married participants were very sensitive to the need to develop of in-depth relationships, in which belonging was contingent upon overcoming superficial engagement.

In fact, Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe (2016, p. 89) argue that in especially close relationships, 'the cognitive processing of each operates to some extent as if the partner's resources, perspectives, and identities, along with one's own, are accessed' in decision-making and subsequent interpretation. They note from the Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) scale (which assesses the degree to which an individual considers another as being connected or overlapping with their own self, from (Aron, et al., 1992)) that 'there is considerable evidence that people at least experience close others as if they, in some sense, were included in the self,' with the stronger the measure of IOS, the stronger the integration or incorporation of the other, (p. 90).

For example, in close relationships (high IOS) the distinction between own and others' outcomes diminishes.[144] Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe (2016, p. 93) go further to assert that 'inclusion of close others in the self creates expansion of the self.' This is in part due to evidence that self-descriptions from those in close relationships included significantly more domains of the self; also, when longitudinal studies were carried out on individuals' self-descriptions, these became more expansive after falling in love than before, as did perceived self-efficacy, (Aron, et al., 1995). The inclusion of others in the self, and the apparent merging of distinct others into a distinct self has strong resonances of Balswick, et al.'s trinitarian commitments that close relatedness produces a perception of dwelling both with and within others, (Balswick, et al., 2021, loc. 300). Outcomes and qualities of others become blended within the related self. The self is expanded by relatedness of others, whilst the self is simultaneously expanded into the related others. However, whilst IOS describes interpersonal relations, it also extends into wider group relations.

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[144] See (Aron, et al., 1991), (Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2016, p. 92), (MacKay, et al., 1998), (Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2016, p. 90), (Omoto & Gunn, 1994) for empirical justification.

Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe (2016, p. 93) argue that identification with salient groups can be conceptualised as analogous to close interpersonal relationships leading to 'inclusion of these groups in the self,' (IIS). Indeed, many of the experiments used to explore IOS have been replicated in IIS settings, with comparable findings. These results have led Smith, et al. (1999, p. 881) to the conclusion that 'that close relationships and group membership both involve some sort of merging of self and other… [in which] this process may deeply influence cognition, affect, and behavior in relationships and group contexts.' Self-definition is thus conditioned by relational connections: both to groups and to individuals. Indeed, it is argued that it is not possible to define the self without such relatedness. As noted earlier, participants in Chapter Four were indeed sensitive to the need for such relatedness: some Africans had left the church where they had found it difficult to establish.

Other evidence of the centrality of relatedness (or belonging) to human definition and flourishing is provided by Baumeister & Leary (1995, p. 497). They assert that their paradigm of belonging is contingent upon the co-existence of two fundamental elements: 'frequent interaction plus consistent caring,' (p. 497), aligning with (Balswick, et al., 2021, p. 299)'s insistence on 'mutually giving and receiving relationships.' Belonging is dependent specifically upon personal interactions that are positive and free from conflict and negative affect and, second, interpersonal bonds which are reciprocal, enduring and underpinned by affective concern, (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 500). These components were especially evident in participants' data where a lack of care and being known by others was injurious.

As such, the need to belong is different from a need for 'mere affiliation' in which, in the latter, contact could be either infrequent, or not reciprocated, (p. 500). Newfrontiers' own concept of belonging proscribes such cursory and unreciprocated interactions. As noted in Chapter One, its espoused ecclesiology anticipates the maintenance of 'intimacy and mutual care' between adherents within the context of tight dyadic and group relationships, (Virgo, 2007, p. 103), as well as mutual care demonstrated in the redistribution of adherents' personal wealth and belongings, (Virgo, 2009, p. 6).

However, belonging maps across both interpersonal and intergroup boundaries. Hogg (2016, p. 130) points out that, whilst belonging is part of defining the self, it is not solely in terms of idiosyncratic personal attributes or interpersonal relationships, as in *personal* identity, but in terms of group adherence. Group adherence was significant in some participants' disclosures. For example, Nailah's 'blackness' embraced a collective group conceptualisation embracing both black African and Afro-Caribbean peers. *Social* identity is foundational to group belonging, and this constitutes commonalities amongst those within the ingroup relative to those within an outgroup, thus triggering normative behaviours which are distinctive to the ingroup. As such, this impulse for humans to belong within groups should apply to 'all humans in all cultures,' conceding that differences in strength and intensity should be expected across both individuals and cultures, (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 499), (see also (Tice & Baumeister, 2016, pp. 71-72)).

Hogg (2001, p. 56), highlights: 'Groups exist by virtue of there being outgroups… a social category acquires its meaning by contrast with other categories,' consistent with Nailah's (2023) 'blackness' in Chapter Four (see also (Brewer, 1999, p. 432)). Baumeister & Leary's belongingness hypothesis blends both Sedikides & Brewer's (2001, p. 1) relational and collective selves, presuming that collective belonging and dyadic relationships are both manifestations of a common belongingness phenomenon.[145] Whilst commonalities may exist between the two, Smith et al., (2016, p. 120) conclude from their own empirical research that successful dyadic bonds are required for reproduction and maturation, whilst group attachment exists for the transmission of culture and for achieving superordinate goals through division of labour.

Different expectations of what constituted 'family' across ethnoracial backgrounds were evident in participants' data in Chapter Four. Collective group identities, and how these form and reform as individuals or families come into an ecclesial setting which is cross-cultural, will be discussed next.

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[145] (Smith, et al., 2016, pp. 114-117) argue that group and dyadic attachments are distinct, with different motives and psychological import, with people exhibiting 'distinct relational and collective selves', citing (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). From their own empirical research, they conclude: 'Group attachment is conceptually distinct from relationship attachment', with the presence or lack of romantic attachments not greatly influencing the degree of involvement in groups, for example. See also (Prentice, 2016, p. 318) for a discussion on the potentially antagonistic and complementary relation of relational and collective selves.

5.3. IN-GROUP AND OUT-GROUP DYNAMICS FROM SOCIAL IDENTITY AND SELF CATEGORISATION THEORIES

This project is considering participants' self-reported belonging and the factors which enhance or impede it. Social psychology takes belonging, and that which underpins it, seriously. Indeed, belongingness constitutes a fundamental human need, and one which humans are cognitively and affectively attuned to pursue, (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 522) in which the self is constituted, expanded, and defined by relatedness to other individuals and groups. Within a multi-ethnoracial church, people from diverse backgrounds, histories and cultures intermingle and thus how such disparate people, united ostensibly by a common faith, interpret their belonging both within interpersonal contexts and across self-ascribed groups is essential to understand. This is because, as noted in Chapter Four, ingroup and outgroup classifications featured prominently in participants' data with the degree of personally-ascribed identification with an ingroup significantly determining self-reported belonging.

For instance, as noted in Chapter Four, Jeremy's (2021) comment that he did not belong at King's Church, (i.e., to a broader ecclesial outgroup) was a consequence of diluted interpersonal relationships, compromised serving and a constraint on intergenerational interactions. Martha's (2021) assessment of the church as too 'white' for some Africans also represented an identification with a specific demographic ingroup, to which the church constituted a contrastive outgroup. Furthermore, the confluence of many nations in a single small group was transformative for Isah (2021) as he experienced similarities across apparently diverse cultures (Ghanaian and Dutch, for instance): he perceived the small group as a coherent 'ingroup' to which he and the others mutually belonged.

Regarding the social psychology of group formation and associated belonging, Baumeister & Leary (1995, p. 501) assert that people in every society form small primary groups that include interpersonal interaction, (citing (Mann, 1980) and (Coon, 1946)). Of particular salience is the Robbers Cave study of pre-adolescent males which has come to be known as the functional interdependence model, or realistic conflict theory, and it considers both intra- and inter-group dynamics, (Hogg & Abrams, 2006, p. 42). It demonstrated that groups form rapidly in which (fairly) stable status hierarchies[146] and group norms quickly emerged, serving to regulate behaviours of individual boys to those norms, (Sherif, et al., 1988, p. 206). The knowledge of a competitive alternate outgroup then readily precipitated intergroup hostility and prejudice which were subsequently ameliorated when the groups were forced into 'reciprocally cooperative and helpful intergroup actions… and in meeting problems,' (p. 209). Such shared goals 'effectively furnished a superordinate common identity,' thus redefining individuals' group identification, and coalescing two previously disparate (and hostile) groups into a new psychological collective, (Hogg & Abrams, 2006, p. 85).

Sherif's work represents 'an important landmark in social psychology', because it empirically demonstrated a discontinuity between individual and group processes: it also undermined the 'assumed primacy of personality and interpersonal relationships in explanations of intergroup behaviour,' (p. 45). It also demonstrated that seeking a superordinate goal with a co-operative outgroup 'may be sufficient to reduce hostility, but not whether it was *necessary*,' (p. 45).[147]

Furthermore, Hogg and Adams are insistent the Robbers' Cave experiment demonstrated that intergroup attitudes and behaviours occur because of a specifically *intergroup* dynamic comprising a 'collective phenomenon not a statistical aggregation of coincidentally similar individual acts': it is as though there is a psychological 'group switch' which precipitates behaviours different from interpersonal ones when intergroup dynamics are salient, (p. 46).

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[146] Although these hierarchies were by no means immutable, (Sherif, et al., 1988, p. 206).

[147] See also (Brewer, 1999, pp. 436-437) for conditions which may undermine superordinate goals' unique ability to coalesce disparate groups: pre-existing enmities and the need for positive intergroup differentiations.

Social identity theory (SIT) is concerned with 'the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of the group membership,' (Tajfel, 1972) (quoted in (Hogg & Abrams, 2006, p. 6)). Importantly, a social group is *self-ascribed*, and it comprises 'two or more individuals who share a common social identification *of themselves* or… perceive *themselves* to be members of the same social category,' Turner (1982) (quoted in (Hogg & Abrams, 2006, p. 6)), similar to Nailah's (2023) 'blackness' self-description noted earlier, (italics added). Within this conception, belongingness is a psychological state of personal identification and extends beyond mere awareness of a group's distinctives: it is a phenomenological reality bearing 'important self-evaluative consequences,' (Hogg & Abrams, 2006, p. 7).

This self-evaluation is significant and foundational: social identity and group belonging largely constitute *self*-definition and identity through *self*-descriptions determined by the 'defining characteristics of social groups to which one belongs,' (p. 6). Social Identity Theory (SIT) is an attempt (as is Self-Categorisation Theory (SCT) to be discussed later) to study scientifically human social behaviour based on empirical science (rather than philosophical commitments) deploying multiple methods to discern the mental processes which mediate external stimuli and human responses, (pp. 8-9).

Regarding intergroup prejudice (such as that manifest within the Robbers' Cave and other Minimal Group Paradigm experiments, (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 501), (Tajfel, 1970), (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, pp. 38-39), (Oakes, 2003, p. 14)), Turner and Reynolds (2003, p. 138) assert that SIT does not insist or demand a 'direct causal connection between ingroup identification and ingroup bias,' (citing (Bourhis, et al., 1997)). Instead, it is contingent upon intergroup hierarchies and differentials between the relative status and power of the groups, as well as the legitimacy and the stability of their status rankings, (p. 138).[148] For example, groups of low status showed discriminatory proclivities specifically 'when their position was unstable and illegitimate but not when it was secure; high status groups tended to be particularly discriminatory when their position was legitimate but unstable but not when it was both illegitimate and unstable,' (p. 138).

This rules out, according to Turner and Reynolds, simplistic assumptions about the automaticity of intergroup bias, but instead necessitates an assessment of the groups' own perceptions of legitimacy and stability, (see also (Bourhis & Gagnon, 2003, p. 101)). Social identity recognises that society is made up of social categories 'which stand in power and status relations to one another,' (Hogg & Abrams, 2006, p. 13) although the process of social categorisation is not externally imposed but self-ascribed. Within the diverse ecclesial context of this study, power relations were apparent across male/female and ethnoracial delineations, especially in the appointment of leaders. Therefore, the stability and legitimacy of these statuses in the views of diverse attendees need analysis, and these will be revisited in Chapter Seven.

According to SIT 'people tend to classify themselves and others into various social categories', including organisational membership, religion, age and gender, (Ashford & Mael, 1989, p. 20)), (drawing on (Turner, 1985)). SIT attempts to interpret intergroup dynamics within actual societal contexts. It embraces the concept that 'people have a need for positive social identity which requires them to establish a positively valued distinctiveness for their own group compared to other groups,' (Turner & Reynolds, 2003, p. 134).[149] This so-called self-esteem hypothesis assumes that categorisation is partly motivated by the desire to place oneself into categories that maximise 'favorable self-evaluative consequences,' because the individual can ascribe positive group attributes to himself or herself, (Hogg, 2001, p. 60), (see also (Taylor & McKirnan, 1984, p. 297) and (Spears, 2016, p. 177)).

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[148] See also (Liebkind, 2003, pp. 388-390), (Wright, 2003), (Moghaddam, 1988), (Mummendey & Otten, 2003, p. 126).

[149] This contrasts with the IOS/IIS assertion that group membership is principally driven by a desire for self-expansion and increased self-efficacy, as will be discussed later, (Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2016).

SIT comprises three key elements: (1) an examination of collective psychology and the need for a positive social identity, (2) specific intergroup status differences in society, (3) the proclivity for individuals to manage identity issues as either an individual or as a group, within a continuum from interpersonal to intergroup behaviour, (Turner & Reynolds, 2003, p. 134). Hogg (2006, p. 68) points out that social categorisation is associated with the 'accentuation effect' in which categorisation 'exaggerates perceived similarities among people in the same group… and differences between people in different groups', effectively homogenising ingroups and outgroups, (see also (Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2016, p. 95)).[150] Interestingly, Isah's (2021) comments on the commonality across considerable cultural differences appear to homogenise aspects of the small group 'ingroup'.

Hogg and Abrams (2006, p. 53) explain that social competition (seen in the Robbers' Cave experiment, for instance) is a combination both of social categorisation and social comparison. The former accentuates similarities between self and the ingroup cohort, whilst producing 'a perceived exaggeration of the differences between groups': the latter is motivated to elevate the self in which the individual 'selects the dimensions on which the ingroup is more favourably placed than the outgroup' and thus maximises the positive distinctiveness of the ingroup, (see also (Turner, 1981)).

Social categorisation is a contextual process emphasising 'important distinctions and de-emphasising unimportant ones,' (Hogg, 2001, p. 58) thus understanding both what something is equivalent to and other things from which it differs, (Oakes, 2003,

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[150] Although there is evidence that there is asymmetry to this assignment, in which competing outgroups are more homogenised than ingroups, (Hogg, 2001, p. 59), (Park & Rothbart, 1982) and (Oakes, 2003, p. 11).

p. 3). It is posited to be 'largely trans-historical and universal', applying across all cultures in order to simplify and evaluate experience, and to bring purposive order, (Hogg & Abrams, 2006, pp. 16-17).

Second, social classification permits the individual to define him/herself within the social environment, in which the 'inclusion of self in the categorization process is crucial,' (p. 208). Thus, according to SIT, the self-concept is constructed from dual sources: a *personal* identity comprising idiosyncratic characteristics (such as physical attributes, competences, psychological traits, interests and goals), and a *social* identity consisting of salient group classifications, (Ashford & Mael, 1989, p. 21). Consequently, '"self-definition in a social context"… always depends upon social categorisation,' (Oakes, 2003, p. 3) (quoting (Tajfel, 1978a, p. 61)). Social *identification* is thus 'the perception of oneness with or belongingness to some human aggregate,' (Ashford & Mael, 1989, p. 21).

However, Ashford and Mael (1989, p. 21) wrestle with group identification asserting that it is not inevitably 'associated with any specific behaviors or affective states.' Indeed, an individual need not even contribute towards a group's goals but instead may impute to himself or herself the group's successes and failures. Such *identification* is contrasted with *internalisation*, with the former triggering personal social categorisation, but the latter necessitating the incorporation of values and attitudes consistent with the group, (p. 22). Ashford & Mael also liken identification with groups and organisations with interpersonal relationships in which the individual 'attempts to *be* like or actually to be the other person,' through more immersive and transformative internalisation, precipitating greater changes in the state of being through becoming, (p. 22), (citing (Kelman, 1961, p. 63)).

Outside of SIT, other theories on belonging exist. For instance, Myers' (2003, p. 20) thesis on ecclesial belonging is based on Hall's (1990, p. 1) *proxemics* which asserts that four principal spaces are used 'to develop personalities, culture, and communication,' and these comprise: public, social, personal, and intimate.[151] However, he notes that his delineations were taken exclusively from 'middle-class, healthy adults' in North Eastern USA, acknowledging that 'these generalizations are not representative of human behavior in general,' but specific to the narrow group within his original sample, (p. 116). Significantly, different ethnoracial backgrounds 'have very different proxemic patterns,' (p. 116). Myers (2003, pp. 11-18) deploys Hall's original four spaces proxemics to take issue with many 'myths' surrounding belonging. He asserts it comprises identification with another entity (person, organisation, ethnic group) but it 'need not be reciprocal,' (Myers, 2003, p. 25). He argues that it does not require proximity, small groups, commitment, activism nor even a clear purpose for belonging to form, (pp. 11-18). However, his thesis seems not to differentiate between looser identification and internalisation which precipitates deeper engagement and behavioural alignment with others, (Ashford & Mael, 1989, p. 21). Notwithstanding, it shall be briefly considered in Chapter Seven.

SIT concerned itself specifically with a concern for the origins of *inter*group ethnocentrism and discrimination. However, self-categorisation theory (SCT) (derived from SIT, (Simon & Kampmeier, 2016, p. 199), and based on the same 'meta-theoretical perspective,' (Hornsey, 2008, p. 207)) instead attempted to understand the psychological foundations of group formation and *intra*group processes, (Turner & Reynolds, 2003, p. 135). Both are required to consider group identity and group formation, especially within multi-ethnoracial church context which embraces divergent group identities and loyalties, such as 'blackness,' and the church's being too 'white' for some newcomers, as noted above.

SCT's pre-occupation with intragroup behaviour relates to interaction 'between two or more individuals that is governed by a common or shared social self-categorisation or social identity,' (Hogg & Abrams, 2006, p. 93). SCT's basic premise is that self-conception adjusts from personal to social identity, and that as individual self-definition shifts from individual to social identification, group behaviour ensues in which people are acting out of a *social* rather than a *personal* identity, (Turner & Reynolds, 2003, p. 135), (see also (Onorato & Turner, 2016, p. 157), (Spears, 2016, p. 172)). This is partly because under certain stimuli, 'social identity is more salient than personal identity in self-conception' and when this applies 'behaviour is qualitatively different: it is *group* behaviour,' (italics added), (Hogg & Abrams, 2006, p. 25). This is partly because 'self-categorization imbues the self with all the attributes of the group', aligning individuals' collective behaviour to that of the group, precipitating 'social uniformity, intragroup consensus, or shared perceptions,' (Hogg & Abrams, 2006, pp. 73-75).

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[151] Hall was an anthropologist and Research Fellow of the Washington School of Psychiatry, (Hall, 1990, (p. xii)).

SCT thus constitutes a more granular, hierarchical conceptualisation than SIT, because it embeds three levels of self-categorisation as central to the self-concept: the superordinate category of the self as human being (*human identity*), the intermediate level of self as belonging to a social ingroup (*social identity*), and the subordinate level of personal categorisation based on interpersonal comparison (*personal identity*), (Hornsey, 2008, p. 208). It is often presumed that a 'functional antagonism' operates between the levels, although this is strongly disputed, (Hornsey, 2008, p. 208), (see (Spears, 2016, pp. 171-182) for empirical studies concerning primacy of individual and collective selves).

Turner & Reynolds (2003, p. 137) are eager to define terms carefully in their SCT. When they refer to categories, they do not intend that they are interpreted in the sense of a social category, in which a collection of people has an objective, common attribute (e.g., students), since the latter 'need have no psychological or subjective significance for its members,' (p. 137). The term 'category' in their theory signifies a personally-assigned and significant *self-definition*, and which constitutes 'psychological representations… cognitive structures which people use *to define* *themselves* and to change their behavior,' (p. 137). These latter categories, they insist, are psychological concepts which become embedded in the individual's mental processing so that 'one moves from the "I" to the "We",' transforming behaviour in terms of the 'higher-order, emergent entity called a psychological group,' (p. 137).

Hogg & Abrams (2006, p. 106) argue that the *process* of self-categorisation is itself the best explanation for psychological group formation, (considering (Hogg, 1985) and (Hogg, 1987)). In this, under conditions which experimentally elevated gender salience, men and women self-categorised more strongly in terms of their own sex, and manifested accentuated 'sex-stereotypic behaviours and perceptions,' (p. 106). Accentuated effects (beliefs and behaviours) emerged coincident with group identification implying that these are produced by the process of self-categorisation.

Self-categorisation presumes a dual process of categorisation and comparison, in which neither can exist in isolation from the other: the assimilation of stimuli into 'categories depends on perceived similarities and differences,' between self and others, or in-group and out-group: as such, it causes a shift of self-perception from individual self with unique qualities and idiosyncrasies to an ingroup member with attributes common to that group within a continuum, (Onorato & Turner, 2016, pp. 156-7), (see also ((Turner, et al., 1987, p. 46)). It is contingent upon two factors: accessibility and fit, (Wright, 2003, pp. 416-417), (Reicher, 2001, p. 198).[152] The former refers to the 'readiness' of the perceiver to apply a specific category, i.e. it is determined by qualities of the individual, such as prior experiences or situational goals, and the categories accessible within an individual's cognitive awareness, (Wright, 2003, p. 415), (Mummendey & Otten, 2003, p. 115), (Reicher, 2001, p. 198). It is idiosyncratic reflecting the uniqueness of the 'perceiver's past experience, present goals, motives, values and needs,' (Onorato & Turner, 2016, p. 157).

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[152] Wright notes that accessibility and fit 'are clearly related' and not completely independent.

Fit concerns the degree to which social categories are considered by an individual to be indicative of social reality, and how well these categories fit real-world *differences*, (Spears, 2016, p. 173). A high degree of fit is regulated by appropriate cues present in the environment, (Wright, 2003, p. 415) and it may be ascribed if the categorisation maximises 'perceived intercategory differences and minimises intracategory differences': this is known as the meta-contrast ratio and constitutes *comparative fit*, (Hornsey, 2008, p. 208). Furthermore, category distinction is also more likely to be perceived as a strong fit if 'social behaviour and group membership are line with stereotypical expectations', constituting *normative fit*, (Hornsey, 2008, p. 208).[153] The latter refers to the extent to which members of two groups 'conform to expectations about category differences,' (Wright, 2003, p. 416). Such comparative and normative fit expectations appear to be significant in terms of Martha's (2021) insistence, for example, that fellow Africans left the church because it seemed too 'white' compared to more immersive ecclesial communities experienced elsewhere.

A foundation of SCT is that of *depersonalisation*. When factors raise the salience of in-group-out-group categorisations, self-perception shifts to being 'similar to or interchangeable with other in-group members,' causing a depersonalisation of self, (Onorato & Turner, 2016, p. 157). This does not constitute a loss of self-identity, 'nor a submergence of the self in the group,' (p. 157), but represents a cognitive shift of self-definition from 'unique attributes and individual differences to shared social category memberships,' (Turner, 1984, p. 528). This depersonalisation operates also by means of constructed *prototypes*, (Hornsey, 2008, p. 208), (Onorato & Turner, 2016, p. 157). (Hogg & Abrams, 2006, p. 178). Some contention exists around the definition of these. However, these are important in the context of ecclesial belonging in that they relate to how leaders are perceived, a factor that was significant in participants' adherence, as in Chapter Four.

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[153] Hogg (2016, p. 132) points out that normative fit is motivated by SIT's convictions that individuals seek self-enhancement and uncertainty reduction through categorisation. See also (Onorato & Turner, 2016, pp. 157-158).

For example, in Turner (1985) and Turner, et al.'s (1987) framing, a prototype corresponds to an 'average' or 'typical' adherent of a category, or, 'the individual or subgroup which best represents the normative tendency of the group', (drawing on (Mervis & Rosch, 1981), see also (Hogg & Abrams, 2006, p. 174)). However, Hogg & Adams (2006, p. 178) argue that a prototype may not represent the mean of a group's individual opinions. Indeed, it may shift in the presence (cognitive or physical) of an alternate group, and instead comprise the view that 'is more extreme than the mean in a direction away from the outgroup', to produce a meta-contrast between the groups as a result of comparison and categorisation, (see also (Hogg, 2016, p. 131)). What is generally undisputed is that, in most cases, 'the prototype does not actually exist,' (Operario & Fiske, 2003, p. 28) , (Reicher, 2001, p. 199).

Instead, individuals place categorical information in 'fuzzy sets', and common categorical attributes constituting the prototype are like a 'family resemblance, wherein attributes share similar features,' (Operario & Fiske, 2003, p. 28). In social contexts, meeting a new person involves making judgments about the group fit of that individual, and perceivers contrast the stranger with a category prototype. If the fit is sufficiently strong, 'perceivers assimilate the target into the category,' (p. 28). Hogg (2016, p. 131) points out that depersonalisation of self precipitates group behaviour because it conjoins 'collective self-definition with the range of behaviors we typically associate with group processes and intergroup relations.'

Importantly, depersonalisation imputes to ingroup members attributes of the positive ingroup prototype, thus rendering them 'prototypically attractive,' and produces 'similarity-based liking' because it accentuates similarity between self and other ingroupers, (p. 66). Finally, when group categorisation is applied, 'prototypical members are liked more than marginal members,' (p. 66). Conversely, when a group attribution is not salient, liking is linked to personal relationships and idiosyncratic properties, (p. 66).

Prototypicality triggers depersonalisation, in which, upon application of a salient category, ‘people come to see themselves and other category members less as individuals and more as interchangeable exemplars of the group prototype,’ (Hornsey, 2008, p. 208) (see also (Turner & Reynolds, 2003, p. 135)). Self-categorisation establishes a ‘gradient of actual or perceived prototypicality within the group,’ in which some ingroupers are identified as exemplifying greater prototypicality than others: these can thus ‘act as a focus for attitudinal and behavioral depersonalization,’ (Hogg, 2001, p. 69). Such high prototypical ingroupers appear influential, Hogg notes, because others mimic their behaviour; they are also socially liked (consistent with the social attraction hypothesis) which ‘furnishes them with the capacity to actively gain compliance with their requests,’ (p. 69). High prototypicality individuals are often advanced into leadership because of this social attractiveness. This in turn empowers them, and publicly confirms their ability to exercise influence, (p. 69) (see also (Hornsey, 2008, p. 211) and (Turner, 2005)). Indeed, in the preceding Chapter, participants demonstrated that they considered leaders to comprise exemplars of Christ, evincing Christlike character qualities, thus steering newcomers into deeper ecclesial belonging.

However, as Hornsey (2008, p. 217) cautions, SIT/SCT are not without their detractors and limitations. When situations are complexified to include subgroup and relational identities, for instance, combined with the complexities of intersectional personal and collective identities, SCT ‘can appear rigid and oversimplified,’ (p. 217). Hornsey is also cautious that its emphasis on uncertainty reduction and whether rigid depersonalisation has disguised factors such as ingroupers' tolerance towards both intragroup heterogeneity and dissent, (p. 217).[154]

IOS/IIS also deviates from some of SIT/SCT's key foundations, although it embraces categorisation as a process of psychological group identification. For example, in SCT, the group is a dominant social entity that projects itself onto the personal self-identity, which triggers depersonalisation. IOS does not predict such extreme depersonalisation, but instead it asserts that when a group is included in the self, 'mental representations of self and in-group are thought to overlap. This overlap may lead to a confusion of self and in-group, resulting in, for example, an increased acceptance of characteristics that are typical of the in-group as typical of self' and vice-versa, (Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2016, pp. 98-99). Second, IOS considers that the motivation for in-group identification is not self-esteem per se, but 'a desire for self-expansion, a desire for the self to actually increase its potential efficacy, not just a desire to see itself more positively,' (Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2016, p. 99). Finally, IOS argues that if self-expansion is the goal of in-group identification, then intergroup comparisons are not the reasons for in-group favouritism because favouritism can occur even when no salient out-group exists. Instead, it may arise because of the perceived interdependence of the group cohort and the fact that the latter (within IIS) is considered part of the self, (p. 99) (drawing on (Gaertner & Schopler, 1998)).[155]

Notwithstanding these contentions, whilst SIT/SCT deals principally with intergroup and intragroup self-ascriptions, cultural divergences across groups need special consideration. This is especially salient where those with strongly differing cultural commitments and convictions attempt to coalesce. The issues of the church's being too 'white' and self-ascribed group 'blackness' within participants' disclosures, noted above, highlight the sensitivity of intercultural commitments and backgrounds. Social psychological theories concerning culture and group formation will be considered next.

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[154] Triandis (1995, p. 16) considers this can be, in part, due to cultural syndromes, noting that 'ingroups are perceived as more heterogeneous than outgroups in individualistic cultures, but this finding seems to be reversed in collectivist cultures,' with homogeneity in the latter more socially desirable and acceptable.

[155] For other derivatives, such as self-schemata, see (Markus & Sentis, 1982 , p. 45) and its detractors, who insist that self-schemata 'do not replicate when collective identity is salient,' (Spears, 2016, p. 177), (Turner & Onorato, 1999).

5.4. CULTURE, CULTURE SHOCK AND ACCULTURATION

Long-term identification with a group and compliance to its norms are significant in a cross-cultural context like a multi-ethnoracial church. This is because the assumptions concerning social norms and their rationale are ingroup phenomena, meaning that outgroupers with little exposure to the other group can find cultural behaviours inscrutable, incomprehensible or aversive. This was evident, for instance, in Nailah's (2023) disquiet over apparently inconsiderate and deficient hospitality from British-born contemporaries and Alice's (2023) loss of authenticity with British-born congregants to the point she felt 'you're not yourself anymore,' and thus not known or understood.

Acculturation theorists assert that cross-cultural engagement can produce *non-isomorphic attribution* in which two parties attribute different reasons underlying a specific behaviour, (Triandis, 1994, p. 182), (see also (Hall, 1990, p. 181)): this can then trigger culture shock (or as Berry (2005, p. 708) prefers 'acculturative stress'), a phenomenon first proposed by Oberg 'in relation to the negative emotional states experienced by foreigners as a result of loss of familiar cues,' (Searle & Ward, 1990, p. 450) (citing (Oberg, 1960)).

Berry (1988, p. 48) asserts that research clearly demonstrates that such stress can precipitate 'mental health problems' dependent upon a variety of group and individual characteristics. These include the nature of the larger society, its openness to non-dominant groups,[156] the type of acculturating group (for example, voluntary versus involuntary – migrants or refugees), the modes of acculturation deployed by the two interacting groups (to be discussed shortly), the demographic and social characteristics of the individual (such as age, sex, marital status), and the dominant psychological coping mechanisms of a specific individual, (p. 49). He concludes that both differences in individuals' and groups' approaches result in a plethora of varying responses, (p. 50).

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[156] For intergroup permeability, see (Liebkind, 2003, pp. 388-389) and (Tyler, 2003, p. 355).

However, acculturative stress undermines personal security because, when competence is eroded in unfamiliar settings in which others behave in ways that are not easily understandable, individuals can feel that they have compromised agency and experience diluted self-efficacy, (Triandis, 1994, p. 263).[157] This can cause people to become 'depressed and helpless, and they are even more likely to die than people who feel in control of their lives,' (p. 263) (citing (Langer, 1983)). The counterbalance to this is to reduce uncertainty and minimise associated anxiety, (Gao & Gudykunst, 1990, p. 303).

Such acculturative stress can be triggered by differences between collectivist and individualist cultures. This is partly because they may straddle a significant cultural distance and the greater the cultural distance, the more difficult any adjustment can become.[158] For instance, collectivists adjusting to individualistic cultures may have greater difficulty than individualists in the same context, (Triandis, 1995, p. 121). Triandis (1995, pp. 157-159) identifies a raft of major differences between collectivists and individualists including individualists' tendencies (in contrast to collectivists) to make quicker decisions, accept blurred distinctions between public and private behaviour, place a high value on consistency between attitudes and behaviours, and expect more transient interpersonal relationships. The latter could be especially problematic, Triandis outlines, because such relationships are likely to be 'superficial and short-term and thus disappointing to collectivists,' (p. 162). Such concerns were apparent in a variety of non-British-born participants' responses in

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[157] See also (Liebkind, 2003, p. 392) who posits that such stress produces negative outcomes when the stressors 'exceed the individual's coping resources, or protecting mediators.'

[158] For a metric measuring cultural difference, see (Babiker, et al., 1980, p. 109), (Searle & Ward, 1990).

Chapter Four, such as Mia's (2023) frustrations that she could only go 'so far' in some relationships and Alice's (2023) observation that 'super connectedness' with British-born congregants was elusive.

To ameliorate the difficulties of culture shock through non-isomorphic attribution, Triandis (1992) proposes a variety of mitigating factors. He asserts that acculturative stress is minimised by a low history of conflict, short cultural distances, knowledge of the other culture, language competence, networks that overlap, equal-status contact, and (similar to Robbers' Cave's observations) 'the more superordinate goals there are, the more perceived similarity… goals are especially important,' (Triandis, 1994, pp. 239-240).[159] His culture shock amelioration is predicated upon perceived similarity arising from meaningful, conflict-free interactions that intergroup individuals finding mutual rewarding: the greater the rewards, the greater the level of interaction, the greater the network overlap through common friendships emerging and the lower the likelihood of adverse non-isomorphic attribution.

Liebkind (2003, p. 386) considers the classical definition of acculturation as comprising 'those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural pattern of either or both groups,' (see also (Ward, 1996, p. 124), (Berry, 2005, p. 698)). Acculturation can be seen both as a state comprising a measurement of the extent of acculturation at a specific time, or as an on-going process of changes to beliefs, emotions, attitudes, values and behaviours, (Liebkind, 2003, p. 387) (see also (Ward, 1996, p. 124)). Liebkind also curates the multiplicity of acculturation theories into two principal strands: the first that conceives it as a linear process of acquiring the host culture's values and behaviours in what might otherwise be termed assimilation, in which the nurture culture progressively diminishes, (p. 387). The second perspective embraces cultural pluralism in which both ethnic groups' members retain 'their heritage cultures while adapting to the mainstream society,' (p. 387). The former emphasises an inverse relationship between ethnic and host cultures and principally employs single index metrics with unidimensional bipolar scales, (p. 388). The latter, however, utilises bidimensional metrics insisting that ethnic and host cultural involvements should be measured simultaneously, with some assuming orthogonality between the dimensions, others inverse correlation, (p. 388).

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[159] See Brewer's (1999, p. 436) qualifications on superordinate goals noted earlier. See also (Wright, 2003, p. 415).

As Ward (1996, p. 127) points out, several researchers have considered affective, behavioural and cognitive components in attempting to determine the metrics which best predict the outcomes of acculturation and to measure its consequences.[160] Searle & Ward (1990) argue that acculturative stress outcomes can meaningfully be partitioned into psychological (emotional/affective) and socio-cultural (behavioural) components, mainly because acculturation motivates individuals to 'maintain psychological well-being… and to acquire culturally appropriate knowledge and skills,' (Ward, 1996, p. 127)·. Berry's model embraces Searle & Ward's metrics in determining acculturation, and supports a specifically bidimensional approach, which Liebkind (2003, p. 393) argues constitutes '[t]he most impressive example of research' employing such a paradigm (as does Ward (1996, p. 126)).

Berry (1988, p. 41) notes that cultural change between groups comprises both group-level and distinct individual-level phenomena. The former include physical, biological, political, economic, cultural and social changes, the latter behavioural, identity, health/stress factors, (p. 41). Berry's (2009, p. 365) assertion is that interpersonal contact across cultural boundaries precipitates mutual change within the two salient cultures, conceding that 'most changes occur in the non-dominant group,' (Berry, 1988, p. 41). Indeed, this appears to be borne out in participants' data in which British-born participants (such as Jeremy (2022) who asserted that Nigerians 'wake us up a bit') were changed by other cultures and vice-versa (such as Nailah (2023) 'experiencing life in God' differently because of the contrastive gentleness of key leaders, although asymmetry between the two groups was also apparent).

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[160] Including (Black & Mendenhall, 1990) and (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985) which considered psychological well-being and values/attitudes in adaptation.

Berry, Phiney, et al. (2006) studied the acculturation approaches of immigrant youth and national youth.[161] Two key metrics were deployed to assess youths' well-being: psychological and socio-cultural adaptation, defined respectively as 'personal well-being and good mental health,' and 'individuals' social competence in managing their daily life in the intercultural setting,' (p. 306). Berry, Phiney et al. group the youths' approaches to acculturation into four key adaptation strategies, (pp. 313-314):

> **Integration** in which youth 'indicated relatively high involvement in both their ethnic and national cultures. These adolescents were high on both ethnic and national identities.'
>
> **Ethnic** which was indicative of 'young people who are largely embedded within their own culture and [showing] little involvement with the larger society.'
>
> **National** in which contact with heritage culture was eschewed in favour of the new host culture.
>
> **Diffuse** in which contact with neither culture was sought.

Berry, Phiney et al. assert that pursuing involvement in both cultures (integration) promotes the healthiest psychological and sociological adaptations: conversely, being immersed in neither culture (diffuse) produces the weakest adaptation outcomes, with ethnic and national adaptation profile results being located in between these extremes, (p. 325) (see also (Liebkind, 2003, p. 394)).[162]

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[161] Aged 13-18 years across 13 societies - N=5,366 and 2,631 respectively for migrant and host cultural groups.

[162] They cite comparable outcomes in studies on adult (rather than youth) migrants.

Berry, Phinney, et al.'s conclusion is that 'a combined involvement in the national and the ethnic cultures is associated with more positive adaptation outcomes than a preference for either the national or the ethnic culture alone,' (p. 322). The most salubrious outcomes for psychological well-being and sociocultural competence result when youth retain their national identity but are immersed in *both* cultures, and this applies to *both* migrant and host-culture youth.

Liebkind (2003, p. 314) agrees asserting that 'the integration option has turned out to be the most preferred acculturation strategy… in virtually every study, and is present for all types of acculturating groups.' She further concludes that studies consistently demonstrate that 'giving up one's ethnic culture can have a negative impact on the self-concept,' (p. 314). Triandis (1994, p. 241) (citing (Berry, et al., 1989)) considers such integration a manifestation of *additive multiculturalism* and asserts that a reason for its higher levels of well-being and competence is that evidence shows that 'ethnic groups are more mentally healthy when they add rather than lose skills.' Conversely, assimilation (or national profile) equates to a deleterious subtraction of cultural elements, or loss, which Triandis terms *subtractive multiculturalism*, (p 241).

Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe's (2016) IOS model, as noted earlier, argues that it is based on twin motivations/outcomes: self-expansion and increased self-efficacy. These could partly explain Triandis' additive acculturation hypothesis since the individual is motivated by an innate self-expansion desire which produces enhanced self-efficacy and thus socio-cultural competence. Since an integration approach is self-expanding and salubrious for extending competence in new contexts, it is consistent with both Triandis' and Berry's observations and theorising, offering a psychological motivation for its pursuance.

Berry's research is not without criticism on three fronts: first, from other empirical studies, second from meta-theoretical or epistemological commitments, and third from its methodology. On the first point, Torbiorn (1982) (cited in (Ward, 1996, p. 137)) observed that 'sojourners who invested time with host nationals were happier' than those who predominantly spent more time with co-nationals. However, other studies draw the opposite conclusion and observe 'increased psychological distress' under comparable conditions, (Ward & Kennedy, 1992) and (Ward & Kennedy, 1993) (cited in (Ward, 1996, p. 137)). This thus implies interactive influences that may be culturally- or situationally-specific, (Ward, 1996, p. 137).

A second criticism of Berry comes from postmodern commitments. As he himself notes, the latter's relativist standpoint 'considers human behaviour to be so fundamentally entwined with, and a product of cultures, that no common psychological concepts or measures of them can be valid, nor is it possible to make comparisons across cultures,' (Berry, 2009, p. 364). In contrast, Berry's own metatheoretical commitments embrace universalism, which contends that 'all human societies exhibit commonalities ("cultural universals"), and that all individual human beings possess basic psychological processes ("psychological universals"). These psychological processes are shared,' and can thus be studied and interpreted by those outside the culture being investigated, (p. 364).[163]

Notwithstanding, Berry, Phinney et al.'s study appears extensive in its sample size and the number of societies studied, thereby potentially smoothing out discrepancies or idiosyncrasies within specific cultures and personality types. However, a third criticism is that it relies on self-reported, quantitative assessments of attitudes and well-being. It does not involve third-party validation or observation of discernible behaviours that may corroborate those attitudinal self-reports: they may simply constitute unjustified claims, (Searle & Ward, 1990, p. 460).[164] Indeed, as Liebkind (2003, p. 397) highlights, strong identification with one's heritage cultural ingroup and a positive attitude towards its maintenance may still yield a failure 'to endorse that culture oneself.' The self-report may thus not distinguish sufficiently between *identification* and *internalisation*, as Ashford & Mael (1989, p. 22) highlighted earlier. Nonetheless, as already noted, results with other similar studies (involving adults) appear consistent.[165]

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[163] See also (Schwartz, 2010) who identifies ten universal motivational types of values across multiple cultures.

[164] Their studies share similar methodological weaknesses by relying on 'subjects' unsupervised self-reports and could be enhanced by… the inclusion of independent, external indicators of adjustment.'

Acculturation, in Triandis and Berry's, Phinney et al.'s and Searle and Ward's perspectives thus embodies strategies employed by cultural groups in managing intercultural contact: it has potentially significant implications for multi-ethnoracial congregations. Restorationism is based, as noted previously, upon close adherence to ecclesial values and immersion in community.[166] It is thus expected to trigger conformity in attitudes, behaviours and values towards biblical norms such as immersion in community, personal piety and evangelism, which goes beyond mere *identification* to more profound *internalisation*, (Ashford & Mael, 1989, p. 22). This will be reconsidered in Chapter Seven.

5.5. SUMMARY

This chapter has identified some key factors which explain why participants' disclosures of belonging are occurring. In summary, social psychology asserts that all human beings have a psychological need to be related to others both interpersonally and within groups. Indeed, some theories argue that selfhood and the self-image cannot be constructed outside the social domain: the self is defined by, and created for, tight interpersonal and intragroup relatedness. Some theologians argue that this is based upon the trinity within a dialectic of *Being* and *Becoming*. Within this paradigm, the self is in a constant state of reciprocal relational and performative transformation, as modelled by the Trinitarian Godhead, undergoing expansion by virtue of sociality and mutual activism in which particularity of the constituent persons is retained within embedded relatedness.

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[165] Although Berry's citing of other studies includes those with which he is involved.

[166] See, for example, (Hunt, 2009, p. 368), (Walker, 1998, p. 158).

Belongingness appears to be contingent upon personal interactions being positive and free from conflict, as well as being reciprocal, enduring and underpinned by affective concern. Groups form readily on contact if there is no history of previous conflict, stabilising into hierarchies of charisma and competence, but contact alone is not necessarily sufficient to displace previous ingroup/outgroup tensions. Coalescing around mutually-rewarding superordinate goals appears to offer some potential to erode preceding intergroup friction provided the environment promotes and sustains mutuality.

Formation into groups is predicated upon either an innate need for a positive social identity (as within SIT), or by a reflex of self-expansion (as in IOS/IIS), but group identification itself may not necessarily equate to internalisation of its values. For this to occur, depersonalisation towards group prototypes is required, with leaders' influence determined by their high prototypicality, as predicted by SCT. Intercultural contact can precipitate aversive culture shock or acculturative stress through non-isomorphic attribution. Alleviation of this loss of socio-cultural competence and security requires conditions conducive to equal-status contact, network overlap and the presence of mutually rewarding superordinate goals to enhance perceived cross-cultural similarity.

The healthiest form of acculturation may require immersion in twin cultures: that is, retention of nurture culture involvement combined with intentional interaction with a new host culture. This may be due to additive acculturation effects in which new competences are added to existing ones, and where identity is augmented not subverted by exposure to, and involvement in, the new culture.

Whilst social psychology provides insight into the generic conditions and consequences of belonging as an explanatory tool to illuminate factors which may explain why a phenomenon is occurring, Osmer (2008, loc. 88), Swinton & Mowat (2006, p. 99) underline the need for *critical faithfulness* within evangelical Practical Theological commitments which foregrounds the 'divine givenness of scripture… ensuring the faithful practices of individuals and communities.' The observations of scripture, and especially the deployment of familial New Testament metaphors so prevalent within participants' data, shall be explored in the next chapter. This is to enable a conversation in Chapter Seven to consider and critique the research data against this normative voice to determine what should be happening within ecclesial belonging, alongside the explanatory voice of social psychology from this chapter.

6. THEOLOGY OF FAMILY

6.1. OVERVIEW

This project is seeking to understand participants' self-reports of belonging in a diverse ethnoracial church, and to identify key elements which promote or hinder such belonging. Social psychology in the preceding chapter is offered as an interpretive tool to explain which factors may determine certain outcomes in attachment relationships, whilst scripture is introduced as a normative voice to articulate what should be occurring within the contemporary church, and to guide and shape praxis, ((Osmer, 2008, loc. 92), (Cartledge, 2003, p. 53), (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 16), (Root, 2014, p. 228)).

Participants in Chapter Four, straddling wide ethnoracial backgrounds, conceptualised belonging principally in familial terms. The scriptural normative voice thus needs to embrace two principal factors: views of scholars concerning those parts of the New Testament which are especially important for the promotion of ecclesial ethnoracial harmony, combined with those which elaborate the significance of the church as a metaphorical family. It will draw principally upon Aasgaard (2004), Bartchy (1999), Atkins (1991), Malina (2003), Meeks (2003), Heim (2017), Burke (2006), Scott (1992), Moo (2013) and Garner (2016) who argue that Paul deploys familial terminology (such as adoption, siblingship, parental metaphors) more expansively than other New Testament writers to explicate his ecclesiological expectations for belonging, across all social and political boundaries, initiated through water baptism. Belonging encompasses the amelioration of ethnoracial tensions through deployment of adoption language (especially *huiothesia*), and the familial roles (modelled on aspects of antiquitarian praxis) to be honoured in the church. The latter includes Paul's deployment of *paterfamilias* responsibilities which he attributed to himself as leader, and spiritual siblingship between himself and between his followers which entailed reciprocal mutual honouring, deeply affective relationships and performative practical support through expressions of *philadelphia*.

Consideration of familial metaphors shall also accommodate Wright's (2005, p. 97) and Barton's (2005, p. 61) insistence (noted in Chapter Two) that the wider biblical chronological narrative be honoured. Consequently, scholars' views on familial metaphors from Paul shall be placed in context with wider scriptural narratives (originating in the Old Testament regarding, for instance, overarching familial and adoption themes) drawing on Johns (2002), Moo (2013), Bruce (1982) and Scott (1992), alongside some of Jesus' parallel teachings (on the primacy of ecclesial family) explicated in the Gospels, drawing briefly upon a variety of biblical scholars. The inclusion of the latter is also partly a response to some scholars' objections to disproportionate emphases upon Pauline ecclesiology, owing to its purported deviations away from Jesus' own injunctions and praxis, (such as those from (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1992, p. 101), (Crossan, 1991) and (Borg, 1987)).

As noted in Chapter Two, theological interpretation involves 'historical work so we can discern what the text meant' to its original recipients, which requires comparing both antiquitarian and contemporary social worlds, (McKnight, 1995, p. 209). This exercise is to fuse 'two horizons,' that of the context of the biblical text itself with the contemporary context, (Gorman, 2009, pp. 27, 159) in order faithfully to apply the former to the latter.

Therefore, this chapter shall commence by considering the broader socio-cultural milieu of antiquity across the most prevalent ethnic groupings, with special consideration of the familial cultural norms that influenced the first century Church. It will consider Roman, Hellenistic and Jewish cultures and the similarities and differences that both united and differentiated them from one another, and the limitations of the almost uniquely androcentric sources originating from a principally urban upper-class demographic.

The main characteristics of antiquitarian households will be investigated, including the acute need for familial succession, the attribution of honour and shame, as well as contentions over gendered roles embedded within antiquitarian patriarchy and siblingship, drawing on theologians deSilva (2000), Schüssler Fiorenza (1992), Crossan (1991), Borg (1987), Aasgaard (2004), Corley (2002), Elliott (2002) (2003), Barton (2005), Esler (2003), Dudrey (1999), Malina (2003), Bartchy (1999), and classicists Saller (2009) and Dixon (1992). As will be demonstrated, two opposing views on ecclesial gendered relationships exist: that of a 'discipleship of equals' promoted by Schüssler Fiorenza, Crossan and Borg, which eradicated antiquitarian male/female power differentials based upon an interpretation of Jesus' praxis and teaching, and that of complementarianism. Within the latter, scholars such as Aasgaard, Corley, Elliott and Bartchy argue that Paul principally retained but reconfigured antiquitarian patriarchal cultural norms, differentiating ecclesial leadership and fictive siblingship roles across prevailing cultural male/female delineations. Consideration of these positions is important owing to contentions over male/female leadership roles which arose in the research, and which constitutes a highly contentious aspect of Newfrontiers ecclesiology.

Before considering specific Pauline familial metaphors, some consideration of familial biblical metanarrative is pressing so as to locate the former within the latter, honouring Barton's (2005, p. 61) and Wright's (2005, p. 97) aforementioned injunctions. For example, in his doctoral thesis, Johns (2002, p. 71) argues that God's familial plan for the church is bound up within the trinitarian nature of the Godhead noting that, mystically, 'God is a family and community… the always-existing first family.' Within this paradigm, Christianity is fundamentally 'a love relationship between a Father and a Son,' in which 'God reveals Himself in family terms,' (p. 72). Beyond this essential father/son relationship, Johns asserts that God's Kingdom is intrinsically *expansionary*, achieved via the medium of 'family because that is his nature,' in which family is both an 'end and a means to an end,' for that expansion, (p. 72).

Johns further declares that God's familial plan is inherently intergenerational, and this is presaged in God's covenant to Abraham. Boice (1985, p. 11) boldly claims that 'No one can understand the Old Testament without understanding Abram, for in many ways the history of redemption beings with God's call to him.'[167] Honouring this commitment to Abraham's unique precursive redemptive role, Johns (2002, p. 74) notes Abraham's divine selection as an agent to embody the message of familial intergenerationality (his name means both "'exalted father'" and '"father of many",' (p. 74)) specifically because the embedded 'vision was multigenerational.' This emerges through God's covenantal declaration that Abraham must 'keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come,' (Genesis 17:9).

Johns then develops this intergenerationality into the New Testament, which he asserts is foundational to God's ecclesial expansion. He cites the declaration of Jesus as constituting an exemplar of His Father (John 14:9), and then the Apostle Paul's claims to imitate Christ in 1 Corinthians 4:15-17. Within this, as will be seen later in this chapter, Paul asserts fatherhood over his fictive spiritual children, and whose lifestyle is worthy of imitation within his metaphorical *paterfamilias* self-designation. The conclusion of this progression for Johns is that familial intergenerationality is 'God's strategy for expanding the family business, the Kingdom of God,' (p. 76). This is achieved by delegation of His authority to spiritual sons and daughters who, in turn, 'function as spiritual parents mediating His grace to another generation,' (p. 76).[168]

Johns (2002, p. 72) notes that just as 'God reveals Himself in family terms. He also builds His Kingdom relationally with His sons and daughters (Gal 4:6-7: Rom 8:18-

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[167] Abram and Abraham are used interchangeably here whilst recognising the divine injunction for the former to be displaced by the latter in Genesis 17:5.

[168] Reminiscent of Virgo's handover of his Newfrontiers movement to apostolic spiritual sons, (Jeffery, 2019a, p. 138). See Chapter One.

25).' This growth is intrinsically familial because it aligns with His essential nature: 'its mission is to help expand the family through new births,' (Johns, 2002, p. 72). With this expansionary familial metanarrative in mind, the suitability of principally Pauline familial ecclesial metaphors to ethnoracial belonging will be considered next.

6.2. SUITABILITY OF THE PAULINE AND DEUTERO-PAULINE CORPUS

Participants' self-reports of multi-ethnoracial belonging in Chapter Four were replete with familial metaphors and allusions, especially those of fictive spiritual siblings and parents. Regarding the confluence of familial themes and ethnoracial harmony within Pauline texts, Thompson (2000) considers the book of Romans. He asserts that, through the common confession of God as Father, 'Jew and Gentile together are adopted into the one *family*,' (my emphasis), (p. 127). This is because Romans was thus a letter that, in part, ((Jervis, 1991, p. 25) (Moo, 1996, p. 27) and (Carson & Moo, 2005, p. 406)) also sought to heal tensions in the churches which were 'essentially ethnic,' (Burke, 2006, p. 168), (see also (Meeks, 2003, p. 81)).

These tensions in Rome were particularly acute[169] and it was probable that Paul was writing into a context in which the Christians in Rome were grouped into several house churches (as evidenced by his greetings to disparate groups in Romans 16, (Moo, 1996, p. 5)), and 'factionalized along ethnic lines,' (Burke, 2006, p. 163). Romans is thus, in part at least, most likely an attempt at a 'family letter' in which unifying familial metaphors addressing inter-ethnic tensions are intentionally deployed, (p. 163).[170]

Such integration was manifestly problematic for the first century church as it 'struggled to keep its Christ-inspired unity,' wrestling as it was against a milieu that decisively proscribed Jew and Gentile socialisation, (DeYoung, et al., 2003, p. 32). Importantly, Paul's use of metaphors 'create meaning, perception, emotion, and a sense of group identity' for the originally ethnoracially diverse audience to which he was writing, (Heim, 2017, p. 2). Furthermore, Burke (2006, p. 79) argues that a unifying motif unique to Paul is that of '*huiothesia'* – adoption as sons[171] – in which all Christian believers acquire both a common status before God (sonship), and between one another as fictive siblings, (see also Atkins (1991, p. 182)).

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[169] For an overview of the expulsion of Jews from Rome by Claudius and their subsequent reintegration, see (Burke, 2006, p. 162), (Moo, 1996, p. 5), (DeYoung, et al., 2003, p. 31).

[170] For similar themes in Galatians, see (McKnight, 1995, p. 21), (Moo, 2013, pp. 19-21), (Dunn, 1993b, p. 11).

Indeed, sibling terminology occurs 'far more frequently in the Pauline letters than anywhere else' within the New Testament corpus, (Meeks, 2003, p. 87). Bartchy (1999, p. 70) concurs noting that *adelphoi* (brothers and sisters) and *adelphos* (brother) appear 118 times in the undisputed Pauline letters, and liberally in each one. This ubiquitous Pauline metaphor, Bartchy concludes, constitutes 'an essential image in his strategy for convincing his readers and hearers to treat each other as biological siblings had been socialized to do,' within antiquitarian norms, (p. 70).

However, Schüssler Fiorenza (1992, p. 101) sounds a circumspect note regarding overreliance on Pauline sources of ecclesiology, stating that he is a dominant theological figure because 'his letters have survived oblivion, but he was neither [the Church's] initiator nor its sole leader,' and he may well have diverted ecclesiasticism back towards patriarchy and away from Jesus' normative vision of a 'discipleship of equals.' Frye (2000, p.19ff) similarly asserts that models for Christian leadership frequently relegate Jesus from holding primary importance, opining: 'What exegetical detour did we take to fixate almost solely on Paul… to the almost total neglect of Jesus and the Gospels?' This concern will be addressed later.

Regarding metaphorical language, Aasgaard (2004, p. 23) highlights, 'metaphor is about "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another",' in order to unveil its 'unique perspective on the transcendent,' (Heim, 2017, p. 75).

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[171] The etymology of this term shall be considered in section 6.7.

Burke (2006, p. 33) (like Aasgaard) draws from (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 150) noting that Pauline family metaphors are ‘suffused with meaning drawn from the family in the ancient world.’ This necessitates an understanding, therefore, of two key factors: the *source* domain (or *donor* field), and the *target* domain (or *recipient* field), (Burke, 2006, p. 34), (see also (Aasgaard, 2004, pp. 23-31)).[172]

Burke (2006, p. 33) considers three key clusters of familial metaphors and their associated source/target domains. Ancient family -> Christian family, father -> God, adopted sons -> Christian/believers. Aasgaard (2004, p. 23) emphasises another: ancient siblings -> Christian siblings, although this could be regarded as a sub-set of Burke’s first pairing. Thus, to understand ‘the intensity, intent and meaning of a metaphor in an ancient text, it is necessary to understand the socio-historical context in which it was originally used,’ (Burke, 2006, p. 37). This shall be discussed next so that the context into which Paul was speaking can be better comprehended, and the associated antiquitarian norms he embraced, modified or rejected subsequently identified.

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[172] Heim (2017, p. 17) cautions against Burke’s assumption that common ‘source and target domains underlie each occurrence of the Pauline *ύίοθεσία* metaphors,’ preferring instead to ‘hold in tension rather than attempting to synthesize them into a single “meaning”,’ (p. 19).

6.3. THE FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD IN ANTIQUITY

Participants in this study deployed familial language and metaphors, especially fictive siblings and parents, in describing what promoted and what hindered their sense of belonging to the local church: as will be seen later in Chapter Seven, many of these appear to be influenced by their own specific familial culture and expectations. Paul likewise was writing to an audience shaped by contemporaneous cultural expectations on familial structure and societal norms, and one shaped by inter-ethnic interactions and tensions. An assessment of the antiquitarian background influencing familial norms is important to 'discern what the text meant' to its original recipients, (McKnight, 1995, p. 209) (see Chapter Two). This section shall investigate the primacy of family in antiquity in determining belonging, identity and subsequent comportment, contrasting this with current Western norms which may imbibe a comparatively diluted view on siblingship, thus affecting norms determining contemporary ecclesial siblingship.

Malina (2003, p. 61) contrasts the significance of family in antiquity with contemporary Western society, asserting 'in the whole Mediterranean world… [family] holds supreme sway over individual life.' Such historic familial loyalty was not a cultural artifact specific to a particular group – such as Roman, Greek or Jew - but seemingly ubiquitous, (Dudrey, 1999, pp. 27, 28, 32).[173] However, the primacy of familial adherence, Malina (2003, p. 61) insists, may be masked from contemporary readers because it has been displaced by 'economics' within western societies, (see also (Bartchy, 1999, p. 68)). The priorities in antiquity were shaped by significantly different pressures.

However, before addressing some of these, it should be noted that much evidence for socio-cultural norms in antiquity is 'weighted toward the wealthy urban upper classes (particularly in urban Rome and Athens),' and this evidence principally articulates male perspectives, (Dudrey, 1999, p. 36) (see also (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 93), (Garnsey, et al., 2015, p. 152), (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1992, p. 108)). Thus, it may shroud the realities of life of less privileged groups including the poor, and uniquely female sensibilities.

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[173] For example, household codes or *Hausetafeln* occur throughout 'Jewish, Greek, Hellenistic Egyptian, and Roman society… [and also] in Christian society,' (p. 27).

Notwithstanding, the pressures facing antiquitarian families were very different from those of today. Notably, infant mortality was egregious compared to contemporary Western norms, with 25-35% of newborns not surviving their first year (Golden, 1990, p. 83), and possibly a 'half not living to age ten,' (Garnsey, et al., 2015, p. 161). Miscarriages were also common, (Safrai, et al., 1988, p. 764). Consequently, Roman women had to bear five to six children in order for the population to be maintained, (Dudrey, 1999, p. 43), but many women died during labour, (Aasgaard, 2004, pp. 37-38), (Brown, 1988 , p. 6).

Dudrey (1999, p. 43) starkly concludes that the main function of ancient family pragmatically was 'not morality but survival,' (see also (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 45)). The size of families was largely determined by high mortality rates – of parents, but also offspring. For example, it is estimated that females and males respectively at ten years old had 2.2/2.0 living siblings, but 1.5/1.4 by the age of thirty-five, (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 38). Too few children in a family were often corrected by remarriage, common because of the early demise of many wives especially during childbirth, and by adoption, (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 39), (Dixon, 1992, p. 9). The significance of adoption to ecclesial family shall be considered in sections 6.5 and 6.7. The existential hazards of mortality and the need for reproduction were major factors in shaping familial priorities. Different sociological values were also embedded antiquitarian society.

Therefore Malina (2003, p. 41) notes that antiquitarian Middle-Eastern collectivist impulses may injuriously chafe against contemporary Western individualism. In the former, each person would consider himself/herself enmeshed within 'a sequence of embeddedness' to a broader collective, sometimes at odds with other collectives, at times competing for limited resources, such as food, property, influence/power. Furthermore, 'any group member equally well represents the whole group' and would not see itself as distinct from it, (p. 41) (see also (Burke, 2006, p. 153)).

The family and household were modelled on the *polis* (city-state) which was a patriarchal institution in which roles were divided across clear male/female delineations.[174] 'Men ruled in the public domain and over their households and women's authority was confined largely within doors,' (Barton, 2005, p. 41), (see also (Malina, 2003, pp. 50-51), (Bartchy, 1999, p. 68), (Elliott, 2002, p. 86), (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 75)). The demarcation between public and private thus differentiated status and roles between male and females, and these drove dominant cultural norms underpinning such sociology.

Barton (2005, p. 41) notes that the male household head assumed responsibility to 'guard the family's honour by protecting the women's sexual virtue.' This was partly because societies in antiquity were designated 'honour and shame societies,' (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 51), (Malina & Neyrey, 1991, p. 95), (deSilva, 2000, p. 23), (Burke, 2006, p. 152). Esler (2003, p. 123) contrasts these opposing values, in which honour 'resides in proper public behaviour or demeanour,' founded on 'positions of eminence in family, village, city or nation.'[175] Honour could both be *ascribed* (through birth into a high status family, for example), or *gained* through attaining wealth, or virtuous living, (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 51), (Esler, 2003, p. 124), (Burke, 2006, pp. 152-153). However, it was thought to exist in only limited quantities, (Esler, 2003, p. 123), (Bartchy, 1999, p. 77), (Malina, 2003, p. 20) and thus easily lost through transgressing social norms, subsequently to be displaced by shame. Transgressors were often shunned, because 'contact with them threatened one's own honour,' (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 52) plunging 'the whole family in disrepute,' (p. 51), (see also (Moxnes, 1993, p. 172), (Saller, 2009, p. 94)). Honour was to feature significantly in Pauline ecclesiology to be described later in this chapter.

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[174] The stark division of male and female roles will be explored specifically in sections 6.4 and 6.8.

[175] Drawing (Malina, 1993).

Intergenerationality figured prominently in participants' experiences of belonging and could prove highly efficacious in promoting it. Within antiquity, parents and children were expected to respect one another, and this was strongly emphasised within Roman tradition and characterised as '*pietas*,' (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 52). It was based upon dutiful respect of positive affection, obedience, and mutual solidarity to one another's well-being, (Dixon, 1992, p. 46), (Aasgaard, 2002, p. 521), (Saller, 2009, p. 131).[176] Within a specific Jewish context, mutual honour was expected between parents and children. This was consistent with the fourth commandment in Exodus 20:12 (cf Deuteronomy 5:16, Leviticus 19:3a) 'honour your father and your mother' in which honour was shown to parents through courtesy, conformity, and caregiving (the latter especially in old-age), (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 53), (Yarbrough, 2020, p. 50). The reciprocal responsibility of parents was to discipline their children, provide for their material needs, support, educate and protect them, (Yarbrough, 2020, p. 45), (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 53).

A pervasive ideal concerning family life in antiquity was 'family harmony.' Dixon (1992, p. 29) discusses the idealisation of family in a Roman context noting 'the sentimental representation of family life… permeated the language of the public sphere… as an attractive social ideal,' comprising a 'haven in a heartless world,' (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 54). The family was to meet members' emotional needs, but also their 'material and social requirements,' (p. 54) modelling loyalty, thus reinforcing *pietas*.

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[176] Similar to Greek-Hellenistic contexts, (Aasgaard, 2004, pp. 52-53)

Parallel ideals were also found in the Greek-Hellenistic contexts: 'the marriage ideal was lifelong,' with sexual faithfulness revered, (p. 55). Parents and children were to nurture strong emotional bonds between themselves, (p. 55) with children often 'the centre of attention and interest in the family,' (Golden, 1990, p. 84). Importantly, intra-family disputes were to be resolved internally. The involvement of outsiders, especially that of a legal court, incurred profound disgrace upon a family, (Humphreys, 1993, p. 5), (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 55), (Bartchy, 1999, p. 72). Jewish praxis closely aligned with Roman and Greek-Hellenistic cultures, but with 'some nuances,' (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 55). Jews were expected to marry earlier, with a strong emphasis on having a larger number of children, (p. 56), (Safrai, et al., 1988, pp. 748, 750), (Yarbrough, 2020, p. 41).

Strong ideals, such as concord, thus existed around family in Roman, Greek-Hellenistic and Jewish traditions. However, these may not have fully aligned with real-life outcomes, especially in cases of divorce and remarriage, as well as the early demise of spouses and children, (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 56), (Dixon, 1992, p. 29). For instance, Bradley (1991, p. 129) contrasts the 'strong ideal of conjugal love' promoted within Roman culture with its probable reality: it is 'not an acceptable inference' that such idealisation created marriages which could be regarded as 'emotionally satisfying' by contemporary standards, he concludes. As noted above, a major distinction within antiquity was that the household and family were highly stratified across male/female delineations, including that of patriarchy. These shall be discussed next.

6.4. GENDERED ROLES IN ANTIQUITY: PARENTS AND SIBLINGS

Pauline writings were situated in a social environment significantly different from today's, especially in terms of the polarisation of male and female roles. The patriarchal structures practised with the first century were inevitably to influence

Pauline writings, either as a template to reinforce, or alternatively to modify. Pauline praxis shall be considered later in sections 6.6 and 6.8 including how antiquitarian structures influenced the norms scholars believe Paul espoused. Contentions over male/female roles were also expressed in some participants' data, as detailed in Chapter Four, especially concerning imbalanced leadership representation. As noted in Chapter Two, reformed theological commitments consider Pauline writings to be normative, (Brencher, 2002, p. 230), (Balserak, 2016, p. 94), (Jeffery, 2019b, p. 12) and an understanding of the social milieu of antiquity comprises a vital component in comprehending them. The roles of parents, offspring and siblings and their sociological interaction in antiquity shall be considered in this section as all these roles arose in participants' data concerning ecclesial belonging.

Meeks (2003, p. 30) considers the antiquitarian household, noting it comprised 'a vertical but not quite uni-linear chain of connected unequal roles.' It was an authoritarian patriarchal hierarchy, (Garnsey, et al., 2015, p. 160) which differentiated (in Roman tradition) between *familia* and *domus*, in which the former was concerned with descent (especially down the male line), and the latter with co-habitation, (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 40), (Meeks, 2003, p. 30). The *familia* comprised everyone under the authority of the *paterfamilias* including 'spouse, children, son's children, adoptive children, freedmen and slaves,' (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 40).

The *domus* (household) included people from outside the cohabiting group, often relatives and the *paterfamilias'* descendants from both male and female lines, (Aasgaard, 2004, pp. 40-41). *Patria potestas* referred to the *paterfamilias'* 'broad discretion to make decisions for everyone in his *familia*,' (Atkins, 1991, p. 177), (Vial-Dumas, 2014, p. 307). The *paterfamilias* had almost absolute mastery of his family, including all its property, and could even decide whether newborns were exposed (the latter not possible in Jewish culture, however (Garnsey, et al., 2015, p. 161), (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 49), (Saller, 2009, p. 118)). Furthermore, his authorisation for marriages of offspring was absolute and he could distribute inheritance as he wished, (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 49), (Garnsey, et al., 2015, p. 160).[177] He could, in principle, even sentence to death members of the household – *vitae necisque potestas* (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 49), (Garnsey, et al., 2015, p. 160), (Vial-Dumas, 2014, p. 307).[178]

The *paterfamilias* was also responsible for setting cultural values within household, expecting to be obeyed, to ensure 'harmony and agreement among the household members,' (Burke, 2006, p. 81), (see also (Meeks, 2003, p. 30)). The motives and potency underpinning *patria potestas* are disputed. For some historians, its usage and its potential for abuse constituted unbridled power and a father's demise '"signalled the end of a kind of slavery"' for his offspring, (Saller, 2009, p. 103). However, Vuolanto (2016, p. 491) is more circumspect, asserting that *patria potestas* 'was linked to social expectations, balanced by the requirements of *pietas* between children and parents,' (see also (Saller, 2009, pp. 103, 106)), (Garnsey, et al., 2015, p. 161).

As such, there may well have been constraints on despotic abuses of *patria potestas* – both from outside and inside the family. Outside culture may well have frowned upon *paterfamilias* harshness thus potentially restraining his ostensible freedom to enact punishment, (Aasgaard, 2004, pp. 49-50), (Atkins, 1991, p. 177), (Keener, 2005, p. 46), (Fitzmyer, 2008, p. 226), (Saller, 2009, pp. 151-153). As will be seen later in this chapter, some *paterfamilias* norms were imbibed by Paul regarding his own status and influence towards his adherents.

Gendered roles not only applied to parental roles, but also between siblings. In contrast to Western commitments to the primacy of romantic spousal bonds, (Barton, 2005, p. 41) the 'tightest unity of loyalty and affection in the world of the early followers of Jesus was found among brothers and sisters,' (Bartchy, 1999, p. 33).

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[177] With considerable potential for intra-family dissension.

[178] Although this was not practised in Jewish families, (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 49).

Aasgaard (2004, pp. 40-41) posits why, arguing that the low number of siblings and high mortality (noted previously) precipitated a ‘potential for close contact and a stronger sense of belonging between siblings,’ (p. 41).

Antiquitarian sibling bonds were to comprise two principal components: enduring positive affect combined with supportive actions, particularly in adulthood. However, such support was differentiated across male/female distinctions, (p. 63). ‘Brother and sister share the most intense cross-gender relationship’ within antiquity, motivating strong protective instincts from the brother, (Malina, 1993, p. 93). Brothers were to defend sisters (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 23), and protect the ‘name and honour’ of sisters, including summarily dealing with unauthorised male approaches, (Malina, 1993, p. 93) principally because siblings’ names and thus honour were shared (as noted previously), Aasgaard (2004, p. 63).

Conversely, sisters were to reciprocate by demonstrating respect and care for brothers, (Safrai, et al., 1988, p. 770), (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 64), (Golden, 1990, p. 131ff). The relationship was expected to endure well beyond the time a sister left the household to marry, (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 64), and sororal obligations to brothers could possibly override spousal ones, (Aasgaard, 2004, pp. 64-65). The sister/sister relationship is posited to mirror that of the brother/sister, but fewer sources are available to elucidate this, (p. 66).[179]

Instead, the brother/brother relationship is one that garners most attention, (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 67). Functionally, brothers represented the family to outside society, (Malina, 2003, p. 50). They were to protect both the name of the family (its ‘honour’) and its constituents from external disruption whilst maintaining property/wealth within the family, (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 67), (Barton, 2005, p. 25). Obligations were not merely external but internal too. For instance, brothers were responsible for ‘preserving the harmony and cohesion of the family, even carrying legal and financial responsibilities for one another,' (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 67). These duties were to model the ideals of 'fraternal concord,' (p. 67) (see also (deSilva, 2000, pp. 214-218)). Within Jewish tradition, brothers bore even weightier obligations including marrying a diseased brother's bereaved spouse to secure succession and propagate the family name, (Deuteronomy 25:5), (p. 67).

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[179] As noted previously, most sources were written privileging male perspectives.

Greek historian and philosopher Plutarch's work *On Brotherly Love* is often cited as explicating idealisations regarding fraternal bonds in antiquity, (Aasgaard, 2002, p. 521). It is encapsulated in the term φιλαδελφία (*philadelphia*) – sibling love[180] – which embraced both positive mutual affect between siblings and ethical actions, (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 106), (Meeks, 2003, p. 86). DeSilva (2000, p. 214ff) picks up on this asserting Plutarch's insistence that 'love for siblings is the best proof of love for one's parents,' which must be demonstrated in kind actions, the sharing of resources, and the promotion of unity, harmony and concord. Unlike friendship, it constituted an obligatory not a voluntary relationship, (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 106). As will be seen later in this chapter, the primacy of such committed and supportive intersibling relationships were also to shape Pauline ecclesiological norms.

Whilst harmony was idealised within fraternal relations, a major source of dispute was inheritance and property. Rawson (2003, p. 235) notes that the 'freedom enjoyed by Romans to use wills to disperse their property quite widely could cause conflict and resentment within the family,' especially between brothers whose inheritance was passed down the male line from the patriarchal family head, (Malina, 1993, p. 93), (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 91), (Garnsey, et al., 2015, p. 160).

Within Greek families, all sons usually shared equally in the division of the family estate, (Golden, 1990, p. 119), (Saller, 2009, p. 76). However, wills in Roman families could override equal distribution, (Garnsey, et al., 2015, p. 160). Consequently, contentions over inheritance were not uncommon, and were to be resolved ideally within the family, or via a mediator. However, they could disintegrate into legal court disputes. Such external scrutiny invited shameful judgment onto the family because social norms dictated internal familial, not external institutional, resolution, (Aasgaard, 2004, pp. 89, 92), (Rawson, 2003, p. 235), (Golden, 1990, p. 120). Again, Paul would pick up on these social mores and reconfigure them to set out normative behaviours for his adherents.

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[180] Thus, extending beyond solely fraternal to broader sibling bonds.

On Brotherly Love highlighted other general tensions in antiquity including vying for parental affection, competition for honours or office, and differing roles between siblings – some of which were stratified by age, (Golden, 1990, p. 118). Like Paul, Plutarch deployed a corporeal metaphor for familial relationships in which the body parts had different functions and status, (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 100). (Corporeal metaphors featured merely briefly in Chapter Four, and only by Robert (2021) when discussing cohesive serving and unity.) Plutarch asserted that siblings had different gifts, natures and strengths: he believed that such inequality was built in by nature itself, but tempered by the mutual pursuit of harmony, (p. 100).

Plutarch thus categorised siblings according to nature, age, sociability within 'superior' and 'inferior' categorisations, (p. 101), uncritical of innate differences. The superior were encouraged to share 'their benefits, and make use of the special abilities of the inferior siblings,' and unique gifting of another sibling was to be celebrated 'as though it were no less theirs,' (p. 102). Notwithstanding, sibling hierarchy was presumed by virtue of differences in 'natural disposition, age, and social position,' (p. 106).

Siblings were thus socialised to demonstrate emotional loyalty and practical support within a uniquely enduring bond. The influence of these commitments on scholars' view of Pauline familial ecclesiology shall be addressed shortly, especially because mutual affection, practical support and care featured prominently in participants' data and the experience of these could heavily influence their perceptions of belonging. As noted previously, Dudrey (1999, p. 43) asserted that the principal function of antiquitarian family was that of 'survival,' (see also (Barton, 2005, p. 25)) and securing succession was a preoccupation of the patriarchal head. One strategy for ensuring succession was adoption. This will be discussed next because some scholars argue it to constitute a metaphorical 'centerpiece,' unique to Pauline ecclesiology, deployed to unite congregants across ethnoracial, male/female and other distinctions, (Burke, 2006, p. 22), (see also (Atkins, 1991, p. 187), (Scott, 1992, p. 55), (Moo, 2013, p. 267), (Barth, 1974, p. 80), (Garner, 2016, p. 3), (Heim, 2017, p. 230)).

6.5. ADOPTION IN ANTIQUITY

In Chapter Four, participants frequently deployed fictive sibling terminology to describe their belonging to others within the church. These relationships were to precipitate positive mutual affect, and to be disclosive and enduring. Furthermore, mutual care was to be reciprocated within conceptualisations of the church as a fictive siblingship of equal status. Within antiquity, as noted in the preceding section, siblingship was a foundational relationship precipitating profound mutual obligations and affect. Siblingship could occur through common parenting, but it could also be ascribed through adoption, which this section shall consider because it features uniquely within Pauline ecclesiology as a unifying metaphor across multiple distinctions, including male/female and ethnoracial ones.

Adoption was significant in antiquity because it comprised a familial practice that actuated the most profound transformation of individuals' belonging, sociology and loyalty. It thus provided a metaphor rich in parallels to articulate similar changes for those who entered the fictive ecclesial family, many of which were articulated in various forms by this study's participants. In antiquity, adoption signified the transfer of a son 'taken out of one family and placed in another with all its attending privileges and responsibilities,' (Burke, 2006, p. 40). In effect, 'he starts a new life,' Lyall (1969, p. 466), (see also (Best, 1998, p. 125)).[181] This transference is one which redefined relationships and loyalties, legal status as well as the adoptee's entire lifestyle. Within this transformation, the *paterfamilias* assumed control of every aspect of the adoptee: from property/inheritance, his relationships (and dependents), through to the standards by which he should live and be disciplined, (p. 466).

Adoptees were usually young *adult* males, (Rawson, 2003, p. 250), (Scott, 1992, p. 4), (Burke, 2006, p. 40).[182] Adoption's principal purpose was to create a legal heir who would 'take on the family name of his new father, continue the family line, protect and pass on family property,' (Rawson, 2010, p. 616). The survival prospects of adults were higher than for infants, (p. 616) and 'the adopting father could see what he was getting as a son and heir,' (Burke, 2006, p. 66) (citing (Rawson, 1986, p. 12)).[183]

Importantly, the effect of adoption 'was to place the adopted person for all legal purposes in the same position as if he had been a natural child in the *potestas* of the adopter,' (Berger, et al., 2016). Consequently, the rights and privileges of the adoptee (including inheritance and succession) 'were the same as that of a legitimate biological son,' (Burke, 2006, p. 69). Greek forms of adoption mirrored those in Roman practice. Its objectives were almost identical in seeking to 'perpetuate the family line and cultus,' whilst also providing care for the adoptive father in his dotage, (Scott, 1992, p. 4). Similarly, adoptees were almost exclusively male and adults, (p. 4). However, inheritance rights for some adoptees may not have been as extensive as those of 'a son by birth,' (Burke, 2006, p. 58), (Smith, 2012, p. 12). Like Roman adoption, it may have been customary (but not mandatory) to adopt a relative, (p. 11). However, 'the absolute nature of adoption' present in Roman practice was diluted in Greek forms, and the adoptee did not necessarily sever irrevocably all relationships with his previous family, (Burke, 2006, p. 59).

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[181] Male/female sensibilities shall be addressed shortly.

[182] Although Rawson (2010, p. 616) cautions that there were probably occasional (possibly exceptional) cases involving females.

[183] For the three principal types of Roman adoption – adrogatio, adoptio and testamentary, see (Scott, 1992, p. 10), (Dixon, 1992, p. 112), (Aasgaard, 2004, pp. 34, 39), (Rawson, 2010, p. 616).

It is also argued that Greek adoption law was fragmented. A single body of law regarding a unified and consistent system of Greek adoption seems elusive, (Burke, 2006, p. 60), (Lyall, 1969, p. 465). This is significant because it may settle which legal system(s) Paul had in mind regarding adoption. Lyall (1969, pp. 465-466) and Burke (2006, p. 60) are both convinced that Roman praxis provided the foundations for Pauline teachings, not simply because the legal processes were clearer and ubiquitous, but also because Paul was a Roman citizen, legally trained and it held 'paramount jurisdiction over him,' (Lyall, 1969, p. 466) (see also Best (1998, p. 125), (Simpson & Bruce, 1978, p. 125), (Moo, 2013, pp. 267-268)).[184] This shall be considered again shortly.

However, the possibility of Pauline corpus adoption being drawn from a specifically Jewish background is hotly contested, mainly because of Jewish law and adoption practices (see (Bruce, 1982, p. 197), (Barrett, 1962, p. 163), (Atkins, 1991, p. 179)), Scott (1992, p. 75), (Heim, 2017, p. 8)). Burke (2006, pp. 60-61) notes that Paul's *huiothesia* metaphor is deployed solely in letters to communities 'directly under the rule of Roman law (Gal. 4:5; Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Eph. 1:5),' (see also (Atkins, 1991, p. 171)).[185] He also points out that the most frequent mention of *huiothesia* occurs in his epistle to the church in Rome, a church which would have been most acquainted with Roman adoption praxis, (p. 61).

However, whilst Roman law may have underpinned the socio-cultural foundation of the Pauline metaphor, the theological significance of *huiothesia* may not have been wholly circumscribed by Roman praxis. Indeed, it may be embellished by a specifically Jewish theological narrative: the Jewish background underpinning the significance of adoption shall be discussed within the context of Pauline ecclesiology in section 6.7.

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[184] Scott (1992, p. 267) differentiates between *huiothesia* as a term with Hellenistic origins and its *meaning* which may be detached from these.

[185] See section 2.2 regarding contentions concerning the Pauline corpus.

Adoption thus held the potential to reconfigure relations between the adoptee and the adopter. The adoptee entered the family as a sibling acquiring equal status, rights and privileges as natural born sons and other adoptees. It was a rich metaphor upon which some scholars argue that Paul shaped his ecclesiology, uniting adherents across significant ethnoracial boundaries, such as those in this study.

With these familial norms in mind, namely parents, siblings and adoptees from antiquitarian praxis, Pauline applications of these metaphors will be considered next to determine which practices he may have embraced, rejected or transformed within his ecclesiology. To start, the familial metaphors that Paul ascribed to himself and those whom he led will be considered. Those employed between believers themselves and the significance of these will be considered in the subsequent sections.

6.6. FAMILIAL METAPHORS WITHIN PAUL'S DESIGNATION OF HIMSELF AND HIS FOLLOWERS

Participants drew on familial metaphors to describe their own sense of belonging, especially those of spiritual parents and siblings. These were endowed with significance, alluding to the depth of adherence and relationship that participants attached to other congregants. Leaders were also conceptualised as spiritual parents and guides acting as exemplars evincing qualities of Jesus such as authority, approachability, care, prayerfulness and adaptability. This section shall consider the familial metaphors Paul deployed from the source domain of antiquitarian society as he repurposed them to the target domain of the church. Consideration of how Paul conceptualised and applied these metaphors is pressing since reformed theological commitments view these as normative for the contemporary church. As Gorman (2009, p. 163) points out, normativity entails the ecclesial community 'to become the text it reads,' and to embody scriptural norms through 'creative fidelity,' (see also (Cartledge, 2003, p. 49)). How Paul described himself and his followers should thus retain fidelity with contemporary praxis. Paul depicted his leadership to his adherents primarily through familial metaphors. These were principally (but not exclusively) based upon male familial roles, such as father, in which qualities of the antiquitarian *paterfamilias* were imputed to himself. He designated his followers as his fictive offspring.

For example, in 1 Corinthians 4:14-21, Paul uses familial metaphors to defend his own leadership to the Corinthian church in an attempt 'to reestablish his authority over them,' (Fee, 1987b, p. 183). He calls his readers his 'dear children,' (v. 14) before, claiming of himself: 'I became your father through the Gospel,' (v. 15). Fee (1987b, p. 155) considers Paul's address to the Corinthians as children significant. This is partly because the epithet 'disciples' never appears in Paul's letters (Fee, 1987b, p. 182), (see also (Aasgaard, 2004, pp. 309-310)). Instead, familial terminology is used to highlight the distinctive nature of his relationship to his followers. Fee asserts that since Paul spiritually 'gave them birth… he is their *only* father,' (p. 182) which confers on him a unique status to challenge both their attitudes and consequent conduct, (Swindoll, 2017, p. 73) (see also (Fitzmyer, 2008, p. 222), (Morris, 1990, p. 80), (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1992, p. 234)).

Paul's own status draws from the source domain of the antiquitarian *paterfamilias,* which 'gave him a special authority over and responsibility toward them,' (Fee, 1987b, p. 185) permitting him in v. 16 to paint the picture of 'a father who has instructed his children in proper behavior by his own example,' (p. 186), (see also (Wanamaker, 1990, p. 106), (Phillips, 2015, p. 68)). He therefore expects them to imitate him (1 Corinthians 4:16) through compliance to his injunctions, (Perkins, 2012, p. 80), (Bruce, 1971, p. 51).

Whilst he implores the Corinthians as the target domain to imitate him within the source domain of antiquitarian father/child, he concludes that he should and will discipline them. Whilst exemplary fathers in antiquity were expected to be gentle towards offspring (Keener, 2005, p. 46), (Fitzmyer, 2008, p. 226), Paul's ultimate responsibility was to discipline them 'as a father ought,' consistent with the prevailing cultural norms and his role as a paternal authority figure, (Keener, 2005, p. 46) whilst simultaneously embracing *pietas*.

Paul's use of father/child metaphor is not restricted to the Corinthian followers but recurs in 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12a, (Johnson, 2016, p. 60), (Aasgaard, 2004, pp. 290, 292). Paul writes: 'For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God.' As noted earlier, the antiquitarian father was responsible for exemplifying the moral and behavioural standards of his children and subsequently enforcing these. Consequently, Paul is explicating through his own comportment what he intends to inculcate to the Thessalonian church, (Wanamaker, 1990, p. 106), (Johnson, 2016, p. 61).

In Paul's letter to Philemon, which considers the latter's relationship to his fugitive slave Onesimus, Petersen (1985, p. 23) comments that Paul draws richly upon the 'language of kinship and the family,' in a multi-faceted way. Within this, Paul adopts the hierarchical role of the *paterfamilias* over both Philemon and Onesimus, combined with a concomitant expectation of authority over both, but all three simultaneously 'are also equals (brothers) within… the church,' (p. 23). For Petersen, the latter is pre-eminent in that 'the ultimate issue is the identity of believers as sibling children-to-be of God,' (p. 289). Such a conceptualisation opens the possibility that Paul can assume a fraternal role of closeness and intimacy with his apparent adherents, in which he can immerse simultaneously himself in community with them as one of them.

Consequently, as Dawn & Peterson (2000, p. 74) note, in all Paul's letters, there are over forty people mentioned, demonstrating his immersion and dual commitment to fraternal community and paternal authority. The paternal metaphor embodies authority and power, within an asymmetrical hierarchy between himself and his followers, typical of the secular *paterfamilias*. It also encompasses aspects of nurturing, care, closeness and affection, (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 303) whilst equalising the status of all between each other and God.

Notably, Paul's self-ascribed metaphors were not uniquely male, within the sexual stereotypes of antiquity. In 1 Thessalonians 2:7b, he talks of himself as 'feeding and caring' his spiritual children within the metaphor of 'nurse,' which Morris (2009, p. 37) points out is sometimes incorrectly translated 'mother,' (for instance, in the NIV), (see also McNeel (McNeel, 2014, p. 132), (Aasgaard, 2004, pp. 135, 288), (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1992, p. 234)). Wanamaker (1990, p. 101) asserts that this aspect of womanhood was 'viewed in an extremely positive light in antiquity.' Its connotations of nursing children apparently reinforce Paul's 'protective concern for his readers,' as well as showing his preference for gentleness, (p. 101). Paul thus deploys a 'wide variety of metaphors' (including occasional female ones) to convey and illustrate his role and status to his followers, (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 135).

The father/child metaphor was also deployed and extended by Paul from the source domain of antiquitarian family to the target domain of the church through the motif of *huiothesia* (in which the father is God): this would reconfigure and transform adherents' identities, roles and sociality, possibly exceeding those within natural families. Such reconfigured loyalties and closeness were also apparent in participants' data in Chapter Four. *Huiothesia* and Paul's deployment of it in sculpting aspects of his ecclesiology will be discussed next to understand the far-reaching nature of reconfigured sociology that church allegiance could precipitate.

6.7. *HUIOTHESIA*: ITS SIGNIFICANCE TO PAULINE ECCLESIOLOGY AND ENTRY INTO THE CHURCH

As noted earlier in section 6.2, *ὑίοθεσία (huiothesia)* occurs in 'some of the most interesting and crucial passages in Paul (Gal. 4:5; Rom, 8:15, 23; 9:4; Eph. 1:5),' (Scott, 1992, p. xiii), (see also (Burke, 2006, p. 22), (Garner, 2016, p. 3)). Despite its moderate occurrence (just five times), Garner (2016, p. 3) asserts that its Pauline usage 'widely embraces… vast pastoral treasure.' This is partly because, Garner insists, it explicates rich theological threads, embedded in Old Testament promises, enacted within New Testament Christology whilst anticipating eschatological fulfilment, (pp. 3-6). Its metaphorical richness is partly in its deployment to unite congregants across significant socio-cultural divides, including ethnoracial ones. It will be investigated because participants in Chapter Four often conceptualised their mutual belonging in fictive siblingship terms, even straddling such delineations. It is therefore important to understand the background underpinning Pauline adoption metaphors (the source domain from which he was drawing), and how these were expected to reconfigure comportment and status between his adherents within in his target ecclesial domain, (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5), (Aasgaard, 2004, pp. 23-31). Both the New and Old Testament influences which could underpin Paul's metaphorical adoption will be considered next.

Burke (2006, pp. 21-22) argues that *huiothesia* comprises two Greek words: *huios* – son – and *thesis* – placing – and consequently 'etymologically denotes either the process or act of being placed or "adopted as son(s)."' Scott (1992, p. xiv) agrees, further asserting that there can be 'no confusion … in the Hellenistic period *huiothesia* always denotes "adoption as son"' and that any temptation to contract its translation merely to 'sonship' is reductive, (see also (Moo, 2013, p. 267), (Garner, 2016, p. 49)).

Scott (1992, p. 55) notes (from his extensive semantic study) that *huiothesia* is one of the most common terms of adoption in Hellenist Greek, occurring frequently in Greek inscriptions. However, its religious deployment in Paul is 'unparalleled,' (p. 55) and unique to him (see also (Moo, 2013, p. 267), (Burke, 2006, p. 21), (Barth, 1974, p. 80), (Garner, 2016, p. 3), (Heim, 2017, p. 273)). Whilst it refers to terminology and praxis most probably from within the Greco-Roman world, (Dunn, 1993a, p. 217) its use in the OT is 'unknown' (Bruce, 1982, p. 197), (Scott, 1992, pp. 61, 267), (Anderson, 1989, p. 122).[186] However, its absence in the OT canon does not necessarily imply that adoption is irrelevant to Jewish theology and/or praxis.

For example, Bruce (1982, p. 197) (like Scott) identifies Exodus 4:22 as exemplifying a similar concept concerning 'Yahweh's relation to Israel.' Moo (2013, p. 268) agrees, noting that claims in Exodus 4:22 that 'Israel is my firstborn son,' emphasises that the promise for believers to become God's sons 'is deeply rooted in the OT,' (see also (Fee, 1994, p. 403 footnote 129), (Heim, 2017, p. 9)).[187] Adoption thus potentially traces back to a promise over all of Israel. Furthermore, Moo (2013, p. 268) discerns a thread through to Romans 9:4 from Galatians 4:5 in which *huiothesia* is used to depict the status of the people of Israel, (see also (Scott, 1992, p. 268), (Atkins, 1991, p. 173)).[188]

Moo also links Paul's deployment of *huiothesia* in Galatians 4:5 with his statement in 2 Corinthians 6:18: '"I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters."' In asserting that *all* Christians enjoy *huiothesia*, Moo asserts that 'Paul is claiming… that we believers become his adopted children, with all the rights and privileges pertaining to that status,' from antiquity, in which non-Jews have been incorporated into the inheritance of Israel, (p. 268) (see also (deSilva, 2000, pp. 206-207)).[189] Such rights of adoption are fully inclusive since 'Pauline adoption…

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[186] Although Anderson (1989, p. 122) hints at Genesis 15:3 as a possible example of extra-family adoption in which a childless Abram's estate may pass to a household servant in the absence of a biological son.

[187] Moses himself was an adopted son of Pharoah's daughter, Exodus 2:10.

[188] Fee (1994, p. 403) argues that Romans 9:4 clearly demonstrates Paul's understanding of Israel's election 'in terms of "adoption as a son,"' supporting Scott's linkage of 2 Samuel 7:14 and Exodus 4:22 to Pauline corpus adoption metaphors.

[189] Anderson (1989, p. 122) sounds a note of caution, noting 2 Samuel 14a '*may* be an adoption formula but not exclusively linked with adoption as such, since sonship could be established also by covenant (cf. 2 Kgs 16:7) and royal grants,' (my italics).

unambiguously indicates privilege for both male and female,' even though *huiothesia* deploys 'the masculine term huios,' (Garner, 2016, p. 51), (see also (Heim, 2017, pp. 21-22)). This is because the specific selection of son (huios) exposes 'the inviolable, indissoluble filial solidarity of the redeemed with the Redeemer,' in a way which is not reductive to one biological sex, (p. 52).

Significantly, Pauline *huiothesia* comprises both theological and sociological dimensions. Regarding the former, Burke (2006, p. 88) notes that Paul portrays 'God in the role of a supreme Father – the new *paterfamilias* – who exercises sovereign control, authority and power over his household, the church.' God is thus to be obeyed since, as in Roman adoption, he carries ultimate authority for the orderliness and ethical comportment of his adoptive ecclesial family who submit to the '*patria potestas* of its head,' (Dunn, 1993a, p. 217).

As noted earlier, adoptees were well known and carefully selected by their potential adopters. Thus, McGrath (2001, pp. 144-145) reflects that adoption is 'about *being wanted*... [it] celebrates the privilege of invitation,' from a divine father for converts to enter into a spiritually-conceived family. *Huiothesia* thereby reconfigures '*belonging*... to be invited into a loving and caring environment,' McGrath (2001, pp. 144-145). Adoption, whilst a familial metaphor, '*is* Pauline Christianity,' Burke (2006, p. 196) emphatically asserts, transforming its beneficiaries from 'children of disobedience' into sons and daughters made welcome and secure through a common process of initiation and welcome.

Meeks (2003, p. 88) highlights baptism and its link to the metaphor of adoption, in Galatians 3:26-29 and 4:5 (see also (Scott, 1992, pp. 267-268)). He asserts that Paul, when discussing initiation into the Christian household, 'is evidently drawing on baptismal language,' (p. 88), (see also (Campbell, 1992, p. 108), (Barton, 2005, p. 105), (Elliott, 2003, p. 186)). The reason he does so, Moo (2013, p. 251) argues, is that baptism was the 'normal cultivating event in a person's coming to Christ.' As seen in the research in Chapter Four, baptism could be highly significant in reinforcing ecclesial belonging for both neophytes and onlookers.

In addition to a standard rite of incorporation into the ecclesial family, Moo insists that being baptised into Christ activated belonging to Christ and thus 'that which took place in him is valid for his own,' (p. 252). Believers thus enjoy sonship because 'they are incorporated into *the* Son,' through baptism, (p. 252).[190] Highlighting the ubiquity of Pauline baptism, Atkins (1991, p. 174) notes from Galatians 3:26-29 'Symbolic action in baptism is personalized – by faith – [whose goal]… is group oriented – incorporation into the body.' Thus, the purpose of baptism constitutes incorporation and identification simultaneously with Christ and the Church. Its function is integrative to a new community of believers, as well as to Christ, thereby reinforcing 'group integrity and solidarity,' (deSilva, 2000, p. 207).

Furthermore, baptism elicits an ecstatic and confirmatory response of the believer's new identity, 'Abba, father!' (Galatians 4:6, cf Romans 8:15), a cry 'of some intensity… with the overtones of emotional depth and sincerity,' (Dunn, 1993a, p. 221). Meeks (2003, p. 88) concludes that this exclamation 'is at the same time a sign of the *gift* of the Spirit and of the "*sonship*" (hyiothesia) that the Spirit conveys by incorporating the person into the one Son of God,' (my italics). The combined witness of the Spirit and the initiate confirm the adoption by the Father and the connection to the Son. Moo (2013, p. 269) insists that Paul's intention in Galatians 4:6 is to 'associate the status of sonship with the gift of the Spirit,' thereby ensuring that *huiothesia* is ultimately a trinitarian phenomenon: adoption by the Father, into the Son, with verbal confirmation inspired by the Spirit.[191]

Burke (2006, p. 74) (like McGrath noted earlier) concludes that adoption 'is about *belonging*, a *belonging* where God as "Father" occupies centre stage in his "family",'

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[190] See also Campbell (1992, p. 108) who underlines baptism's eschatological significance.

[191] See (Barrett, 1962, p. 164), (Bruce, 1982, p. 198), (Witherington & Ice, 2002, p. 25) for discussions on the optimal translation of 'Abba.' Notably, Kaesemann (1980, p. 228) strongly disputes the 'common assumption that the opening phrase of the Lord's Prayer is being quoted.'

(p. 74) (my italics). The utterance of 'Abba' thus expresses the commonality of adoption across all distinctions: male/female, socio-economic and ethnoracial. Common experiences of the divine, expressed through pneumatologically-inspired language, thus confirm reconfigured belonging. Consequently, this entry into a new family of human siblings initiates a 'resocialization of conversion,' (Meeks, 2003, p. 88). This resocialisation is fundamental because 'the natural kinship structure into which the person has been born… is here supplanted by a new set of relationships,' (p. 88). The new spiritual family can therefore assume precedence over the biological family, strongly overlapping with Greco-Roman praxis which severed ties with the adoptee's previous familial line, as discussed earlier.

Furthermore, this radical reconfiguration of kinship overlaps with Jesus' definition of who constituted his fictive family in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 12:46-50, Mark 3:31-35, Luke 8:19-21). When he explains who his mother and brothers are, he points to his disciples, explaining, '"Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does this will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother,"' Matthew 12:49b-50. Healey (2008, p. 80) argues that the supremacy of spiritual siblings predominates because Jesus' disciples are not merely followers, 'they are his *family*.'

This again appears consistent with antiquitarian adoption praxis in which the adoptee's adoptive family would displace ties to natural family.[192] For Jesus, it appears that the spiritual family assumes higher priority than the biological because the new relationship to a divine Father determines superior allegiance to the former. However, 'Jesus is not saying that earthly familial ties are unimportant, only that they are not all-important,' (Morris, 1995, p. 332), (see also (Elliott, 2002, p. 79), (Keener, 2009, p. 370), (Hendriksen, 1976, p. 542), (Morris, 1995, p. 330) and then (Fodet,

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[192] See Nolland (2005, p. 519), (Healey, 2008, p. 80) and Fodet (1870, p. 378) for discussions over Jesus' maternal metaphor.

1870, p. 378) on Luke 18:19-21 and (Healey, 2008, p. 80) on Mark 3:31-35 for similar conclusions regarding primacy of believers' fictive siblingship).

Barclay (1975, pp. 82-83) considers the implications of Jesus's saying in Mark 3:31-35, and especially that Jesus' cohort was a 'very mixed group,' both socio-economically and politically. However, they were 'bound together' through a common relationship with Jesus. He posits that Christians can be 'really nearer to someone who is no blood relation' through profound common *experiences* typifying blood siblingship. Such experiences include not only those of Jesus and his forgiveness, but importantly of Jesus *together with others* in which adherents journey and 'weep together' through adversity and joy, (p. 82).

What is significant from Jesus' declaration in Matthew 12:49b-50 is the lack of mention of 'father' in his list, (see Healey (2008, p. 80), (Edwards, 2002, p. 124), (Fodet, 1870, p. 378). Later, in Matthew 23:9, Jesus declares to his disciples and the crowd, 'do not call anyone on earth "father," for you have one Father.' Schüssler Fiorenza (1992, p. 147) then boldly states from this that the ecclesial family thus 'has no room for "fathers"… it implicitly rejects their power and status… in the new messianic community all patriarchal structures are abolished,' (p. 147).

However, Paul's self-designation as spiritual father to his fictive spiritual children has been noted previously, rendering the argument complex. Nonetheless, Schüssler Fiorenza raises a highly significant and potentially even more contentious aspect of ecclesiology: that of ecclesial fictive siblings' interactions across male/female boundaries. These will be considered next through scholars' view of aspects of Pauline ecclesiology because it was a theme of potential disquiet, especially concerning leadership representation, that arose in the participant data.

6.8. HIERARCHY AND MALE/FEMALE ROLES WITHIN THE PAULINE COMMUNITY

As noted previously, the household and family in antiquity constituted 'an authoritarian patriarchal hierarchy,' (Garnsey, et al., 2015, p. 160) in which Paul spoke of his followers as one another's mutual siblings.[193] He described himself within a variety of gendered metaphors (as noted earlier): father, brother, and nurse/mother. Such gendered language inevitably raises the 'pressing issue of equality versus hierarchy,' (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 20) and its effect on roles within the ecclesial family.

What is significant is how the early church was exhorted by Paul to interrelate, especially in terms of male/female interactions, and how these would overlap or diverge from the prevailing socio-cultural context. Of course, this is a 'minefield' which touches on profound contemporary sensibilities, (deSilva, 2000, p. 229), especially so for a male author embedded in Newfrontiers, a movement that, from its outset, has advocated uniquely male leadership in certain positions, such as apostleship and eldership, (see (Kay, 2007, p. 266), (Briers, 1992, p. 10), (Walker, 1998, p. 247)), buttressed by recourse to its interpretation of Pauline ecclesiasticism, (see, for example, (Tomczak, 1992, p. 30), (Virgo, 2007, pp. 236-237), (Grudem, 2004, pp. 11, 46)).[194]

As Jeffery (2019a, p. 97) notes, Newfrontiers' ecclesiology asserts that, 'whilst ultimately equal in God's eyes, men and women were created with different but complementary functions,' under the concept of 'male headship.' In this, ecclesial leadership is to replicate normative hierarchical familial structures found in antiquity. As noted in Chapters One and Four, this is an area of existential contention within the wider Newfrontiers movement and in participant data respectively. How biblical norms are interpreted and applied are central to the development of subsequent ecclesial praxis and some main contentions around this will be discussed in this section.

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[193] See section 6.4.

[194] As well as what is considered Jesus' normative example of appointing twelve exclusively male apostles despite women being part of the itinerant apostolic cohort, Luke 8:2-3, (Virgo, 2007, p. 235).

Two polarised views clash within the consideration of male and female ecclesiology. The complementarian one espoused by founders of Newfrontiers, and an alternative egalitarian one. This latter insists on the eradication of such gender-based differentiations, critical of the other perspective's 'anachronistic proof-texting,' founded upon positivist commitments to assessing the gospels as 'an accurate description of the events and agents in early Christian beginnings,' (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1993, pp. 105, 106). This section aims to articulate some key points from the two sides of this debate, but it is not an attempt either to resolve them or settle on one side, nor to be exhaustive (space does not permit this, and the issue was foregrounded specifically just once by a younger participant). She was clear that she was unable to justify a feminine position using biblical sources. Also, as noted in Chapter One, this is an on-going discussion within some of the Newfrontiers spheres, and one which will require considerable sensitivity to navigate. However, it will be specifically addressed in Chapter Eight concerning ministerial outcomes.

Barton (2005, p. 89) highlights why this analysis is incendiary: that feminist scholars ascribe the foundations of 'women's oppression in church and society today to the patriarchization of authority in the early church.' Consequently, both sides need to be heard, partly because divergent views currently co-exist in Restorationist churches like the author's. Discontent with current male/female societal delineations is traced back to praxis and attitudes propagated by the early church founders. Such alleged hegemony is challenged, Barton notes, by feminist identification of 'egalitarian strands… of women's liberation,' within the New Testament, (p. 89). Consequently, within the fight for liberation, feminist biblical interpretation must 'explore whether and how the Bible can become a resource in this struggle,' (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1985, p. 129) (cited in (Barton, 2005, p. 89), see also (Graham, 1996, p. 197)). Within this paradigm, the bible is essentially a contingent resource in which the scriptural authority of texts is dependent upon their alignment with a superordinate and contemporarily framed female liberative narrative, (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 307).

Schüssler Fiorenza (1992, pp. 108-9) notes that historical experience in Jewish and Christian literature derives from principally male texts and sources.[195] Furthermore, Schüssler Fiorenza herself states it is not possible to determine the degree to which codified patriarchal practices were consistently *lived* out in the 'actual interaction and relationship of men and women,' (p. 108). This objection will be revisited shortly.

Notwithstanding, Schüssler Fiorenza discerns egalitarian strands in the Gospel accounts in multiple ways: for instance, in the role of apostleship and the superior loyalty demonstrated by Jesus' female followers, Jesus' parables and allusion to women therein in which she insists that Jesus subverted prevailing patriarchal norms, and in his purported simultaneous commitment to the eradication of patriarchy and poverty. Considering the first of these, Schüssler Fiorenza challenges traditional notions of apostleship as uniquely male, questioning the textual evidence 'for the assumption that biological maleness and masculine gender were intrinsic to the apostolic office,' (p. 107). She rejects the latter asserting that, if apostleship is the performative succession of Christ, 'it is not their maleness but their preaching, exorcising, and healing power that continue Jesus' mission,' which she insists could equally be discharged by women, (p. 112).

In fact, she concludes that, whilst the twelve with Jesus in Gethsemane all desert him in his suffering (Mark 14:50), his female disciples 'remained faithful to the end… [and] are the *functional* successors of Jesus,' continuing his apostolic mission and ministry, (p. 113) (my italics). Such an apostolic calling, she insists, engages both 'men and women in the struggle for the transformation of the patriarchal church into the discipleship community of equals,' (p. 116). Indeed, Schüssler Fiorenza (2021, p. 125) is critical of a default andro-kyriocentric interpretation of Romans 16:7 which imposes a uniquely male translation. She insists that even '*Patristic* exegesis understood the Greek accusative *Junian* as the name of a *woman*. Andronicus and Junia were an influential missionary team who were acknowledged as apostles,' thereby undermining male-only apostolic normativity, (p. 125) (see also (deSilva, 2022, p. 207)).[196]

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[195] As noted earlier in this chapter.

A second line of argument is that the Gospel parables exhibit inclusiveness of women in Jesus' community, in stark contrast to the contemporaneous socio-cultural milieu. The inclusiveness of God for all sinners, male and female, 'is spelled out again and again in the parables,' (p. 131). For example, in the parable of the creditor embedded within Luke 7:36-50, the reason Jesus cites for the profundity of the love of the sinful woman is specifically because of her deeply transgressive history. Schüssler Fiorenza interprets Jesus' 'inclusive grace and goodness,' (p. 131) in his reactions towards the woman as exemplifying his open invitation to inclusive table community towards 'not only women but even notorious and well-known sinners,' (p. 129).

Furthermore, when in Matthew 20:1-16 Jesus tells the parable of the labourers in the vineyard, identical remuneration is given to all workers irrespective of their length of service. Even though in the latter there is no mention of women (v. 1 cites men as those to be hired, and the last labourers are specifically cited as male, v. 12), Schüssler Fiorenza interprets this as Jesus' commitment to 'establish equality among all of us, righteous and sinner, rich and poor, men and women,' (p. 132). The parables are interpreted as robustly evincing an equalisation of social interaction and status through common table fellowship, and a redistribution of social and material capital. This is a consequence, Schüssler Fiorenza insists, of the erasure of male/female hierarchy within Jesus' 'discipleship of equals,' (p. 135), (see also (Elliott, 2002, p. 173), (Corley, 2002, pp. 1, 7)).

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[196] Newfrontiers apostle Devenish (2011, loc. 5051ff) counters by asserting 'there is a lack of clarity as to whether Junia was a man or a woman,' and second whether the translation of his/her 'being "outstanding among the apostles"' could equally be translated as '"greatly esteemed among the apostles,"' with the latter indicating that Junias did not hold an apostolic role at all, rendering the argument moot.

The redistribution of the social and material capital is rooted, Schüssler Fiorenza argues, in Jesus' inextricable dual concern for the poor and the deconstruction of patriarchy. These are effectively 'two sides of the same coin,' (p. 140) because 'the majority of the poor and starving were women,' (p. 141) who were unable to access wealth within the patriarchal system.[197] Furthermore, in terms of Jesus' declaration of who constituted his spiritual family (noted earlier and referring to Matthew 12:46-50, Mark 3:31-35, Luke 8:19-21), Schüssler Fiorenza concludes that the new discipleship community 'abolishes the claims of the patriarchal family… [and] does not include fathers in its circle,' (p. 147). That Jesus makes no room for fathers, Schüssler Fiorenza insists, is because he is implicitly rejecting their power and status within a renewed community stripped of all patriarchal structure.[198] In fact, Steffi (2021), (2022), the participant who raised concerns over male/female leadership representation, appeared to conceptualise the church as a 'discipleship of equals' in which all siblings should be afforded equal rights to lead (see Chapter Four).

However, Schüssler Fiorenza (1992, p. 236) asserts that Jesus' egalitarian paradigm was to be disrupted by Pauline ecclesiasticism in which his 'figurative characterization of his apostleship as fatherhood' ushered in a reintroduction of patriarchal values and sexual differentiation, contrary to Jesus' praxis. Borg (1987, pp. 133-135) also draws on Luke 7:36-50, as well as the itinerant group of women who supported Jesus financially (such as Joanna and Susanna, Luke 8:3) and insists that these demonstrate commitment to a radical egalitarianism. However, he asserts that historical evidence clearly shows Jesus' rejection of patriarchy was subsequently overturned within Pauline ecclesiology, 'representing a "fall" from the radicalism of the early movement,' even though Paul's initial praxis aligned with Jesus' (expressed, he argues, in Galatians 3:28), (p. 135), (see also (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1992, p. 235)). This fall is a crucial development for Borg because it validates grievous subordination of women in today's Church, (p. 135).

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[197] Although this may be contested by classicist/historian Saller (2009, p. 131) who asserts that, in antiquity, 'mothers… had a remarkable potential for financial independence.'

[198] See also Crossan (1991, pp. 261-264) who, like Schüssler Fiorenza, argues from Jesus' parables and praxis for open commensality negating 'distinctions between female and male, poor and rich, Gentile and Jew,' within a renewed egalitarian community, (p. 263).

However, the views of Borg, Crossan and Schüssler Fiorenza are strongly contested. Indeed, the counterarguments align closely with established Newfrontiers' ecclesiasticism outlined in Chapter One. For example, Corley (2002, p. 1) conversely concludes that Jesus' establishment of 'anti-patriarchal movement or a "discipleship of equals" is a myth posited to buttress modern Christian social engineering,' interpreting the egalitarian agenda as principally politically- rather than theologically-justified, (p. 7) (see also (Plaskow, 1980, p. 11)). Her objections are manifold. First, she takes issue with the argument that Jesus' praxis towards Jewish women was socially counter-cultural. This is because she considers the subjugation of women in antiquitarian Judaism may be overstated.

She asserts that the universally negative characterisation of Jewish women in which they hold 'no rights in inheritance, marriage, or divorce... were not allowed to serve meals or eat with men, and were unduly burdened by restrictive purity regulations,' is overblown, (p. 9). She posits that non-Jewish women acquired increased rights in inheritance, divorce, and education during the Roman period, (see also (Milnor, 2012, p. 815), (Saller, 2009, p. 131)). Schüssler Fiorenza (1992, p. 101) herself homogenises the experience of women across antiquity noting that 'the cultural horizon of Palestinian Judaism was Roman Hellenism.' Corley (2002, pp. 20-21) agrees, arguing that Jewish women's lives were 'similar to those of their Gentile counterparts... Jewish families were indistinguishable from other Greco-Roman families insofar as their basic relationships were concerned,' as were their rights.

The depiction of Jewish women's rights in antiquity as deleterious is thus problematic, and even Schüssler Fiorenza herself concedes this. She notes, citing Jewish feminist Judith Plaskow, that 'despite the evidence that [Jesus] in no way reinforced patriarchy, there's also no evidence that he did anything radical to overthrow it,' and especially the status of women within it, (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1992, p. 106).[199] Plaskow concludes that only when 'Christian feminists have deepened their understanding of Judaism can they honestly evaluate the uniqueness or non-uniqueness of Jesus' attitudes towards women,' (p. 11). Corley (2002, p. 21) expands this theme, asserting that little evidence exists to support the notion that Jewish women were especially segregated from men in antiquity. She argues that the intermingling of men with women was commonplace and not culturally proscribed, especially in the context of the broader Greco-Roman Mediterranean world, including their 'common presence at gender-inclusive meals,' (p. 144).

Females' absence in Jesus' gatherings would therefore, according to Corley, have been surprisingly *counter*-cultural to antiquitarian Jewish practice. Common table fellowship, seen from this perspective, was 'not unique, and certainly not revolutionary,' (p. 144). Indeed, Jesus' inclusivity reflected typical 'Greco-Roman rather than Hebraic roots,' (p. 145). Consequently, Corley argues, the inclusion of women in Jesus' retinue was not the radical departure Schüssler Fiorenza asserts, (p. 53).

In terms of Schüssler Fiorenza's use of parables as evincing Jesus' egalitarian vision, Corley counters with the observation that only five parables considered authentic in the Synoptic Gospels deploy images of women,[200] and only four of these include actions attributed to women, (pp. 55-59). She concludes that none of these parables 'substantiate modern feminist claims for Jesus,' partly because they do not focus explicitly on 'the acceptance of women *as women* into the kingdom,' (my italics) but instead attribute them to a wider class of outcasts (including women) who are welcomed as children into Jesus' community, (p. 59). This is especially the case in the Parable of the Feast (Luke 14:16-24 and Matthew 22:1-14). Schüssler Fiorenza (1992, p. 121) considers this 'jolts' its hearers into recognition of the universality of Jesus' *basilea* which embraces all – '[w]omen as well as men.' However, Corley is circumspect. She sees the parable as principally a challenge to rank and class, and that it does not 'hinge on the issue of gender,' (p. 60). The application of this parable to the inclusion of women, for Corley (2002, p. 60), is therefore at best secondary.

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[199] See Plaskow (1980, p. 11) for her counterarguments regarding Jewish praxis.

[200] The Leaven: Matt 13:33/Luke 13:20-21, the Lost Coin: Luke 15:8-9, the Unjust Judge: Luke 18:2-8 and the Prodigal Son. Corley also includes the non-canonical Empty Jar (Thomas 97).

Additionally, Corley notes that whilst his teaching promotes a 'clear awareness of poverty and a critique of class inequality in ancient Palestine, it does not show an equivalent critique of patriarchy, nor a similar interest in gender concerns,' (p. 53). For Corley, Schüssler Fiorenza's conflation may thus be overstated. Corley concedes that, whilst aspects of his teachings and praxis prescribe elements of egalitarianism, it is difficult to detect the *explicit* dismantling of patriarchy, 'nor was it aimed at a clear social program geared towards major social change for women,' (p. 53). For Corley, the 'discipleship of equals' promoted by Schüssler Fiorenza appears possibly illusory, especially since 'probably only a few women were members of the predominantly male group,' (p. 143). This aligns closely with Newfrontiers' founder Virgo's (2007, pp. 234-5) convictions (noted in Chapter One) that Jesus appeared to treat men and women differently, even in the mixed cohort cited in Luke 8. He asserts that women's 'role in the group was different from that of the men who were being trained for apostleship,' for which he insists the women were not, (p. 235).

Like Corley, Elliott (2003) is critical of Schüssler Fiorenza's, Borg's and Crossan's insistence on Jesus' establishment of a 'discipleship of equals' and the Pauline corruption thereafter. In particular, he objects to the use of Galatians 3:28 as evidence of the egalitarianism of the pre-Pauline Jesus movement. He notes that the text 'says nothing *explicit* about equality,' (p. 178) because Greek terms for 'equal' or 'equality' (*isos, -a, -on*, *isotês*) are not deployed. Paul's statement does not embrace being '"equal" in Christ, but of being "one" in Christ,' because the Greek word used is not *isos* (equal) but *heis* (one). The intention of Galatians 3:28, therefore, (and especially pertinent to this study) is a declaration that 'ethnic, social, and gender distinctions conventionally made in society are irrelevant for determining who is "in Christ,"' resulting from the universal practice of baptism, (p. 180). The existential differences of ethnicity, male/female and social status are 'not eliminated,' but immaterial to inclusion in the Jesus community, (p. 181) (citing (Martyn, 1997, pp. 378-383), see also (Witherington, 2004, p. 278), (Grudem, 2004, p. 11)).

Whilst Elliott detects a possible allusion in Galatians 3:28 of an eschatological utopian vision, he discerns 'no actuality of social freedom,' within the communities themselves, (p. 185). This is substantive for Elliott (2002, p. 77) asserting that there is a failure for Schüssler Fiorenza and Crossan to demonstrate that their assertions of equality were actually 'translated into social realities.' Aasgaard (2004, p. 13) agrees, noting that Schüssler Fiorenza 'does not adduce any socio-historical material of significance to support her views,' thus undermining the assertion of a pristine pre-Pauline egalitarianism instituted by Jesus. Aasgaard (2004, p. 307) summarises his socio-historical study by asserting that 'an idea of sibling equality appears as a modern construct, which is not grounded in the classical sources' pertinent to antiquitarian practice.

Two scholarly positions thus exist with divergent and irreconcilable perspectives on male/female ecclesiology: the promotion of egalitarian ideals within a conception of a 'discipleship of equals,' and another which embraces differentiation across gender boundaries, which Newfrontiers has hitherto embraced and whose influences shape current participants' responses in this study like Steffi (2021) and Mia (2021) (see Chapter Four). Within this debate, Bartchy (1999, p. 68) asserts 'Paul's goal was not the creation of an egalitarian community in the political sense, but a well-functioning family in the kinship sense.' Within such kinship, the Pauline corpus prescribes siblingship norms to inform and shape his praxis. Fictive siblingship was a key motif that emerged in participants' data, and some scholars' views of this within aspects of Pauline ecclesiology shall be discussed next.

6.9. ECCLESIAL SIBLINGSHIP IN THE PAULINE CORPUS

Participants frequently deployed familial and specifically sibling terms in Chapter Four to describe their closeness, affection, mutual support and care for fellow congregants. For instance, Isah (2021) spoke of his 'brother from another nation, or my sister from somewhere else' in describing the closeness of the small group cohort he led with his wife. What Isah seemed to be emphasising was that conceptualisations of siblingship could unite congregants from widely different ethnoracial cultures and across male/female distinctions.

Returning to the New Testament, Aasgaard (2004, p. 309) asserts that siblingship is the metaphor deployed most frequently in Paul's speaking of his co-Christians and 'almost his only way of addressing them directly,' (see also (Meeks, 2003, pp. 86-87)). The sibling motif comprises 'about ninety per cent of his total use of address,' (p. 262), (see also (Bartchy, 1999, p. 70) and (Bartchy, 2001, p. 18)).[201] Thus, Aasgaard concludes that siblingship was most likely the metaphor that best described Paul's understanding of 'what a Christian community should be like (ecclesiology),' whilst not being used exclusively, (p. 312), (see also (Bartchy, 2001, p. 18)). The application of scriptural norms to contemporary contexts to critique and refine praxis necessitates consideration of how scholars view Paul's deployment of the sibling metaphor, and how these may have shaped his normative ecclesiology.

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[201] As noted earlier in this chapter.

As noted earlier in this chapter, sibling relationships constituted possibly the tightest interrelational unit in antiquity, exceeding even friendships and spousal bonds, (Bartchy, 1999, p. 68). Siblings were socialised to show strong commitment, unity, loyalty and mutual affection within the concept of φιλαδελφία (*philadelphia*)*,* a word commonly applied in the Greco-Roman world for 'love between actual siblings,' (Fee, 2009, p. 159).[202] Brothers were expected to protect the honour of the family through virtuous comportment undergirded by the conviction that honour was scarce, triggering inter-family competition (see section 6.3).

As noted in section 6.4, disputes over inheritance rights, when they spilled over into arbitration by external authorities such as the courts, were shameful. Siblings were expected to obey the *paterfamilias* who had authority in nearly all matters of family conduct. The success and gifting of other (possibly stronger) siblings were to be imputed to all siblings as their own. The reputation of the family, and its honour, were dependent upon obvious expressions of *philadelphia*.

However, when Paul portrays Christian relations within a sibling metaphor, it is important to distinguish between what he is principally referring to as normative – the external socio-cultural context, or an internal Christian reference point within his own distinctive ecclesiological praxis, (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 20). Aasgaard settles on the former as taking precedence, (see also (Bartchy, 2001, p. 18)). He concludes that Paul's ecclesiological ethic is a sibling one built on antiquitarian 'ideals, expectations, duties and rights associated with that role,' (Aasgaard, 2002, p. 530) (see also (Bartchy, 1999, p. 70)). Aasgaard (2004, p. 306) argues that such a paradigm constructed a robust 'sense of identity and belonging' but with certain modifications to its external milieu (principally around honour), to be discussed shortly.

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[202] See (Wanamaker, 1990, p. 160) who notes that in Greek and Jewish writings (with the possible exception of 2 Maccabees 15:14) φιλαδελφία comprises 'love for blood brothers and sisters'.

Aasgaard (2004, p. 139) notes from Romans 8 – and 8:29 in particular[203] – that Christ as 'firstborn' is significant, mirroring the role of the antiquitarian firstborn son. Jesus is portrayed by Paul as a 'model son, worthy of honour in the same way as a firstborn in the ancient family,' to be respected by virtue of his status and to be imitated thereby, (p. 145). This idealisation is consistent, Aasgaard notes, with depictions of firstborns within ancient sources such as *4 Maccabees* and Plutarch, (p. 150), (latter noted previously in this chapter). For Aasgaard, Christ as firstborn constitutes a convergence of two axes: eschatological and Christological, (p. 149). In the former, Christians are siblings sharing in an eschatological state of living through their adoption as sons. In the second, Christ and his followers are identified jointly as heirs of God with Christians following the example of the honoured older son, (p. 149).

This injunction to imitate Christ entails ethical implications, therefore. Burke (2006, p. 171) points out that *huiothesia* in Romans 8 and 9 has harmony at its core as it embraces and unites Christian siblings from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds (as noted in Isah's (2021) comments above). Aasgaard (2004, p. 307) agrees, highlighting the emotional component of siblingship and the expectation of positive mutual affect, concluding that Paul's intention was to 'further unity amidst diversity… concord should be preserved and differences mitigated,' as would be expected within an antiquitarian conception of *philadelphia*, (see also (deSilva, 2000, p. 218)).

As also noted earlier, Plutarch's conception of family embraced hierarchy across multiple facets, including age, disposition, gifting. Like Paul, he deployed a corporeal metaphor to illuminate this, (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 100). The distinctive parts in the body held different functions and associated status, bound by a sibling motif that ensured that superior gifting or role of other siblings, for instance, be celebrated 'as though it were no less theirs,' (p. 102). Although siblings have 'been made unequal… as though of set purpose' Plutarch's conception of *philadelphia* ensured that 'mutual responsibility' promoted concord within immutable diversity, (p. 102).

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[203] Romans 8:29: For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Fee (2009, p. 584) argues that Paul similarly explicates concord within diversity (of gifts, serving and works) in 1 Corinthians 12:1-31 again employing a corporeal metaphor, (Fee, 2009, p. 584) in which difference 'is God's design,' and with an intentional purpose, (p. 611). Every member is in the body 'by divine placement,' (p. 611) each with a distinctive role. Diversity of function and gift thus appears foundational and held together through a principle of sibling unity and mutual concord.

Aasgaard (2004, p. 307) concludes from his study of the Pauline corpus and contemporaneous secular sources (such as Plutarch) that 'neither Paul nor the other sources appear to stress ideas of equality.' However, he notes that within Pauline conceptions of siblingship (as in Plutarch), 'varying degrees of strength or weakness, appear to be viewed as given and acceptable,' (p. 307). His conclusion is that hierarchy was 'inherent in the sibling relationship,' a conclusion provocatively at odds with much contemporary scholarship, (p. 307).[204]

Hierarchical delineations are especially apparent in 1 Corinthians 12:22-24 in which some members of the church family appear weaker than others. Consistent with his injunctions in Romans 12:10, mutual honouring is exhorted, v. 24b. Bartchy (1999, p. 73) concludes that Pauline ecclesiology resocialised its members to abandon prior social status in favour of universal respect for all fictive siblings. Within such transformative ecclesiology, Paul instead assessed the 'strength of the "strong" by their capacities and willingness to empower the "weak,"' (Bartchy, 1999, p. 73), (see also (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 216)).

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[204] See previous section.

Aasgaard (2004, p. 178) points out, the weak/strong dichotomy appears also in Romans 14:1-15, 21 and 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1, which demonstrate 'clear and extensive' parallels, (Moo, 1996, p. 828). However, such distinctions are significant in that they most likely straddle pre-existing interethnic tensions. Paul thus appears to dispense with such divisive delineations by appealing to both corporeal metaphors *and* familial ones, the latter within his conception of *huiothesia* which conferred common sibling soteriological status.

Whilst it is argued that conceptions of siblingship may possibly align with the prevalent antiquitarian norms over hierarchical commitments, modification of prevailing social norms centred around conceptions of honour. As noted in section 6.3, honour was scarce and to fought over between families. However, within intrafamily interactions, brothers were socialised to 'give honor freely to all their siblings and to refrain from responding in kind to an honor challenge from any member of their family,' (Bartchy, 1999, p. 68). This 'standard cultural norm,' (Sherwood, 2020, p. 437) is revitalised by encouraging ecclesial fictive siblings to treat one another as blood kins but 'more so – specifically to seek to outdo each other in showing honor to each other (see, e.g., Philippians 2:3-4 and Romans 12:10),' (Bartchy, 1999, p. 69) (see also (Moo, 1996, p. 777)).

The constant expression of honour, and acknowledgement of its infinite pneumatological supply, Aasgaard (2004, pp. 159, 165)[205] argues, reconfigures intrafamily ethics in which honesty, self-disclosure and generosity could be expressed at an intensity and prevalence previously impossible. This is because, in Romans 12:13,[206] Paul expands the notion from Romans 12:10 of reciprocated honour embedded within *philadelphia*, (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 177) to the fictive siblingship's sharing with others in need. Consequently, the church as fictive family could live ‘in relations of mutual trust, practicing truth-telling and generalized reciprocity, sharing life and goods with each other, and not keeping score,’ (Bartchy, 1999, p. 70). Thus, Paul’s injunction appears to move beyond merely relational, affective fellowship but instead to internal activism to meet mutual needs. These, Moo (1996, p. 779) insists, are ‘material ones: food, clothing, and shelter,’ (see also Sherwood (2020, p. 438)). Satisfying such needs ‘would clearly form part of Paul’s notions about siblingship,’ (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 176) (see also (Wanamaker, 1990, p. 162)). What was notable in the research was a presumption that those in need, like Alice (2021) who was unexpectedly rushed into hospital and thus ‘weak’ (even if temporarily), would be supported by stronger others; it was aversive when such support was absent or withheld (see Chapter Four).

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[205] Constituting 'an interior force' (p. 160) motivating practical expressions of *philadelphia* through the 'activity of the Spirit,' (p. 165).

[206] Share with God's people who are in need. Practise hospitality.

Much of Romans focuses on honour *internal* to the fictive family, manifesting in affective closeness, care and reciprocated material support. Aasgaard (2004, p. 177) argues that 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 expands Paul’s concern regarding *philadelphia*,[207] to the manifestation of honour to the perception of *outsiders*. As noted in participants’ responses, outreach and social action in front of unbelievers were key components in reinforcing participants’ sense of belonging, especially when harmoniously performed.

Like Aasgaard, Fee (2009, p. 163) highlights that Paul’s concern for the comportment of the fictive siblingship is twofold: it should be ‘“fitting” as believers,’ (consistent with Romans 12), but also not ‘inappropriate as far as “outsiders” are concerned,’ in which the latter should be able to discern consistency between the Pauline communities’ actual familial comportment and prevailing antiquitarian norms.

Thus, when Thessalonian believers’ attitudes chafe against antiquitarian norms regarding work, it had implications for ‘those outside the community as well,’

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[207] The earliest New Testament mention of *philadelphia*, (Fee, 2009, p. 159).

(Holmes, 1998, p. 135), effectively neutering the missional effectiveness of the church's witness, (Fee, 2009, p. 163): *philadelphia* properly expressed proscribed able-siblings' inequitable disengagement. Paul, therefore, exhorts the 'disruptive-idle' to contribute fruitfully to the whole ecclesial community, (Fee, 2009, p. 163) (see also (Wanamaker, 1990, p. 164), (Holmes, 1998, p. 139)) to present the gospel honourably to outsiders consistent with antiquitarian siblingship obligations to mutual and honourable support, (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 166).[208]

Such criticisms were not restricted to the Thessalonians. A further example is cited by Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 in which believers were executing lawsuits against one another before civil magistrates, (Fee, 1987b, p. 228). Paul's outrage at such litigation is once again motivated by antiquitarian norms in which sibling unity to onlooking outsiders was *de rigueur* and external lawsuits shameful, (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 68). The litigious believers thus demonstrated to unbelievers that they 'no longer regarded each other as part of the same family,' (Bartchy, 2004, p. 36) thereby bringing shame upon it, (Fee, 1987b, p. 229) (see also (deSilva, 2000, p. 219)).

In summary, *huiothesia* appears to precipitate common siblingship in which *philadelphia* is to be expressed, reflecting antiquitarian notions of love for siblings emphasising positive mutual affect. Harmony between siblings was expected, mitigating differences between fictive siblings, be those differences ethnic, racial cultural, dispositional, status or within their gifting. Honour between fictive siblings was promoted to overcome any sense of competition between believers: success of one adherent was to be adopted as honouring the whole ecclesial family. This in turn transformed intersibling ethics in which honesty, self-disclosure and serving of others' material needs could be undertaken with pneumatologically-inspired generosity. Both exploitation of other siblings' generosity (by remaining idle, for example), and litigation against fictive siblings, were proscribed as they not only weakened the family internally, but also in the view of external unbelievers.

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[208] For a discussion on the ethical imperatives of work regarding antiquitarian familial self-sufficiency, and each individual's obligation to contribute to such familial self-sufficiency, see (Aasgaard, 2004, pp. 164-165), (Fee, 2009, p. 163), (Wanamaker, 1990, p. 164).

6.10. SUMMARY OF PAULINE FAMILIAL METAPHORS AND ECCLESIOLOGY

Some scholars argue that Paul principally (but not exclusively) employed male familial metaphors to describe his relationship with his followers, thereby most likely equating himself with aspects of the antiquitarian *paterfamilias*, to be respected, imitated and obeyed. Within the New Testament corpus, he uniquely draws on the source domain of antiquitarian (and probably principally Roman) adoption to convey the profundity and ubiquity of believers' post-conversion transformation in status before God the Father and one another. *Huiothesia* is deployed to explicate a reconfiguration of sociology in which previously disparate groups (ethnic, male/female, socio-economic) could be united under a common familial identity. Entry into this fictive family is consummated by believers' baptism in which pneumatologically-inspired common language is expected to confirm and articulate believers' unifying identity as adopted sons of God. Scholars note that Jesus similarly identified followers as constituting a fictive spiritual family, arguing an elevated priority and allegiance beyond even biological family.

Within consideration of the ecclesial family, two principal views exist over differentiated male and female roles. One which considers Jesus' praxis and teachings as specifically undermining antiquitarian concepts and praxis of patriarchy, reversed by subsequent Pauline teaching and praxis, thereby subverting Jesus' intended ecclesiology. The second considers the former as the projection of a contemporary egalitarian agenda onto biblical texts, circumspect about Jesus' actual realisation of genuinely egalitarian communities.

Antiquitarian siblingship conceptualisations seem apparent within aspects of Pauline ecclesiology. *Philadelphia* is emphasised as evincing his expectations of adherents' profound commitment, loyalty and affection to one another. These were to be demonstrated through reciprocal acts of support and care. Mutual honour was further to be apparent through the avoidance of undue dependence upon fictive siblings, for instance by avoiding work, and by avoiding external legal action against one another. The honour of the ecclesial family was to be optimised before non-believers to promote a positive representation of the gospel. Acceptance of the differences in giftings, disposition and social status of fictive ecclesial siblings (often deploying corporeal as well as familial metaphors) appears consistent with antiquitarian concepts of siblingship (such as those within Plutarch's writings), and the success of specific members is to be imputed to the whole family, thereby undermining potentially attritional intra-family competitiveness.

Within such conceptualisations of ecclesial family, it is important now to consider how participants' espoused experiences and views converge, reinforce or diverge from such notions of Pauline ecclesiology, combined with further explanatory insights from 'converted' social psychology (discussed in Chapter Five). These will be discussed in the next chapter.

7. PSYCHOLOGICAL AND THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPANT DATA: MUTUAL CRITICAL CONVERSATION

7.1. OVERVIEW

This study has investigated ethnoracially diverse participants' self-reports concerning ecclesial belonging. It has principally explored the following: how do participants self-report their own sense of belonging and which elements do they identify which promote or hinder such belonging? The dominant motif from Chapter Four was that participants conceptualised their belonging deploying familial terminology, especially spiritual parents and siblings. Three key themes emerged from their data: entry into the family, family life together and the retention of distinctives within the family. As discussed in Chapter Two, these shall be assessed within a mutually critical conversation comprising four principal voices, (Pattison, 2005, p. 223), (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 87): the disclosures of participants from Chapter Four, the normative voice of Pauline familial metaphors outlined in Chapter Six, aspects of ecclesiology from Newfrontiers and those of the local church discussed in Chapters One and Three, and the interpretive voice of social psychology from Chapter Five. Additionally, liminality theory from Turner & Turner (2011) shall be introduced to consider participants' initial exploratory experiences of church belonging.[209]

This chapter will show that successful entry into the church is dependent upon the overcoming of tentative and transitory liminal 'pre-belonging' (consistent with Turner & Turner's (2011) theorising on exploratory liminal experiences). This occurs when participants experience leadership figures positively as both social guides and exemplars of Christ, also overlapping with aspects of Pauline *paterfamilias* metaphor in terms of leaders' authority, approachability, prayerfulness, care and concern. Leaders were effectively viewed as influential prototypes of the ecclesial culture, aligning with predictions about leadership from SCT, (Hogg, 2001, p. 69) (Hornsey, 2008, p. 211) and (Turner, 2005). Furthermore, belonging was contingent upon comparative and normative fit to participants' pre-existing expectations of ecclesial 'familiness,' predicted by SCT, (Hornsey, 2008, p. 208), (Wright, 2003, p. 416). Baptism cemented belonging to the ecclesial family, both for newcomers and the wider church family, cohering with aspects of Paul's unique unifying *huiothesia* metaphor, precipitating a radical resocialisation, (Meeks, 2003, p. 88). This can produce a merging of congregants' outcomes, indicating strong mutual belonging explicated by IOS/IIS psychological theories, (Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2016, pp. 93, 98-99), (Smith, et al., 1999, p. 881).

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[209] Three further normative biblical themes shall be briefly introduced through Paul's appointment of leaders straddling diverse cultural backgrounds (including Barnabas and Titus), the appointment of leaders from a marginalised group in Acts 6, and finally the difficulties which ensued from attempting to coalesce adherents from diverse ethnic backgrounds in Acts 15.

Initial experiences of church either hindered or nurtured an inchoate and anticipatory sense of belonging to an ecclesial family. However, belonging required specific bolstering for it to attain resilience and depth beyond such fragile 'pre-belonging,' and into more stable 'aggregation,' again consistent with Turner & Turner's (2011) liminality theory. Experiences of 'family life' with others could assist or disrupt more enduring adherence. Both relational and performative components were pivotal in deepening belonging to fictive family members. For instance, important relational elements promoting belonging necessitated being known and cared for within fictive sibling-type relationships. These are consistent with Pauline exhortations of *philadelphia*, (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 308) in which fictive siblings are responsible for reciprocal acts of mutual support and immersion in profoundly affective interrelational bonds, (Bartchy, 1999, p. 68).

Performatively, having gifts released and developed through serving others was salubrious. For belonging to be enhanced, participants had to feel valued and needed within a superordinate alignment of purpose, beliefs, teamwork and co-ordinated activity, precipitating a ‘superordinate common identity,’ (Hogg & Abrams, 2006, p. 85), (Marti, 2009, p. 56). Furthermore, belonging was contingent upon a paradigm of growth of self and others when relationships and acts of service were experienced as ‘expansionary’ of the individual. This is consistent with IOS/IIS psychological theory, (Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2016, pp. 93, 98-99) which asserts that belonging is motivated by innate self-expansionary reflexes to extend both competency and sociality. These precipitate positive changes in *Being* through expansionary *Becoming*, (Balswick, et al., 2021). Consistently, ‘expansionary’ divine encounters in communal worship and significant life events, such as marriage and funerals, were similarly conducive to enriched belonging – both to God and the fictive ecclesial family.

Participants discussed the importance of diversity in the ecclesial family as potentially enhancing or eroding belonging, including across generational, believer/non-believer, male/female and ethnoracial distinctions. Each of these differences, when experienced positively and without eradication, offers the potential for the disclosure of a fuller stature of Christ in two ways, (Walls, 2002, p. 82): first in terms of discerning becoming more Christlike in character (through the acceptance of others with differing qualities and backgrounds, for example) and, second, through the experience *of* Christ himself *in* and *alongside* close but distinctive others into whom participants then merge and expand, as anticipated by IOS/IIS, (Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2016, pp. 93, 98-99).

For example, positive engagement across generational lines (with fictive parents, siblings and biological children) was universally welcomed. This aligns with Johns’ (2002, p. 76) assertions of the trinitarian ‘always-existing first family’ metaphor across father-son distinctions. Growth of the ecclesial family through outreach to non-believers (through personal evangelism or social-action based ministry) was a factor that could deepen participants’ interpersonal and ecclesial belonging, again because it was 'expansionary' relationally and performatively: this is again consistent with both IOS/IIS theories, (Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2016, pp. 93, 98-99), and Balswick et. al.'s (2021) *Being* and *Becoming* paradigm.

Concern was expressed about male and female distinctives, exclusively by female participants, evincing (possibly generational) sensitivity to uniquely male leadership roles. These were seen as constituting anachronistic and aversive constraints on the development of women's serving and leadership, undermining belonging. This is contentious theologically because of the two opposing views of leadership outlined in Chapter Six. Notwithstanding, the constrictive nature of such differentiation, and its ultimate instability, is anticipated by SIT. This predicts that intergroup differentiation, such as male/female in this study, leads to a sense of aversive discrimination in the view of the disempowered group if such distinctions are experienced as being illegitimate, unstable and non-consensual, (Turner & Reynolds, 2003, p. 138), triggering resultant dissent, (Mummendey & Otten, 2003, p. 126).

Similarly, imbalanced ethnoracial representation in the church's leadership was another factor that could affect belonging for exclusively non-British participants. This was because it was also experienced as being illegitimate, unstable and non-consensual, as identified by SIT, (Turner & Reynolds, 2003, p. 138). Additionally, it constituted a breach of mutual honouring, (Bartchy, 1999, p. 69) anathema to the consequences of Paul's unifying *huiothesia* metaphor, (Burke, 2006, p. 171) and a constraint on expansionary *Becoming* both for the individuals precluded from leadership and for the wider church, (Balswick, et al., 2021): it was thus appropriately aversive for contemporary congregants.

Losses and gains in the multi-ethnoracial environment of the church appeared unevenly borne by non-British-born participants, possibly because acculturation typically more acutely affects non-dominant groups, (Berry, 1988, p. 41). Losses were often detrimental, gains especially conducive to enriched belonging. Such experiences could thus constitute either subtractive or additive multiculturalism, (Triandis, 1994, p. 241) with the latter precipitating disjunctive 'feelings of alienation, loss of identity,' (Berry, et al., 1989, p. 188). Such losses could be caused by non-isomorphic attribution, (Triandis, 1994, p. 182), (Hall, 1990, p. 181) in which two parties attribute different motives or reasons motivating a specific behaviour because of cultural distance, (Babiker, et al., 1980, p. 109), (Searle & Ward, 1990).

Conversely, gains could be highly enriching of participants' belonging, in part comprising additive multiculturalism, (Triandis, 1994, p. 241). Such experiences were innately expansionary, but they required participants' dual involvement in a novel culture and a preceding heritage one, (Berry, et al., 2006, p. 325). This constitutes a form of integration adaption which is argued to offer the potential for the most salubrious psychological and sociological outcomes, (Liebkind, 2003, p. 314). Indeed, these often appeared to be manifestations of Walls' (p. 82) 'Ephesian moments' in which unique and expansionary sociological, eschatological, ecclesiological and theological disclosures were evinced solely because of positive inter-ethnoracial interactions within the church.

Components central to participants' successful entry into the ecclesial family shall be considered first.

7.2. ENTRY INTO THE FAMILY

This section shall show that successful entry into the family is dependent upon participants' experience of leaders as exemplars of Christ, overlapping with aspects of Pauline *paterfamilias* metaphor in terms of authority, approachability, prayerfulness, care and concern, acting as influential prototypes, as predicted by SCT. These need to be experienced by newcomers during an evaluative and transitory liminal phase of 'pre-belonging' in which leaders are to act as social guides and exemplars of the ecclesial familial culture, and this journey into the family conforms closely to theories on liminality from Turner & Turner (2011, p. 2). As predicted by

SIT/SCT, belonging was judged according to comparative and normative fit to participants' pre-existing expectations of ecclesial 'familiness.' Baptism, as an entry rite, was experienced as reinforcing belonging to the ecclesial family, both for newcomers and the wider church family, consistent with aspects of Paul's unique *huiothesia* metaphor, precipitating strong mutual belonging and a merging of one another's outcomes, again predicted by IOS/IIS psychological theories.

Aggregation, or more stable and profound belonging, was contingent upon the creation of enduring relationships of depth with other congregants: these were to mirror fictive familial sibling and parenting roles in which practical acts of care were anticipated and discerned from others, consistent with Pauline commitments to mutual *philadelphia*. Serving was especially conducive to belonging when it was 'expansionary' in terms of gifting, competence and interpersonal relationships. This aligns with Balswick, et al.'s (2021, loc. 209) *Being* and *Becoming* trinitarian-based dialectic of constant transformation of a reciprocating self through activism.

The 'awkwardness' of entering the family comprised a transitory, liminal phase of tentative 'pre-belonging.' It conformed closely to aspects of Turner & Turner's (2011, p. 2) theorising on liminality. This extends ethnographer's Arnold van Gennep's (1960) work on rites of transition in tribal societies to ecclesial contexts, (p. 3).[210] These rites comprise 'transitional rituals accompanying changes of place, state, social transition and age in a culture,' (p. 249). They argue that such transitional rites involve three key stages: 'separation, limen or margin, and aggregation,' (p. 2).

The first phase, separation, is one that comprises detachment from a preceding stable social structure. The second involves the initiate's state in the new environment as being inherently ambiguous, as 'betwixt and between,' holding 'few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state,' (p. 2). The culminating stage (aggregation) enables the initiate to settle into 'a stable state… with rights and obligations of a clearly defined structural type,' (p. 2). They also note that liminality involves not solely *transition* but also *potentiality*, the latter of which anticipates 'what may be' once the preceding liminal phase has stabilised into aggregation, (p. 3). Indeed, this helpfully explains what many participants described in terms of their initial and subsequent transition into more stable belonging.

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[210] Mainly in the Roman Catholic tradition.

Dixon (2022, pp. 98-99) draws on Turner & Turner's work in his Practical Theological doctorate studying remand prisoners and chaplains. Dixon notes that liminal environments are inherently difficult to navigate because they embrace elements which are 'unfamiliar and strange to the initiate,' (p. 109). However, he points out that mitigation of such stress is often sought via 'a guide… to lead someone through this liminal period' because such a guide can yield meaning for the initiate from within this transitory and possibly inscrutable state, (p. 109). Whilst Dixon's milieu is uniquely pressured and intense by virtue of enforced incarceration, it nonetheless highlights some generic pressures of liminality. These include traversing novelty, unfamiliarity and uncertainty, whilst anticipating future stability, components all evident in newcomers' experiences of church.

Participants' data align closely with this three-phase transformation, as well as an openness to leaders acting as guides through their liminality. For example, Martha's (2021) original 'backseat bencher' and Paula's (2021) 'pew filler' commitments were commonplace. Furthermore, Kemi (2021) explained that she intentionally constructed a temporary 'resting place' to recover from burnout from a previous church. Additionally, she acknowledged its transience noting that 'all good things must come to an end… I had to make a choice,' (Kemi, 2021).

Backseat benching, pew filling and resting places constructed by newcomers all comprised a locus of separation from a previous state of belonging (to a prior church in the locality, as for Paula and Kemi, or sometimes to a church in a different nation – as for Martha), but one which was located specifically within a self-defined margin, or 'boundary,' (Kemi, 2021). Newcomers thus entered a transitory state of uncertainty, separated from a previous known ecclesial social structure. Within this, they attempted to negotiate the unfamiliarity of the new ecclesial family whilst simultaneously anticipating the potential of a subsequent and more settled state of engagement and adherence, namely aggregation, (Turner & Turner, 2011, p. 3).

As noted, SIT/SCT assert that self-ascription to a group is based on normative and comparative criteria accessible to the initiate. This involves a process of discernment, one which is inherently evaluative. However, it is specifically transitory because the telos of this process is to determine whether a stable position of group self-ascription as family member is desirable. Within this process, the influence of leaders acting as guides was significant and potentially transformative, (Dixon, 2022, p. 109). It occurred in two principal ways: through the invitation and signposting of newcomers into meaningful familial-like community life, and through leaders' exemplification of familial norms. Participants were evaluating their liminality against expectations of familial life on two levels: first, with leadership as spiritual parents and culture setters, and second with the suitability of others to embrace them within familial-type relationships often within small groups.

For participants who had become attached to the church (hence their inclusion in this study), immersion took place sequentially. It frequently started with clear and consistent familial welcome. For example, welcome helped Akin (2021) to 'feel at home,' whilst Carl (2021) asserted that it was transformative in helping him to feel 'noticed,' and thus to explore profounder engagement. Consistent welcome fulfilled normative fit commitments for familial acceptance; for instance, Amila (2021) noted that the welcome she consistently enjoyed enabled her to feel 'like I'm… with my family.' Comparative fit was also evident as newcomers contrasted their welcome and acceptance to experiences at previous churches, (Carl, 2021) or within more discriminatory secular workplaces, (Amila, 2021). However, whilst entry into the family required these components of initial welcome, they also necessitated development beyond these through bespoke and intentional interpersonal invitation, usually by leaders, again exemplifying familial acceptance.

For example, Martha (2021) was chased up by Jennifer and invited into deeper engagement in which the church 'became like a family.' Jennifer appeared to fulfil a normative sororal role expressing persistent concern and interest in Martha's well-being and sociality, whilst acting as a guide into more immersive community: she called regularly and sought Martha's opinions on her early experiences of church. Alice's (2021) planned passivity was disrupted by a couple who offered a personal invitation for her to join a newcomers' group. Such bespoke and specific invitation overcame her initial resistance which persisted despite her awareness of the weekly generic verbal Sunday notice advertising the existence of the Connect newcomers' group. Personal invitation felt far more familial aligning with normative commitments to specifically *relational* familial interaction, as opposed to distant and institutional verbal announcements which could go unheeded. This led her and her husband into a new community in which 'we got to see the church, meet new people and we really felt at home,' (Alice, 2021).

Conversely, Martha (2021) pointed out that some newcomers left owing to a lack of 'familiness,' in which their experiences of the church did not align with their expectations of familial life, especially if deeper friendships could not readily be formed. This occurred when the expression of community felt too shallow and constrained to inconsequential verbal exchanges with other congregants on a Sunday morning. Entry into the family was thus curtailed because access into more embracing group life was compromised: the comparative fit of the church as a group was unattractive because the expression of community was too superficial compared to previous and more immersive experiences of church. It represented a stifling of *Becoming* through the thwarting of potentiality which anticipated reciprocal familial sociality, (Turner & Turner, 2011, p. 3). Aggregation was consequently hindered because the 'what may be' was aversive; it was lacking 'familiness.'

This seems especially relevant to many first-generation migrants (the cohort to whom Martha was referring) who often arrive without detailed knowledge of possibly novel and inscrutable British secular and ecclesial cultures. For belonging to emerge within a conceptualisation of family, common experiences need to be nurtured, (Barclay, 1975, pp. 82-83) as would occur naturally between biological kin. Leaders can help to facilitate these. The common experiences necessitate newcomers' placement within a reciprocating community, but they also extend to enabling newcomers to experience positive qualities of the leaders themselves.

Regarding the latter, some scholars assert that Paul defines himself within an antiquitarian *paterfamilias* paradigm evincing paternal qualities of closeness, care and discipline, whilst acting as an imitable exemplar of Christ, and also embracing more female nurturing metaphors, such as nurse. Similarly, Newfrontiers' commitments are framed within Pauline paternal metaphors (Virgo, 1985, p. 89) in which leaders' lives are worthy of imitation through closeness to Jesus and godly living, (Devenish, 2011, loc. 1088).

In assisting newcomers, leaders were acting as the guides Dixon (2022, p. 109) mentioned, steering newcomers into more immersive community whilst simultaneously exemplifying key characteristics of the communal culture, comprising highly prototypical and influential ingroupers, (Hogg, 2001, p. 69), (Hornsey, 2008, p. 211) and (Turner, 2005). The most frequently cited quality by participants was that of approachability: for instance, 'Jesus was accessible to everybody,' opined Akin (2021) conceptualising approachability as normative and Christlike. It was also augmented by comparative fit in which 'when I was in Africa, the leaders are not accessible,' (Akin, 2021). The contrast for Akin enabled him to evaluate leadership with a fresh perspective, and to determine the degree of fit leadership embodied relative to his normative commitment to Christlike accessibility.

Leadership approachability was also cited by Isah (2021) as facilitating his requests to Simon for his first child's dedication and Watch Night Services. When experienced early-on, through initial welcome, prayer and consistent concern (as in Isah's (2021) initial encounters with Simon), approachability promoted newcomers' openness to consider deeper belonging. Thus, the experience of leadership fulfilling normative criteria considered consistent with expectations of Jesus' leadership qualities was conducive in overcoming liminal 'pre-belonging.'[211]

Additionally, when disagreements or concerns were expressed, as for Kemi (2021) when she sought reassurance on her perceptions of disproportionately white leadership, approachable leadership exercising authority to ameliorate the ecclesial culture was perceived as salutary: 'I thought: "that is a leader."' The decisiveness of the leadership, combined with a clear strategy to rectify Kemi's concerns, were interpreted as bringing order and setting the cultural climate of the family: in this case, incorporating others from different cultural backgrounds into leadership. Maya (2021) also claimed that, through her post-membership course discussion with a leader, 'it helped me feel like… these people [leaders]… do care about my soul.' Participants were thus anticipating and responding to leadership as exemplary prototypes evaluated against normative values largely consistent with nurturing Pauline *paterfamilias* metaphors. These exemplified prayerfulness, closeness, care and approachability combined with more discipline-oriented qualities such as bringing order and strategy to the church within a culture of openness straddling ethnoracial boundaries.

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[211] In her study of ethnoracially diverse churches in Sydney, Australia, Watson (2009, p. 324) considers the reconfiguration of religious celebrations performed in migrants' places of origin to their new locations as constituting salubrious 'adaptive dexterity.' She concludes that performing a 'hybridised version of imported cultural practices' precipitates a closer sense of mutual belonging 'through the integration of these practices into a shared space.'

This is consistent with Cartledge's (2003, p. 49) assertion (see Chapter Two) that experience and scriptural norms should be both consistent and generative. In other words, 'Pentecostal experience informs one's understanding of the text; yet the text testifies of the same experiences among the early church and the apostles.' There should be a correspondence between the experience from 'within' the contemporary church with that of the Early Church, Cartledge contends, should the same Holy Spirit provide a consistent motivation for antiquitarian and contemporary contexts.

Conversely but consistently, cold and distant leadership which felt 'professional' was highly aversive for participants, chafing against such normative familial commitments to caring and relationally-centric leadership. Both Nigerian-born Alice (2021) and British-born Charlotte (2021) found the worship team's 'professionalism,' manifest through aloof leadership, deficient pastoral support and undue emphasis on the execution of task, compromised a 'sense of togetherness,' truncating relational interactions between members and with leaders. Such detachment chafes against normative Pauline praxis manifesting deep affection for, and close proximity, to his adherents, (Dawn & Peterson, 2000, p. 74) and thus appears to be appropriately aversive for adherents within the contemporary church as well as in antiquity.

Consequently, personal steering of newcomers by leaders into more familial group life was significant for many participants. This familial perception was reinforced through deepened interpersonal relationships and the creation of common experiences of Jesus with others in small groups, (Barclay, 1975, pp. 82-83). It was also significant in immersing some participants in a specifically intergenerational environment, again reinforcing normative commitments of ecclesial 'familiness.' This was the case for Martha (2021), for whom her small group facilitated 'friendship and community,' in which the church 'became like a family' partly because it embraced a wide age span with different levels of experience. This will be discussed more in the next section.

As noted previously, some scholars argue that Pauline praxis comprised water baptism as a ubiquitous entry rite for initiates linked to his *huiothesia* metaphor (see section 6.7). Of course, this is complicated by the practice of infant baptism within other denominations, one eschewed by Newfrontiers (see Chapter One). Furthermore, many newcomers arrive at King's already baptised as believers by full immersion and thus do not undergo believers' baptism: just five of the twenty-four participants were baptised as believers specifically at King's.

However, the experience of water baptism was universally positive for those who underwent it (although only mentioned by two participants). Carl (2021), for example, spoke positively about baptism's transformative effect on belonging, 'it really sort of enhanced the feeling of being part of the part of the church, it was almost a turning point for me in terms of sense of belonging in the church, sort of feeling like we're really there… and the prayers that came with that was quite powerful for me.' The other baptisee, Carim (2021), spoke of its enriching his sociological and spiritual connections to the church in which he claimed to be 'surrounded by people who are welcoming and are like family.'

These experiences validated Maya's (2021) dual assertion equating baptism to 'connection with God… to be welcomed into God's family.' Furthermore, upgraded familial belonging was discerned by congregants observing others' baptisms. Filip (2021) reflected on Carim's account of baptism and considered its effect on him and other churchgoers as onlookers: 'I was part of that event, I was part of your baptism, I got to witness that amazing day... It's just phenomenal.' His language embraced transcendence (it was 'amazing… phenomenal') but he spoke also as though he were a direct participant in Carim's baptism: 'I was part of your baptism.'

This overlapping of others' experiences and outcomes is indicative of very close belonging: social psychology specifically sheds explanatory light on this. In particular, the Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) scale assesses the degree to which an individual considers another as being connected or overlapping with his/her own self. Based on psychological studies, IOS concludes that ‘people at least experience close others as if they, in some sense, were included in the self,’ with the stronger the measure of IOS, the stronger the integration or incorporation of the other, (Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2016, p. 90). Filip thus appears to be considering Carim as someone close whose outcome is strongly connected, if not fused, with his own, manifesting very tight belonging.

Furthermore, Filip’s (2021) language is even more expansive and inclusive: ‘I think another part of belonging in the church is the, you know, it's obviously it's your special day… but the whole church is there and you’re all a family, like you said, and it's such an amazing, such an amazing thing.’ Carim’s baptism was not solely a matter of Filip’s inclusion into Carim’s life and outcomes, but it was integrative of the whole church – in which the church felt profoundly united as a family. This indicates that Filip is also ascribing IIS (inclusion of group in self) qualities to himself and others. This thus represents not simply Filip’s tight interpersonal belonging to Carim, but tight intragroup belonging to the church collective.

Participants’ disclosures thus indicate that baptism has a potentially generative effect of cementing adherents to one another. This reconfigures participants’ allegiance specifically and tightly not only to one another but also to the fictive ecclesial family group. This is also predicted and explained by *huiothesia* conceptualisations. Meeks’ (2003, p. 88) assertion, drawing upon Paul’s *huiothesia* metaphor in Galatians 3:26, 4:6 and Romans 8:15-17, thus appears validated by Filip’s experience in which ‘the image of the initiate being adopted as God’s child and thus receiving a new family of human brothers and sisters is a vivid way of portraying… the resocialisation of conversion.’

This is because preceding biological kinship structures are ‘supplanted by a new set of relationships,’ rooted in fictive ecclesial siblingship, (p. 88). Meeks’ assertions appear remarkably consistent within Maya's, Filip's and Carim's overarching and superordinate familial terminology embedded in their descriptions and observations of baptism. Baptism thus appears to comprise not simply a *personal* action, it seems genuinely to resocialise initiates and observers into more profound *group*-oriented belonging, consistent with aspects of Paul's normative *huiothesia* metaphor. Within this, adoption in antiquity enacted the transfer of a son 'taken out of one family and placed into another with all its attending privileges and responsibilities,' (Burke, 2006, p. 40). It represented the start of 'a new life,' (Lyall, 1969, p. 466) with other spiritual siblings but also with a new divine *paterfamilias* and first-born sibling, Christ, (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 139)

Therefore, it should be expected that baptism engender a greater sense of incorporation into the Son. Carim (2021) hunted for adjectives to describe his baptism, settling on two: he asserted baptism was 'spiritual' whilst also being 'just, emotional, if I want to say that – emotional.' Carl (2021) noted that 'the prayers that came with that [baptism] was quite powerful for me,' with the combination signifying a 'turning point' in his sense of belonging to the church. Moo (2013, p. 252) notes that believers' common sonship is because 'they are incorporated into *the* Son,' through water baptism experiencing a common adoption, *huiothesia*. The 'spiritual' dimension of baptism and the concomitant prayers thus afford some explanation of participants' closer union both with Christ and others as anticipated by *huiothesia*, (Atkins, 1991, p. 174).

Carim's second adjective is also potentially significant: it was 'emotional.' This has resonances with some aspects of his new identity as an adopted son by his divine *paterfamilias*. As noted in Chapter Six, Pauline baptism was anticipated to elicit an ecstatic and confirmatory response of the initiate's new identity through 'Abba, Father!' (Galatians 4:6). The latter comprised an exclamation of 'some intensity…

with the overtones of emotional depth and sincerity,' (Dunn, 1993a, p. 221). Carim's testimony similarly expressed profound emotion in response to his baptism.

Maya, Carl, Filip and Carim represented the following heritage nations: Nigeria, Britain, Poland and Syria respectively. The significance of baptism specifically to multi-ethnoracial congregations is picked up by Marti's (2009, p. 61) ethnographic study in the USA. He asserts that water baptism constitutes 'a ritual that directly and unambiguously affirms an alternative identity… baptized believers are members of the same community.' Marti considers baptism (and other practices such as worship, to be considered later) as 'reorienting experiences' that significantly 'lean people away from ethnic and racial specificity,' and into a unifying religious identity. This seems validated by participants in this study whose experiences of baptism appear to unite them to diverse ecclesial siblings. The primacy of the ecclesial family over biological family shall be considered further in the next section.

Whilst the influence of leadership (through personal invitation and demonstration of authority, prayerfulness, closeness, care and approachability) and experiences of baptism could assist newcomers in overcoming transitory liminal 'pre-belonging,' successful and enduring aggregation required additional factors to be developed. These will be discussed in the next section.

7.3. FAMILY LIFE TOGETHER

Initial experiences of church could hinder or reinforce an inchoate and anticipatory sense of belonging to an ecclesial family. However, belonging necessitated further bolstering for it to attain resilience and depth beyond initial liminal 'pre-belonging,' and into more stable 'aggregation,' (Turner & Turner, 2011, p. 3). Experiences of 'family life' with others could assist or disrupt enhanced adherence. Relational and performative components were pivotal in deepening belonging to fictive family members. These comprised being known and cared for within fictive familial relationships, often expressed within the locus of small groups.

Such relationships appear consistent with those supported and promoted by aspects of Pauline ecclesiology.

Performatively, having gifts released and developed was salubrious. For these to be established, participants had to feel valued and needed within a superordinate alignment of purpose, beliefs, teamwork and co-ordinated activity. Furthermore, belonging was enhanced within a paradigm of growth of self and others, when relationships and acts of service were experienced as ‘expansionary’ of the individual. These appeared to be developments of *Being* through *Becoming*, enhancing self-reports of belonging. ‘Expansionary’ divine encounters in communal worship and significant life events, such as marriage and funerals, could similarly transform perceptions of belonging both to God and the fictive ecclesial family.

Regarding participants’ self-reports, healthy belonging was expressed as one in which participants sensed they were well known to others within the family life of the church. For example, Imogen (2021) complained that she felt she was known only superficially, despite her being in the church for years, and this meant that she and her husband felt ‘lost’ because ‘it took us a heck of a long time to get to know anyone at any sort of depth.’ However, the reason she and her husband moved to a new church site was specifically for profounder relationships. Indeed, during their first meeting there, new conversations seemed to breach the barriers of superficiality, holding out the hope of deeper engagement, relationship and belonging: ‘It made us think, “okay, there's some, there's a chance to get to know people here,”’ (Imogen, 2021). In fact, a perception of being known at depth was universally beneficial.

Consequently, enduring relationships in which life was profoundly shared with others through joy, mundanity and adversity nurtured close sibling-type bonds: ‘they’re like family,’ Charlotte (2021) enthused concerning a close age-peer friendship she and her husband enjoyed with another couple. Conversely, departure of Jeremy’s (2021) previously close age-peer friends during lockdown – without warning – ruptured both his sense of fictive siblingship: 'I wouldn't expect anyone to leave my family without saying "goodbye."' So grievous was this departure that it compromised his whole sense of ecclesial adherence, with Jeremy (2021) lamenting 'maybe I don't actually belong in King's Church.' However, his attachment was subsequently revitalised when he and his wife were invited into a close fictive spiritual parenting role with a younger couple: 'Aye and Mary call us "mum and dad"… and being treated as such, that makes you feel like a family,' (Jeremy, 2022).

Within natural families, healthy siblings (and parents) frequently know the intimate details of one another – such as each other's deeper feelings, insecurities and circumstances, differentiating siblingship from cursory acquaintance. It was what Paula (2023) craved as a single woman but found difficult to achieve in her church experience because of singleness. To compensate, she sought tight friendship outside the church because belonging is 'about being known,' (Paula, 2023). For Paula, being known meant that others would be aware of her idiosyncratic 'likes and dislikes, know what I'm like as a person, what am I *really* like.' Key elements of intimate siblingship were missing because her distinctive qualities and preferences remained hidden, exacerbated by singleness. Indeed, Aune (2008, p. 285) points out that the promotion of marriage as normative in evangelical churches like Newfrontiers leads to 'disaffiliation of unmarried women,' partly because the latter's social status can be perceived as inferior by both single and married women relative to the predominant ecclesial discourse: it seemed that Paula was weighed down by such expectations. For her, as for many participants, there was an innate yearning for in-depth, disclosive, reciprocal relationships modelling fictive siblingship and parenting.

As noted earlier in this chapter, Cartledge (2003, p. 53) highlights that there should be a tight correspondence between the experience from 'within' the contemporary church with that of the early church, articulated within Scripture, should the same Holy Spirit be motivating both. Furthermore, social psychology should validate aspects of the motives driving participants' desires for close fictive sibling-type relationships. Regarding scripture, Paul's own immersion in community, (Dawn & Peterson, 2000, p. 74) was framed simultaneously within *paterfamilias* and fraternal relationships to others within the church, (Petersen, 1985, p. 23) (see Chapter Six).

Additionally, his injunction to his adherents was for them to imitate his transparent immersion in community, 1 Corinthians 4:16, (Perkins, 2012, p. 80), (Bruce, 1971, p. 51): Paul presented himself as exemplar for others to emulate. Within this transparency 'the model of Christian living manifest in his own faithful ministry and concern for the audience' should be replicated by his followers, (this time in Thessalonica), in which siblingship is central to adherents' sociology, (Johnson, 2016, p. 41).

Bartchy (2004, p. 33) notes that the 'tightest unity of loyalty and affection in the world of the early followers of Jesus was found among brothers and sisters,' exceeding even friendships and possibly spousal bonds, (Bartchy, 1999, p. 68). The sibling relation was 'distinguished by mutual love,' precipitating positive 'emotions and practical obligations,' qualities promoted by Paul's ecclesiology consistent with antiquitarian notions of *philadelphia* (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 308). To be known, and to know others closely, with positive affect, thus appear to be key foundations underpinning Paul's normative 'resocialization of conversion,' (Meeks, 2003, p. 88). Should there exist a consistent and normative pneumatological thread between the early church and its contemporary counterpart, these qualities should readily be evident in participants' desires. Therefore, Imogen, Charlotte and Paula's responses are consistent with a Pauline paradigm in anticipating being well known by others, and to enjoy tight, disclosive relationships, irrespective of marital status or any preceding socio-economic or ethnoracial background: antiquitarian siblingship subverted such distinctions.

It was not just the immersive and disclosive relationships which promoted close fictive siblingship in the early church: as Aasgaard (2004, p. 308) noted, siblingship entailed practical obligations of mutual support, ones promoted by normative Pauline conceptions of *philadelphia*. Therefore, when reasonable care is withheld or deficient, this should be aversive to participants. Indeed, it was. For example, Alice's '999' sign demonstrated that, at the time of her focus group, she felt alone and detached, particularly when she was unexpectedly rushed into hospital. She opined that she and her husband belonged 'in terms of the serving side,' but not 'in terms of relationships,' (Alice, 2021). This merely functional belonging was clearly distressing. However, this had been redressed a couple of years later. She claimed to have 'made more individual connections with people, so I know I can call someone. I also feel like I belong much more,' (Alice, 2023). A key deficiency of detachment had been redressed and consequently, Alice (2023) claimed, the church then felt 'like a family, cause it's always there' by virtue of its potential to provide practical care.

Indeed, reciprocated care within the church was transformative for new believer, Arpad. He went as far as to claim that the ecclesial family members' ability to care for one another could eclipse the bonds within biological family. For Arpad (2021), when working cohesively, the church had the power to displace historic deficiencies and hurts experienced within biological families and emerge 'stronger than any other family… we just love another and care and support each other.' This was multi-faceted, and it will be discussed again shortly, but reciprocated care of others through major life events was seen as enhancing fictive familial belonging. Consequently, the normative *philadelphia* which Paul espoused – comprising a combination of positive affect and mutual caring, (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 106), (Meeks, 2003, p. 86) – was experienced as generative for belonging: its absence conversely detrimental, and its subsequent correction restorative, as for Alice.

Consistent with the participants' experiences in this thesis are the findings from Krause & Hayward's (2013) study on belonging investigating church-based social support. Their quantitative research showed (in a Mexican-American ecclesial context) that a higher sense of belonging is reported when congregants both provide and receive emotional support to and from fellow co-religionists (p. 253).[212] They note that when congregants provide emotional support (comprising 'empathy, caring, love and trust'), 'they are letting support recipients know that they are loved and valued highly,' enhancing the latter's identification with the ecclesial 'group,' (p. 254).

The locus for such caring and support was frequently cited as the small group. Indeed, as Carl (2021) pointed out regarding group engagement, 'the more you put in, the more a sense of belonging,' expressing a need for personal commitment to group life to nurture enhanced adherence.[213] Within such a milieu, further aspects of familial living could also be experienced to deepen belonging. For example, Syrian Carim (2021) described the prayerfulness of his small group during his challenge to find a new job. It appeared to him to be analogous to a 'mother or father' knowing the hardships an offspring would endure, counterbalanced by consistent care and support, (Carim, 2021).

Consequently, the inability to access group life was aversive. Indeed (as described in the preceding section), Ghanaian Martha explained that many had left the church, not because of the failure of initial welcome, but because more immersive familial interactions valued by Africans in small groups were lacking. This was contrary to her own experience of small group which had comprised an intergenerational 'mini family,' (Martha, 2021).

She claimed that two key barriers curtailed more recent attendees' ability to experience this 'familiness.' The first was the process of entry into the small group which was consumerist: entrants were required to select their own group. For Martha, this seemed anathema to the organic nature of family in which mutual siblings are subject to the superordinate and independent actions of parents, not siblings' choices. Martha had appreciated pastoral leadership selecting her small group during her own entry into the church, possibly because this seemed to mirror such superordinate spiritual parenting. Second, the composition of some emergent groups had simultaneously shifted away from familial intergenerational and intercultural interactions, but instead towards potential siloes of homogeneity: either with similar age-group peers, or with monocultures like the 'Nigerian Association,' Martha (2022). These were unfamilial because they diluted 'familiness' away from more natural expressions of heterogeneity in which siblings do not self-select their fictive family members but freely intermix.

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[212] This was especially salient for *men* in their study. See also (Krause & Wulff, 2005, p. 73).

[213] Alice (2021) agreed but from an alternate perspective of a failure to commit to group life.

As noted, some scholars argue that Paul's *huiothesia* metaphor precipitated an inclusivity in which preceding socio-economic, gender or ethnoracial distinctions were irrelevant to ecclesial inclusion, and previously disparate groups should freely intermingle, (Elliott, 2003, p. 186), (Witherington, 2004, p. 278), (Walls, 2002, p. 76). The siloed nature of some groups thus potentially chafes against such normative Pauline injunctions for inclusivity within diversity. Thus, it appears appropriately aversive for participants to crave such heterogeneity, with the alternative being experienced as a stifling of the Holy Spirit's desire to promote it. Consequently, for some newcomers, an experience of such impermeability was interpreted as deficiencies of fictive 'familiness.' This was so compromising that they left the church; it also represented a failure of leadership to guide people into meaningful community, as noted in the previous section.[214] [215] This is again consistent with Krause & Wullf 's (2005, p. 97) study into church-based support and health satisfaction that concluded that ‘increasing levels of congregational involvement correspond to higher subjective levels of belonging, especially if they are combined with strong attendance of small groups.’

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[214] The contrary experience of Kemi (2021) who valued the self-selection of small groups as enhancing her belonging to the church should be noted.

[215] Other factors around intergenerationality will be considered in the next section.

Relational intermingling and interactions within small groups, across and within generations and ethnoracial groups, were important in reinforcing the experience of the church as an intergenerational family, but they were not sufficient per se to nurture resilient adherence. Belonging was universally enhanced, diluted or corrected by performative elements expressed through purposive serving of, and alongside, others. For Filip (2021), it constituted his ‘kit,’ an outward manifestation of church adherence, whilst Isah (2021) explained that a failure for others to be given appropriate responsibilities in the sound-mixing team weakened attachment to the church, and they left. ‘Familiness’ was diluted because people needed to feel needed and productive, and when they were not, it was highly aversive.

Notions of Pauline *philadelphia* again seem to anticipate and prescribe such experiences and commitments, especially when blended with his corporeal metaphor in 1 Corinthians 12, in which *each* part is necessary, and each sibling thus performs its own unique function. Therefore, any unequal burden of serving, as per Steffi’s (2021) observation that ‘20% of the people are doing most of the, the serving,’ is a breach of such reciprocal sibling obligations. Thus, Paul’s injunction in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 that *all* contribute to the well-being of others – both for the harmony of the church and its reputation with outsiders, (Fee, 2009, p. 163) (Wanamaker, 1990, p. 164), (Holmes, 1998, p. 139), (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 166) – is a pre-requisite for the cohesive operation of the church. Steffi’s consternation is thus consistent with parallel Pauline concerns about inequitable apportionment of serving responsibilities among fictive siblings.

Furthermore, familial unity within such cohesive activism was both anticipated and expected. Alignment across beliefs, purpose and mission was valued. Indeed, unity appeared to be pneumatologically-empowered and richly appreciated. For example, new-Christian Arpad asserted that, because of God's presence, church family could experience deeper bonds than biological counterparts. He spoke of a new and common language uniquely created within the ecclesial family asserting that we 'talk the same language and we understand each other more than the family itself,' (Arpad, 2021). This emergent 'ecclesial vernacular' articulated experiences of God to other fictive siblings, which in turn yielded profounder mutual understandings of God and one other. His experiences seem consistent with some scholars' perceptions of Pauline *huiothesia* in which the putting on of Christ precipitates common pneumatically-inspired responses of 'Abba, father!'

Such Pauline-promoted ecclesial vernacular, comprehensible to and expressible uniquely by the fictive family, is pneumatically-given for common expression, interpretation and profound mutual comprehension. It appears consistent with what Arpad is articulating. It may be explained, within Pauline ecclesiology, by believers' common experience of God of adoption into sonship, (Galatians 4:6, Romans 8:15). Such confirmatory verbal expressions validate the believers' existential spiritual adoption, and thus their 'belonging where God as "Father" occupies centre stage in his "family,"' (Burke, 2006, p. 74). Arpad's assertion, therefore, that his adherence to the fictive ecclesial family is imbued with a depth, unity, comprehensibility and robustness that exceeds that of biological family coheres with aspects of Paul's *huiothesia* metaphor, and Newfrontiers' espoused theology, (Virgo, 1993, p. 6) noted in Chapter One. Furthermore, it aligns with Jesus' insistence (from Matthew 12:46-50, Mark 3:31-35 and Luke 8:19-21) that the spiritual family he creates can assume higher priority and intimacy than believers' preceding biological ones (see previous Chapter).

The antiquitarian *huiothesia* adoption metaphor restructured all loyalties, affections and priorities to the new adoptive father and siblings, evinced through the creation of a pneumatological vernacular to articulate the richness of such realignment. Such profound transformation of familial priorities and mutual understandings appears pneumatically-inspired, and consistent with Arpad's (2021) insistence that it was uniquely possible 'because here is God.' This reconfiguration represents further validation of believers' 'extraordinarily thoroughgoing resocialization,' in which loyalties, affections and understandings within the fictive ecclesial family can genuinely transcend preceding biological ties, (Meeks, 2003, p. 78). The creation of this resocialised siblingship precipitates further changes in language and self-perception.

Such reconfiguration can also be discerned in Yomi's (2021) assertions in which she attributed others' serving actions as reinforcing her own belonging. She spoke about the giving out of food to the marginalised as 'something we do selflessly,' (Yomi, 2021) in which she considered herself embedded within the outcomes of others' actions and celebrated them as though they were her own (as did her husband in terms of overseas mission, (Akin, 2021)). Notably, neither she nor her husband was directly involved in serving within those ministries. This attribution coheres with Pauline (and Plutarch's) commitments to the mutual honouring of siblings in which all are co-contributors to one another's success by virtue of their common ecclesial familial adherence and identity, (deSilva, 2000, pp. 220, 222) and the differing serving roles of others celebrated 'as though it were no less theirs,' (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 102).

Such a merging of self with the outcomes of others – who comprise the new fictive familial ingroup – appears to be embedded within the essential psychology of the self, explained by theories from social psychology, including the aforementioned IIS.[216] This asserts that 'mental representations of self and in-group are thought to overlap… resulting in… an increased acceptance of characteristics that are typical of the in-group as typical of self' and vice-versa, (Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2016, pp. 98-99).

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[216] A similar merging of outcome was noted in the previous section between Filip and Carim during the latter's baptism.

Yomi and Akin appear thus to identify so strongly with the church 'ingroup' that they impute to themselves qualities of the ingroup such as the success and faithfulness of social-action and mission-based outreach. For Yomi (2021), such activities were 'authentic to the, the commands of Jesus,' (consistent with normative fit criteria for the church's outreach) by serving people in need outside the church. There thus appears to be merging of self and group in terms of values, outcomes and qualities resulting from tight in-group identification.

An important assertion of IOS/IIS is that (unlike in SIT/SCT) the motivation for in-group identification is not self-esteem per se, but 'a desire for self-expansion, a desire for the self to actually increase its potential efficacy, not just a desire to see itself more positively,' (Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2016, p. 99). Thus, the anticipation of serving as 'expansionary' in terms of efficacy is not surprising and neither that its opposite is deleterious. For example, Isah (2021) lamented that in the sound-mixing team '[you] might not be able to, you know, grow. And the next plan is how you want to get out or leave the place.'

His frustration was that skills were consistently constrained with little likelihood of development; his aversion to such stagnation was profound and could rupture belonging. It appears that Isah's lament was also based on a conception of siblingship in which equal status alongside concomitant treatment and empowerment were to be expected: his experience of the opposite was potentially ruinous. Reciprocated sibling honouring appeared to have broken down and the familial sense of the church severely compromised. The expansion of the self into the group (IIS) was thus constrained, belonging comprised, and summary departure ensued for some other team members.

Paula (2021) similarly noted that 'I'd hate to be stagnant,' instead asserting that 'it's great to just always be growing… learning.' She linked enhanced belonging to co-leadership of her small group in which she had 'people that you can start to invest in,' (Paula, 2021). Serving was thus an opportunity for investment with an expectation of vivifying growth. Maya (2021) agreed, explaining that serving constituted 'an opportunity where God is growing me… to help us flourish as we carry on our own task.' Such serving was presumed to take place within a context of cohesion and unity, as Robert (2021) insisted: 'moving forward… knowing we are united in belief and purpose is an important quality of belonging.'

The power of serving, by deploying a specific gift but cohesively alongside others with diverse gifts and talents, was also greatly valued and generative of belonging. For example, Dave's (2021) serving in the PA team with others showed him that everyone 'has a little bit of value to bring anything. It's everyone's values all add up,' in which cohesion with others' distinct and diverse gifts was deeply enriching. Such alignment is validated by Stroope's (2011, p. 317) analysis on multilevel data from the U.S. Congregational Life Survey, from which he concludes that 'that church members' traditional beliefs, group-level belief unity, and their interaction associate positively with members' sense of belonging.'[217]

Both Balswick, et al. (2021) and Stetsenko's (2012, p. 152) commitments to *Being and Becoming* seem especially pertinent here, and align with IIS' expansionary motivation. Distinct individuals, with differing gifts from others, cohering in co-ordinated action does appear to be powerfully transformative of belonging. Their *Being* is a reciprocating self, which itself reflects the trinity of the Christian Godhead in which the three persons are 'persons-in-relation and gain their personal identity by means of their interrelationality,' whilst retaining their distinctiveness, (Balswick, et al., 2021, loc. 148). This reciprocating identity is not static nor fixed, but in 'pathways of *constant transformations* in the states of Being,' (Stetsenko, 2012, p. 144). These transformations and growth are made possible through purposive and cohesive activism with others. Constant transformations in the states of being, which represented upgraded skill, competence, sociality and mutual appreciation, were indeed central to enhanced and sustained belonging, but the opposite (as for Charlotte (2021) and her sense of 'amputation', and Paula's and Isah's 'stagnation') highly and consistently aversive.

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[217] Robert's (2021) assertion above appears validated by Village's (2007, p. 270) findings in UK Anglican churches in Central and Southern England that a 'low sense of belonging being associated with high levels of conflict.'

Furthermore, superordinate goals in which individuals serve alongside others in co-ordinated action whose success is dependent upon mutual co-operation seem efficacious in reconfiguring individuals' belonging to one another and the ecclesial group, (Crocker & Nuer, 2003, pp. 5-6), (Triandis, 1994, pp. 239-240), (Sherif, et al., 1988, p. 209). Such superordinate goals 'effectively furnish a superordinate common identity,' enhancing mutual belonging, (Hogg & Abrams, 2006, p. 85). Within a specifically ecclesial context, this coheres with Marti's (2009, p. 56) conclusion that diverse churches need to foster an 'inclusive congregational identity' to overcome the costs associated with the difficulties of diversity. These costs will be considered further in the next section, as will the effects of superordinate goals in the context of social-action based outreach.

Other activities that could foster a superordinate common identity included collective Sunday and midweek corporate worship. Nigerian-born Maya (2021) was adamant that 'worship is a heavenly language… it's what connects us to God.' Other participants agreed. For example, hearing God speak during worship events was conducive to deepened belonging, not only to God but also to other congregants. However, this only occurred specifically when in the presence of others, consistent with Barclay's (1975, pp. 82-83) assertion noted in Chapter Six of the need for common experiences of God with fictive family to engender belonging. For example, Paula (2021) spoke about hearing God speak to her during sung-worship in her first visit to King's asserting 'God spoke to me really clearly and said, "I've finally got you where I want you!"' as pivotal in her commitment to pursue deeper belonging to the church. Likewise, Carl's (2021) surprise encounter with God during sung-worship was 'particularly powerful' because of the 'collectiveness of it,' enhancing his belonging to the broader church community.

The necessity of the collective church community to the profundity of worship was noted also by sound-mixing technician Dave. He explained that the first Sunday back post-lockdown gave 'goosebumps down my spine,' partly because 'we belong *together*,' (my emphasis) (Dave, 2021). Furthermore, he clarified why this was so emotive: 'It was probably hearing the loud music again and then hearing the worship. Hearing people react and show passion.' This contrasted with online worship, which was more atomising and far less engaging. The profundity of his reaction and his sense of belonging were dependent upon the *gathered* collective church.

Briers (1992, p. 205) considers Restorationist worship as a form of Victor Turner's *communitas* in which: 'Social distinctions of age, status, and background are set aside… and the consequent solidarity achieved is extremely beneficial… in that it further consolidates group loyalties and alleviates potential tensions' across boundaries such as socio-economic and ethnoracial ones. The reinforcement of ingroup loyalty encompassing diverse backgrounds referred to by Briers seems entirely consistent with participants' self-reports in this study.[218]

Similarly, major shared life events, such as funerals and weddings, embedded within collective acts of family worship, were generative of belonging. This was due to two main factors: common experience with other congregants, and the influence of leaders and other congregants. The latter can be explained by aspects of prototypicality within SCT (see Chapter Five). For example, the funeral of Jeremy's mother-in-law was a step in his reconnection to the church. Being served by leaders and others transformed his strength of familial adherence to the church. He stated that he was 'really proud to be part of this bunch,' changing his perception of belonging from one of detachment a year earlier to one of subsequently restored familial affection: 'We are a family, and we need each other,' (Jeremy, 2022).

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[218] Turner (1969, p. 132) distinguishes between three forms of *communitas:* 1) existential or spontaneous communitas, 2) normative communitas and 3) ideological communitas. The first comprises '"a happening"… "the winged moment as it flies"' of spontaneous egalitarian community which defies construction and 'is the opposite to social structures,' (Dixon, 2022, p. 106). The second is the reification of community to 'mobilise and organize resources,' and to institute 'social control.' The third applies to 'utopian models of societies… within the domain of structure, and it is the fate of all spontaneous communitas,' representing a demise 'into structure and law.'

Arpad (2021) spoke of another life event, his wedding, as reinforcing his ecclesial belonging: 'we got married in King's church… [it] is once in a lifetime so we really love the place, and we belong to that place and we made us really welcomed.' Like Jeremy, he cited the service he and his wife received from leaders and other congregants as central to his sense of adherence. Leaders (and others outside leadership) were again being assessed as prototypical exemplars, evincing approachability and service, enabling congregants like Jeremy and Arpad to depersonalise and ascribe deeper group membership to themselves, as predicted by SCT, (Hogg, 2001, p. 69), (Hornsey, 2008, p. 211) and (Turner, 2005). Furthermore, as Barclay (1975, p. 82) points out (referring to Jesus' explication of his fictive family in Mark 3:31-35), the 'basis of true kinship lies in a common experience,' and activities including funerals and weddings hold the potential to bind congregants together pneumatically through such common experiences to promote closeness that can surpass that within biological families.[219]

Consequently, atomisation is deleterious because it disrupts the essential communal nature upon which worship depends. Therefore, even though Charlotte (2021) accessed Sunday worship through online content during lockdown, it left her feeling 'completely cut off' because of the physical absence of others. As a result, she re-evaluated what had previously seemed inconsequential – the 'mere' spotting of other worshippers from a distance. This loss of apparently cursory acknowledgement experienced during lockdown, when restored, yielded a fresh appreciation for her of the significance of larger gatherings. Echoes of both Hall's

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[219] Again, comprising what Marti (2009, p. 61) defines as 'reorienting experiences that lean people away from ethnic and racial specificity.'

(1990) and Myer's (2003) 'public space' component in belonging could yield some explanation. Hall's (1990, p. 1) *proxemics* thesis is that humans require four principal spaces 'to develop personalities, culture, and communication,' comprising public, social, personal, and intimate spaces.

Charlotte touched on the latter three (noted previously), in which she expressed contentment with aspects of her serving (being with others in the Kids' Team, for example), close interpersonal and familial relationships with age-peer friends, and the ability to be honest and disclose intimate life details: these relate to the latter three of Hall's proxemics. However, Hall (1990, pp. 114-115) asserts that each of us has learned *situational* personalities in *all* four areas. What seemed grievously lacking for Charlotte was connection with the public component of her belonging, even if it previously appeared to be somewhat superficial. In reality, it may be the opposite because, should Hall be correct, all four spaces are required to engender a holistic and fully developed sense of belonging.

Myers (2003, pp. 11-18, 25) draws on Hall's proxemics to consider the significance of these on ecclesial belonging. However, he goes on to assert that belonging does not require proximity, small groups, commitment, activism nor even a clear purpose for belonging to form. These assertions are not validated by participants' data in this study. When each of these components was strengthened, upgraded belonging was consistently reported. Thus, well-functioning small groups, activism in the form of serving and outreach, and proximity to others so reciprocal care could be experienced, all correlated to more positive self-reports of belonging. They appeared to move participants from more surface ingroup *identification* to deeper *internalisation* of group belonging, (Ashford & Mael, 1989, p. 21).

As an important aside, it should be noted that the original brief given to participants was to select images that typified their experiences of belonging *and* participation in the author's church (see Appendix 1). However, participants seemed to report increased belonging through increased participation, and they largely conjoined and conflated the two. For example, in his focus group Jeremy (2021) complained that ‘maybe I don’t really actually belong in King’s Church,’ and this was linked to the departure of previously close friends and loss of relationship, as noted earlier. However, he also claimed that many in the church had unused gifts and talents asserting that ‘if this is really about belonging… it does really require leaders to draw people’s gifts out.’ Belonging and participation were discerned as inextricable. In fact, Jeremy (2022) claimed his own belonging was upgraded when he mentored a younger congregant, he was invited to be a spiritual parent to an African couple, and after he started to serve on the homeless ministry: participation appeared to be generative of belonging.

Jonathan was not alone. Another participant, Robert (2021), spoke about refreshed areas of serving with which he had engaged just prior to his focus group. He summarised the effect of expressing these thus: ‘when these gifts are recognised, I feel there’s a strong sense of belonging.’ Asked how he would rate his sense of belonging he explained that it was ‘particularly high since we began to meet together as a prayer team, and as a prophetic team that I think the river is running very fast on that one… it shows me that we are moving forward,’ (Robert, 2021). Like Jonathan, Robert’s sense of belonging was conjoined to performative serving alongside others. He again spoke in expansionary and progressive terms through his river metaphor. Additionally, Filip (2021), was similarly adamant about the conjunction of serving and belonging: ‘my sense of belonging is serving and doing stuff I believe in.’ Thus, Myers’ (2003, pp. 11-18, 25) generic assertion that belonging is not dependent upon performative participation is somewhat undermined by the testimony of participants in this study: absence or containment of performative contributions was deleterious, reinstatement or refreshment conversely restorative.

In summary, communal ecclesial experiences (such as worship, funerals and weddings) embedded in fictive familial relationships (often in small groups), combined with feeling needed and purposive serving, are important in aggregating congregants' belonging: they are 'expansionary' consistent with prescribed Pauline *philadelphia*, a *Being* and *Becoming* trinitarian paradigm, and explained by social psychological commitments within IOS/IIS which assert an expansionary inclusion of the self in others and groups.

Whilst common experiences nurtured belonging, key distinctives are also required for the family to function and interact cohesively. These were inherent in the early church in its socio-economic, male/female and ethnoracial diversity, (Galatians 3:28) and some of these are also central within its contemporary expressions. They will be discussed next.

7.4. BEING DISTINCTIVE IN THE ECCLESIAL FAMILY

Participants discussed the importance of diversity in the ecclesial family as potentially enhancing or eroding belonging. These elements of diversity included intergenerationality (fictive parents, siblings and biological children) in which positive engagement across generational lines was universally welcomed. Growth of the ecclesial family through outreach to non-believers (through personal evangelism or social-action based ministry) was a factor that could deepen participants' interpersonal and ecclesial belonging. Concern was expressed about male and female distinctives, exclusively by female participants, evincing (possibly generational) sensitivity to uniquely male leadership roles. These were seen as constituting anachronistic and aversive constraints on the development of women's serving and leadership, undermining belonging.

Ethnoracial representation in the church's leadership consistent with congregational demographics was another factor that could affect belonging for exclusively non-British participants. Losses and gains in the multi-ethnoracial environment of the church appeared unevenly borne by non-British-born participants, losses often detrimental, gains especially conducive to enriched belonging, with the potential to unveil enriched sociology and fresh qualities of Jesus to participants.

Scholars' views of Pauline familial metaphors from Chapter Six shall critique participants' data, including ecclesiological commitments embracing fictive siblingship. These include the need for performative intersibling *philadelphia* combined with *pietas* to nurture emollient intergenerational interactions. Furthermore, *huiothesis* as constituting a common status of salvation and siblingship shall be considered as eroding potentially injurious differentiation across ethnoracial lines. Throughout nearly all aspects of intersibling differentiation, the most salubrious blending of key distinctives encapsulates innately expansionary experiences. To explain these, Balswick, et al.'s (2021) *Being* and *Becoming* paradigm shall be related to intergenerational, believer/non-believer, male/female and ethnoracial engagement. Furthermore, Triandis' (1994, p. 241) and Berry, et al.'s (2006) additive multiculturalism and integration adaption profiles respectively shall be considered in light of participants' expansionary experiences of others' cultures. These are significant in evincing important 'Ephesian moments,' (Walls, 2002, p. 82) made possible by positive inter-ethnoracial interactions within the church.

Participants' self-reports of belonging were inherently intertwined with intergenerational commitments. As noted, it was a quality that was anticipated as salubrious, as in Maya's (2021) assertion that generational interactions were 'what I was looking for' in choosing an ecclesial home. Importantly, participants spoke about cross-generation engagement as potentially vivifying at both ends of the participants' age spectrum.

For example, British-born retiree Jeremy explained that his mentoring of a man in his early twenties achieved two purposes: first, the passing on age-acquired wisdom, and second the transformation of his sense of belonging from a previous position of detachment during his focus group, to a year later in which he stated ‘I do feel more that I belong,’ (Jeremy, 2022). This was also partly due to his being invited (along with his wife) to act as spiritual parents to a Nigerian couple in the church (see previous section). For Jeremy, belonging was inextricably linked to his perception of the church’s being familial, and this was achieved partly through specific intergenerational engagement in which ‘being labelled as a spiritual parent… makes you feel like a family,’ (Jeremy, 2022).

Another retiree, Robert (2021), spoke of the vibrancy of being intertwined with the lives of his grandchildren and their friends because ‘connection between all age ranges… promotes a sense of belonging, not just to one's own age range,’ but across age distinctions. Consistently, the two youngest participants also found intergenerational engagement salubrious. For example, Nailah (2021) claimed that ‘I have… many spiritual mothers and fathers which is amazing,’ who deepened her discipleship and the degree to which she felt known and valued, counterbalancing the tendency in which ‘rarely, am I, as an individual with my peers, asked questions that invite real conversation.’ Similarly, Filip (2021)[220] spoke of how his belonging was enhanced by supporting a couple in his own small group (they were around eight to ten years older) through the late stages of pregnancy and the early stages of parenting: ‘just the fact of how their small group supported them during… their pregnancy… giving birth to their daughter and stuff like that… so this is really cool reflection of of everything King’s does for me.’

What was striking about Filip’s reflection was that he seemed to experience the support the couple had received as though it had been offered to him personally. Again, it appears to be an expansion of himself into the lives of others, consistent with IOS (Inclusion of Others in Self) commitments that merge the experience of close others with the self in which the outcomes of both are conjoined, (Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2016, p. 89). Consequently, IOS offers some explanation of Filip's conflation of others' outcomes with his own: his strong sense of belonging precipitates such merging.

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[220] The youngest male contributor at 21.

Non-British-born participants, like Filip, were especially sensitive to positive intergenerational experiences. For instance, Ghanaian-born Martha (2021) commented that the 'parenting' of an older generation to a younger one meant that the church was 'like a mini family,' one which compensated the loss of biological family back in Africa. Other Africans made similar observations. For example, Miriam (2022) noted that the practical support she and her husband received through older couples in the church replaced 'what our parents [in Nigeria] would do if they were here.' Furthermore, this expression of fictive parenting promoted the familial feel of the church to the point 'we felt welcomed and embraced… loved and cared for,' (Miriam, 2022). Such intergenerational engagement often constructed an age-stratified fictive family providing practical support in parenting, for instance, which otherwise would have been undertaken by biological parents. This was especially salient for those who were first generation in the UK.

Participants' self-reports of belonging were inherently intertwined with intergenerational commitments in that they constituted normative fit for what constituted family, hence Maya's desire to find a wide congregational age span as she sought a new church. It was also embedded in Jeremy's assertion that being a spiritual father helped the church feel familial. Both normative and comparative fit were evident in Robert's enhanced belonging, (Hornsey, 2008, p. 208). Normative fit because intergenerational engagement 'promotes a sense of belonging' across age delineations typical of biological family, combined with comparative fit embedded in his reflection that 'I didn't relate to pensioners,' (Robert, 2021) as a teenager. The contrast between the church in which he grew up comprising impermeable age-group siloes, and his current experience of permeable cross-generational relationships, were factors in his ability to value the latter as comparatively more familial and thus assert a strong sense of ecclesial belonging.

The normative fit commitments seem to align closely with Johns' (2002, p. 76) assertion that familial intergenerationality constitutes 'God's strategy for expanding the family business, the Kingdom of God,' through which spiritual sons and daughters 'function as spiritual parents mediating His grace to another generation,' (p. 76). It appears that there may be a pneumatological reflex in participants which instinctively aligns with this purportedly divine scriptural (and thus normative) metanarrative. Therefore, positive interactions with other generations appeared to be universally expansionary, intertwining and expanding personal lives into others' across different age groups, thus strengthening 'familial' belonging. The exposure to positive influence from other generations seems expansionary for Jeremy, Martha, Nailah, Maya and Robert through a development of *Being* (for example, becoming a spiritual parent to others, or the influence being known by a fictive spiritual parent) to an expanded relational and performative *Becoming* uniquely facilitated though such intergenerational engagement.

As noted in Chapter Five, Balswick, et al. (loc. 390) assert that to bear *Imago Dei* is 'to reflect the Trinity's unity and uniqueness within our own relations with the divine and the human other. The relational life of the triune God is not represented *within* ourselves but *among* ourselves.' Consequently, intergenerationality is one component which expands participants into the uniqueness of others embedded within different generations. Furthermore, since this reflects the innate nature of the trinity, this also causes an expansion into greater Christlikeness and the potential to experience a fuller stature of Christ, (Walls, 2002, p. 82) (Ephesians 4:13).

The significance of intergenerationality was also linked to *intra*-biological familial dynamics. Nigerian-born Isah spoke of the vibrancy of the children's work and the positive effect on his own children. Isah's (2021) children had been part of the children's work for over six years, and he claimed 'the way they are now, growing, you know, as part of a group in the church, is also been extraordinary.' He explained that, in the week leading up to the first children's meeting post-lockdown, his children were eager to reconnect. He noted that 'if they're excited about church, we're excited,' (Isah, 2021). Like others, spiritual growth of his children was conjoined with his and his wife's profounder belonging.

It was not just African-born participants who expressed this. British-born Charlotte (2021) reinforced what seemed to be an almost ubiquitous appreciation of the children's work: 'it helps the whole family to feel like you belong.' The growth of a new generation of believers was foundational to many participants' belonging. Of course, this was in the context of biological family. It again may be party explained by IOS in which identification with the outcome of a close relation is merged with the outcome of the self, (Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2016, p. 89). Furthermore, the development, or *Becoming* of a close other is imbibed as a merged growth of the self. Both belonging and *Becoming* of close others appear to be generative across intergenerational boundaries, especially for parents, because it is inherently expansionary: of offspring and the merged parental self.

Other forms of growth of the ecclesial family deepened participants' belonging. These were evident through the anticipated addition of non-believers via personal evangelism, social action-based outreach, and overseas mission. These were activities that were discussed in expansionary terms across multiple factors, and not merely through gaining new converts.

For example, British-born Paula's spoke about the church's preaching on personal evangelism through the church's BLESS initiative (see Chapter Three). She explained that 'the messages that often come across to me is that you build yourself up for what you're going to give out. It's not about me, me, me,' (Paula, 2021). Her experience of such outreach was that it displaced self-absorption through considering the needs of others, ultimately building up the individual who did so. It was expansionary in terms of her serving, her desire to include others, her relationships with others, and the growth of the church. It is the antithesis of what Balswick, et al. (2021, loc. 107) assert in which when 'individual self-contemplation becomes the basis of self… the self *begins to disappear*.' Instead, the self can expand by virtue of its desire relationally to connect and draw closer to others, in this case through personal evangelism.

Social-action based outreach was also particularly effective in reinforcing ecclesial belonging for some participants. Imogen (2021) was insistent that 'it's actually living… Christian values… [I] feel like I'm contributing, and I feel like I'm getting to know people.' She was asserting a normative fit for what Christians should do – imitate Jesus. This was similar to Yomi's (2021) assertion that social-action was 'authentic' to Jesus' commands to reach the lost. However, Imogen's belonging was linked to contributing to something bigger than herself: one which expanded her own contribution and deepened her interpersonal relationships.[221] It was based upon the exercise of superordinate goals (of serving and reaching out) which required her own contributions simultaneously alongside those of others to succeed.

Furthermore, Sri Lankan Amila (2021) similarly spoke of the same ministry (to the street homeless) in expansionary numerical terms 'to bring more people… into the, you know God,' but also in upgrading courage of practitioners: 'everyone, have the, you know, the courage to do.' Furthermore, she noted that it was unifying in a twin sense: co-ordinating cohesive serving with a common aim, whilst also eroding barriers between leaders and non-leaders. In that sense, it promoted some form of performative *equal-status* across power differentials and ethnoracial boundaries, (Triandis, 1992), (Triandis, 1994, pp. 239-240): Amila, British-born Jonathan and

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[221] As noted in the previous section, Imogen was very sensitive to overcoming superficial and possibly inconsequential relationships.

Imogen, Polish-born Filip and Hungarian-born Arpad were all participants serving in this ministry.

Pre-existing group identities possibly crystalised across ethnoracial lines were thus potentially reconfigured through a superordinate goal of serving the homeless, (Triandis, 1994, pp. 240, 257) (see also (Crocker & Nuer, 2003, pp. 5-6), (Sherif, et al., 1988, p. 209)). As noted in the previous section, such common goals 'effectively furnish a superordinate common identity,' enhancing mutual belonging to an overarching ecclesial ingroup, (Hogg & Abrams, 2006, p. 85), (Marti, 2009, p. 56). The significance of the promotion of equal-status across group delineations shall be considered again shortly.

For the social action-based outreach to be effective, the mutual contribution of others was essential in delivering positive outcomes, (Triandis, 1994, pp. 239-240). Courage was also required (this ministry is not without risk because of the addictions of the guests) and the exercise of this was reported as generative of belonging. Baumeister & Leary (1995, p. 518) note that both courage (necessitated by 'external threat' from an outgroup) and adversity can be factors in reinforcing dyadic and intra-group belonging, (citing (Elder & Clipp, 1988, p. 177), (Elder & Clipp, 1989, p. 326)).[222]

This blend of courage and mutual trust was especially transformative for Jeremy: at the time of his focus group, he was clearly disaffected, and his belonging was compromised on many levels. A year later, in a follow-up interview, Jeremy (2022) stated that his belonging had changed. He explained why, partly in terms of his serving of the homeless: 'you feel part of the team, and you are doing something out there for people, and you build relationships with the people you are serving alongside.' He contrasted this with traditional small groups in which he claimed, 'you just sort of sit there, looking at each other,' (Jeremy, 2022).

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[222] Although their research encompassed uniquely male interactions.

He opined that his experiences of traditional bible-study small groups were comparatively static: sitting and observing. The transformation brought by his involvement with the street homeless was that it was a highly performative engagement involving others. Jeremy (2022) suggested that the reason for deepened relationships was that 'you're focussed on a goal… on other people, serving them. And… you have a part to play that is needed.' He spoke of being invited to speak at an outreach meal with homeless guests: 'I am started to be developed and stretched into something, you know,' (Jeremy, 2022).

Being part of something altruistic, that brought together a diversity of giftings, bred tighter dyadic and intra-group relationships. The nature of such evangelism necessitated upgraded courage, mutual trust and dependency: it also seemed to precipitate resultant tighter interpersonal relationships and fictive ecclesial *philadelphia*. It was also an expansionary opportunity to express and develop gifting – in Jeremy's case, speaking and serving. The overlap with the expansionary and performative nature of serving, noted in the previous section, is apparent. Balswick, et al.'s (2021) assertion of *Being* and *Becoming* in which individuals have intrinsic being through status which is constantly revised through relational interaction within activist engagement partly explains such upgraded belonging. For Jeremy (2022), this is occurring through collective activism causing him to be 'developed and stretched' through deployment of his gifts alongside others: his *Being* is being transformed relationally and performatively into an expanded *Becoming*, enhancing belonging.

Whilst outreach was universally reported as salubrious, male/female distinctions could be seriously disjunctive. German-born Steffi (2021) reported that she believed her experiences had been 'different, because I'm a woman.' She lamented that different leadership opportunities available to men and women appeared discriminatory. This was an 'elephant in the room' because it was rarely discussed, (Steffi, 2022). Furthermore, the clear differentiation between the sexes left women with unfulfilled and unexpressed leadership potential: it constituted a synthetic 'limit' imposed on women, (Steffi, 2022). Consequently, some of her female peers had left the church 'because of the lack of women,' in senior leadership, (Steffi, 2021).

Steffi (2022) contrasted this with experiences outside the church, which appeared to be far more intentional and progressive: 'there's efforts… to have equal representation of things.' By comparison, the church came across as 'being behind on that,' (Steffi, 2022) and thus anachronistic and contractionary in its praxis. Wignall (2023, p. 65) considers similar practices at Terry Virgo's original Brighton church, noting that these chafe against 'wider cultural notions of gender based around equality and universal suffrage.' He concludes that Newfrontiers' traditional patriarchal boundaries are especially problematic for younger women because such restrictions make it problematic for them to 'find a proper "fit"' within the church, (p. 65).

Furthermore, the rationale for proscriptions around leadership was inadequately articulated, partly because 'it's covered once… but then it's never talked about again,' (Steffi, 2021). This led to its position being inadequately understood: 'I probably would struggle to explain exactly why,' (Steffi, 2022). Steffi also spoke of the need to see other women in senior leadership positions to have confidence that she and others could, in her view, rightfully advance into comparable roles. Indeed, women in elevated leadership in Newfrontiers constitute 'beacons… of a Charismatic femininity' which others like Steffi can subsequently emulate, (Wignall, 2023, p. 73). For Steffi, it seemed that discriminatory praxis was illegitimate (there was no defensible rationale for its justification). It also appeared unstable by comparison to external secular praxis combined with the apparent inconsistency of some senior leadership positions being open to women, such as being able to be part of the SLT, but not others, including eldership.

However, Steffi (2022) claimed that she had stayed in the church because eldership, whilst not *personally* salient to her ('the funny thing is, I don't want to be an elder'), was nonetheless salient within her *social* identity as a woman ('this is more of a principle thing'). She could resolve the tension because she claimed to 'know the eldership more than a average churchgoer,' (Steffi, 2022). She explained that she trusted the elders (as individuals within a group) to be well motivated in their love for Jesus and the church.

SIT and SCT offer some explanation for Steffi's dual position. Seeing leaders as highly prototypical ingroupers (within the church through their devotion to Jesus and church adherents), enabled the attribution of positive qualities to the male eldership outgroup, (Hornsey, 2008, p. 211), (Hogg, 2001, p. 69). This assuaged her concerns to some degree on the motives behind an illegitimate, insecure and non-consensual status differential, (Turner & Reynolds, 2003, p. 138). Ultimately, however, this combination is unstable potentially precipitating conflict over groups' comparative status, (Hogg & Abrams, 2006, p. 60). This is because 'differentiation changes into discrimination when two parties disagree about the appropriateness and justifiability of a respective distribution and of the underlying categorisation,' in this case male/female, and consequently 'dissent results,' (Mummendey & Otten, 2003, p. 126). The observation Steffi made over the legitimisation of the status hierarchy is correct: it is indeed rarely discussed or presented other than briefly (in around 20-30 minutes' discussion) in the church's membership course.

To summarise: the status differential appears illegitimate, unstable and non-consensual to some women, and this is possibly generational, (Wignall, 2023, p. 66). It may well violate commitments to normative fit in which the church comprises an egalitarian ecclesial siblingship, in which all roles can be performed by any sibling: male or female. Additionally, there may be generational accessibility differences across age groups which sensitise them to such an egalitarian perspective on siblingship (as anticipated by Edwards (2020): see Chapter Two); it was Steffi's age-peers whom she claimed had left the church.

Furthermore, it appears contractionary. This is because it appears to stifle the expression and growth of women's gifts and, within Balswick, et al.'s (2021, loc. 107) paradigm, comprises a constraint on *Becoming*. Relative to praxis in secular contexts and other Christian denominations (comparative fit within SCT), Newfrontiers position as it is articulated within King's is open to the accusation of being injuriously anachronistic. Therefore, Newfrontiers may well have a choice should it maintain its current complementarian position: that of aversive anachronism, or additive anachronism. Its future depends upon both the theological position upon which it settles (and the normative voices it chooses to foreground), and the way it communicates that position. Suggestions for refined praxis around these contentions shall be delayed until the next chapter.

Sensibilities towards leadership representation also embraced ethnoracial factors. Of course, this constitutes another minefield which, as a white male researcher, it could be hazardous to navigate. What seemed evident was that a few participants were willing to voice disquiet. Whether others were more reticent to do so is not known. However, those who did were unequivocal about the need for church leadership to reflect its congregational demographics. For Nigerian Kemi (2021), the observable imbalance 'didn't sit down well with me,' whilst German-born Steffi believed that greater representation across 'skin colour… ethnicity… that would improve… my sense of belonging.' Afro-American Mia (2021) agreed, noting that balanced ethnoracial representation in leadership would constitute a 'huge' improvement to her sense of belonging.[223]

Mia (2021) then proceeded to assert that imbalanced representation (like Steffi's position on male/female leadership differentiation) 'might be like the elephant in the room… I don't know if I can say this, Richard. I find you have all of the right question in the right way. And as long as there's people in leadership that's willing to ask the right questions, then the trajectory of the church can grow.' The process and dynamic of the focus group format thus seemed to embolden at least some of the participants to raise profoundly felt sensibilities, and consequently to feel heard and understood. This is reminiscent of Browning's (2005, p. 284) commitment (noted in the Introduction) to the Practical Theological enterprise as 'restorative. Individuals and groups like to be understood… being understood is a deep hunger of the human spirit.' Elements of this appeared to surface in some of the focus groups and subsequent follow-up interviews.

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[223] It should be noted that all such objections came from female participants.

Four factors seemed to underpin the concerns expressed: first, that balanced representation was self-obviously fairer, possibly because siblings and spiritual parents should bear resemblances that are immutable and manifest, such as ethnoracial ones: Mia (2021) wanted 'the leadership that it represents [to be consistent with] the diversity of the congregation.' Second, a lack of representative leadership was contractionary, constituting a restriction on the expression of suitably gifted leaders (some of whom were or may have been participants). They were being held back from leadership, being disempowered and possibly dishonoured thereby. Furthermore, this constituted a contraction on the development of the corporate church body because talented leaders were not being released to nurture and strengthen the church family.

Both contractionary components were strongly articulated by Martha (2022) who noted 'you get people come through with a lot of giftings, spiritual giftings and they are not tapped into. I sat at King's for years and I felt like I was just marking time.' Her personal sense of loss and attritional stagnancy was grievous and existential: however, she was clear that this failure to release latent leadership talent also impaired the concomitant development of the wider church body.

Third, leaders from similar cultural backgrounds would be more aware of the cultural pressures underpinning concerns than British-born ones. Nigerian-born Sani (2023) made this point clearly noting that a Nigerian coming into eldership ‘definitely creates an opening to share… he really knows what angle I'm coming from.’ The transformation of leadership into more balanced congregational representation is spoken of in expansionary terms: of being understood, of sharing viewpoints leading to increased participation.

Finally, a failure of balanced leadership representation was deemed a deficiency in relational engagement, Martha (2022) further claimed, because potential leaders were not well ‘known’ relationally and performatively by incumbent leaders. Therefore, it seemed some siblings were being preferred over others because existing leaders were prioritising specific relationships; these would appear manifestly to fall across racial lines. Such differentiation was thus egregious because it appeared that the leadership valued specific siblings more than others.

This chafes grievously against the normative principle of mutual sibling honouring irrespective of background. As noted previously, Paul encouraged ecclesial fictive siblings to consider one another as blood relatives but more so – to ‘outdo each other in showing honor,’ (Bartchy, 1999, p. 69). Should the same Holy Spirit be active in both the early and contemporary churches, preferential treatment, witting or otherwise, of one group runs contrary to such an injunction for universal honour, and thus appears entirely unfamilial within such a paradigm. It is thus appropriate, and pneumatologically consistent, for participants comprising fictive ecclesial siblings to find such unfamilial treatment corrosive of belonging.

This position, like the other ‘elephant in the room’ (Steffi, 2022) of unequal male/female leadership opportunities, was again spoken of as being illegitimate, insecure and non-consensual for those who raised it, and thus unstable and likely to be a source of conflict, (Hogg & Abrams, 2006, p. 60), (Mummendey & Otten, 2003, p.

126). Psychologically, as Triandis (1994, pp. 239-240) points out in his model of culture shock amelioration, equal-status contact whereby leadership potential is equally considered, known and deployed from across intergroup (ethnoracial) boundaries is foundational to the creation of a perception of similarity across distinctions. Such similarity subsequently erodes intergroup boundaries into a common superordinate group, enhancing ecclesial group belonging from previously marginalised groups.

Consequently, when leadership changes which promoted more equitable representation were apparent, belonging was upgraded. For instance, Sani (2023) was effusive how a fellow Nigerian appointed to eldership changed his sense of belonging: 'Yeah, it definitely does!' Consistent with Balswick, et al.'s (2021) *Being* and *Becoming* paradigm, it creates the possibility of expansionary *Becoming* through the potential to develop personally into appropriate leadership roles, but also for that *Becoming* to develop the corporate church body through the deployment of such leadership talent. It thereby offers the possibility for the church to realise its expansionary 'full stature of Christ,' (Walls, 2002, p. 82).

Of course, this raises the awkward issue of racism (sub-conscious or intentional). Such an allegation was never directly expressed by any non-British-born participant. Martha presumed that the appointment of higher profile leaders (such as a Nigerian-born elder, and platform ministries such as preachers and meeting anchors) was linked to a specific response to George Floyd's appalling death. This was as close as any participant came to verbalising any form of racial preference or discrimination within leadership. Of course, I was part of the leadership team releasing new leaders. What role I took in mentoring the Nigerian who came into eldership was never foregrounded to the church. Therefore, whether participants considered me embedded within any systemic bias, or as contributing to its amelioration, was not explicitly expressed (other than Mia's (2021) positive comments noted above).

What was intentional on my part, however, was my presentation within Edwards' (2020) leader/servant/learner paradigm, and the opportunity for participants to speak as a 'majority,' with my comprising the researcher 'minority' within the focus groups (see Chapter Two). Furthermore, follow-up interviews gave a second opportunity for participants (some new, like Sani) to express their views. However, as noted, Sani was clear that there were certain topics he would probably only address with a fellow African. This may well have influenced what participants were willing to share or withhold. A different researcher from a different background may well uncover different results. Notwithstanding, disquiet over unequal leadership representation was voiced by multiple participants; Ghanaian Martha appeared to be very comfortable to engage in a lengthy discourse about this contention in her follow-up interview, for example, as were Steffi, Mia, Sani and Alice.

As noted in Chapter Six, some scholars are convinced that the erasure of ethnic distinctions within Pauline ecclesiology is built upon *huiothesia* in which, through salvation and baptism, all attain a common status as sons and inheritors, irrespective of preceding biological and ethnoracial familial history. The well-being of every fictive sibling becomes the concern and duty of every other sibling by virtue of their adoption and the subsequent imperative to demonstrate *philadelphia* (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 307), (deSilva, 2000, p. 218) and *pietas*, (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 52), (Vuolanto, 2016, p. 491).

Huiothesia and the commonalities it confers constitute the antidote to discrimination and preference, (Burke, 2006, p. 171), (Atkins, 1991, p. 182), (Aasgaard, 2004, p. 307). It should be uppermost in the minds, therefore, of leadership as it identifies and releases leaders in the church. It should also be mindful of the assertion made by Steffi: that seeing others with similar characteristics to hers in leadership would enhance her own belonging (primarily, but not exclusively, her womanhood), as well as her hope that she could also aspire to comparable leadership roles. Siblings often bear visual resemblances: the effect of releasing greater diversity could well be generative, therefore, as Steffi had asserted in terms of female representation.

Contemporary challenges surrounding ethnoracial harmony, such as those in the author's home church, are not new. As noted in section 6.2, the creation of ethnoracially diverse churches in the Pauline era was highly problematic, especially across Jewish/Gentile divisions.[224] However, Paul was intentional in assembling a multicultural leadership team comprising Barnabas and Titus, Jew and Greek, (DeYoung, et al., 2003, p. 32). Furthermore, in Acts 6, when the church 'stood on the verge of an ethnic conflict,' (p. 22) owing to the favouring Palestinian-born widows over migrants from other parts of the Roman Empire in food distribution, seven leaders were appointed. What was significant was that, for some commentators, the apostles provide 'the first example of affirmative action,' (Witherington, 1998, p. 248) avoiding 'even the appearance of favoritism,' in which those chosen 'bore Greek names,' (p. 250) thus showing sensitivity and pro-activity towards marginalised ethnic groups.

The growth of a multi-ethnoracial congregation which embraces the whole ecclesial family requires measures which promote balanced ethnoracial representation. When it does, such pro-activity (demonstrated by Paul, and the Apostles in Acts 6) appears to be conducive to upgraded belonging, as participants Martha and Sani reported, consistent with a superordinate pneumatological linkage between the early and contemporary church, (Cartledge, 2003, p. 53).

The gains in adherence caused by more intentional blending of leadership across cultures may go some way to alleviating the costs borne by those coming into a multi-ethnoracial church. As noted in section 4.4, considerable losses were articulated almost exclusively by non-British-born participants, and some of these comprised socio-cultural factors, centring on food and hospitality. For example, Nailah was shocked by the lack of effort in British food preparation and the short duration of interpersonal interactions compared with her Nigerian upbringing. These seemed superficial and unwelcoming by contrast to her own expectations. Her conclusion was 'you're being so inhospitable!' and she claimed she felt undervalued, (Nailah, 2023).

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[224] Consistent with Senior Leader Harbour's (KCHW, 2020) espoused position in Chapter Three that diversity can lead to 'clashing notes… challenges… misunderstandings.'

The latter seemed part of a broader contraction of in-depth sociality in which the duration of engagement would seem comparatively short: 'I would only be there for an hour and half,' (Nailah, 2023). 'I was discombobulated,' Nailah (2023) claimed, by apparently compromised expressions of hospitality and sociality. Others agreed, particularly on the latter, with Alice (2023) concluding that she did not expect 'super connectedness' with British-born congregants in contrast to 'if I went to a Nigerian church.' This caused her to present herself as 'artificial' and cautious about transgressing inscrutable intercultural social mores.[225]

Similarly, Mia (2023) felt she could only go 'so far' in relationships with others in small groups which was painfully constraining. She then explained that the consequence was 'we do find ourselves like closing our mouth,' (Mia, 2023) restricting her willingness to share her life and thoughts with others. Her daughter Crista (2023) agreed, asserting that 'we're concealing God… that's the painful bit.' The pain constituted a contraction of their worship (containing their love of God) on top of their compromised sociality.

Those from the dominant social group, the British-born, reported almost no such losses[226] and thus the balance of losses and gains across the church does not seem to be shared equally. Instead, it appears to depend in no small part upon racial factors.

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[225] It is also worth considering that Alice was also in close friendships with fellow Nigerians in the church with whom she could interact without the loss of authenticity she perceived in non-Nigerian settings.

[226] Apart from Robert's (2024) comments on 'uncontextualised' use of scripture and congregants' late arrival affecting his experience of corporate sung-worship, and Paula's (2023) lament around the singing of carols in Chapter Four.

For instance, when asked about losses they had experienced specifically because of the diverse cultural composition of the church, British-born Jeremy, German-born Steffi and Hungarian-born Arpad had almost identical responses, the latter observing that he could not 'say anything is a loss for me,' (Arpad, 2023). Indeed, their experiences of diversity comprised solely gains.

Other losses were also apparent from non-British-born participants, and these were principally ecclesiological in which lack of leadership vibrancy was cited as deleterious to belonging: Martha (2022) had asserted 'the way the prayer was handled' was too subdued for Africans to feel connected, and Alice (2023) spoke about her need to access online communal worship that 'is a bit more vibrant' than her experiences at King's. Such deleterious experiences may partly be explained by acculturation theory. Within this, *subtractive* multiculturalism occurs when 'people need to subtract something, lose some of their original cultural elements' in interacting with others, (Triandis, 1994, p. 241). It is a form of acculturative stress in which individuals experience associated 'feelings of alienation, loss of identity,' (Berry, et al., 1989, p. 188) (see also (Triandis, 1994, p. 263)) precipitating 'negative emotional states,' (Searle & Ward, 1990, p. 450).

Other factors also appear to be salient. The first is that acculturative stress can be precipitated by *non-isomorphic attribution*. In this, two parties attribute different reasons underlying a specific behaviour, (Triandis, 1994, p. 182), (see also (Hall, 1990, p. 181)). For Nailah, meeting in coffee shops rather than homes, sharing food prepared by corporations not individuals, and short-duration interactions constituted a rejection of her through deficient hospitality and sociality. However, for British-born congregants, these were normative relational expressions, most likely with no desire to alienate or demean. They constitute different expressions of hospitality. However, they are stressful and aversive when compared to alternative norms – Nigerian ones, in Nailah's case. However, upon reflection, Nailah (2023) concluded that ‘there are other ways to express hospitality, and other ways to eat dinner, other ways to be kind that I'd never seen before,’ in which the acculturative stress is not necessarily fixed and ossified, but it can be transitory and subsequently re-evaluated dependent upon sustained and positive intergroup experiences.

Notwithstanding, cultural differences between individualistic and collectivist impulses may also partly explain such losses. As noted previously, Triandis (1995, p. 157ff) highlights a series of key differences across this distinction. However, a key one may be that individualist cultures anticipate more transient interpersonal relationships which may be perceived as ‘superficial and short-term and thus disappointing to collectivists,’ (p. 162). This seemed to be the case, not just for Nailah, but for Nigerian-born Alice and US-raised Mia and Crista. Cultural distance is unavoidable in any richly diverse context, including a multi-ethnoracial church comprising a blend of individualist and collectivist cultures whose social mores and attributions sometimes diverge.[227]

Therefore, it may not be possible to mitigate against all perceived loss. As in the challenges with the Antioch church in Acts 15, the quest for unity ‘reminds us that racial reconciliation and multiracial congregations come at a cost and with sacrifice,’ (DeYoung, et al., 2003, p. 36). For instance, in Acts 15:19-20, Peter and James wrote to Gentile believers to avoid foods polluted by idols, the meat of strangled animals or blood and to remain sexually pure. Such proscriptions were established to promote sociality between Jew and Gentile, (Meeks, 2003, p. 161). However, some ‘Gentile practices were specially offensive to Jews, and if these practices were given up, Jewish Christians would feel that an obstacle in the way of table fellowship… with their Gentile brethren had been removed,’ (DeYoung, et al., 2003, p. 35). The unavoidable loss of some cultural elements may ultimately be worthwhile if the consequence is greater unity and positive interaction: ‘the people read it and were glad for its encouraging message,' (Acts 15:31). Indeed, Nailah (2023) concluded that, despite the aforementioned losses over sociality and hospitality, 'I think I gained a lot more than I laid down – a lot more.'

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[227] For a metric measuring cultural difference, see (Babiker, et al., 1980, p. 109), (Searle & Ward, 1990).

Therefore, whilst losses were existential and painful, there were also counterbalancing gains which may be those anticipated within Walls' (2002, p. 82) 'Ephesian moments' in which a fuller disclosure of the stature of Christ may be tantalisingly glimpsed. These were specifically due to the cultural diversity within the church, and they were generative of participants' belonging. The gains were sociological, eschatological, ecclesiological and theological, as outlined in section 4.4, with many of these simultaneously intertwined.

Starting with the first, Isah explained that the first group he had led comprised congregants from eight nations with mutual exploration of, and learning from, one another's cultures vivifying and expansionary. The experience of commonality in the presence of diversity bred strong fictive sibling bonds. For example, Isah (2021) explained that 'the way we integrated was so, so good.' Isah (2021) expounded why the confluence of differing cultures was so refreshing:

> It's just so brilliant… everybody just wanted to learn. "Oh, so you do this – oh yeah, we have something similar"… and just, you knowing that, this is my brother from another nation, or my sister from somewhere else.

Isah enthused over the surprising commonality that was experienced across ostensibly very different cultures. The love that emerged was profound, bridging geographical, racial and cultural boundaries. It fostered sibling-type bonds, further buttressing the perception of church as family. At times Isah appeared lost for words as he recalled the seeming transcendence cross-cultural engagement. He paused as he attempted to summarise his thoughts – it was 'beautiful, beautiful,' (Isah, 2021).

When asked about this, he explained that this beauty extended beyond unity across disparate backgrounds to the communal experience of learning from one another. It was, again, an expansionary encounter. As Hogg (2006, p. 68) has noted, social categorisation is based on the 'accentuation effect' in which perceived similarities are exaggerated between fellow ingroupers when strong group belonging is self-ascribed. Furthermore, Isah is describing an expansionary environment in which conflict-free diversity triggers reciprocal exploration and learning. He is articulating constant transformations in his state of *Being*, through *Becoming* – expansion through learning across multiple dimensions. These are cultural, through the experience of others very different in background, relational through the creation of new fictive sibling bonds, and richly affective – 'you know, shedding tears,' (Isah, 2021).

Significantly, Isah's small group was inherently diverse: no specific culture dominated. Immersed within diversity, he may have felt liberated into such mutual exploration, rather than being in a minority dominated by British-born believers. This has overlaps with Nailah's (2021) experiences in which she claimed that her 'blackness' was not subverted, challenged nor contested: instead, she found it 'refreshing to be in a place where I go often, where there's diversity.' For Nailah (2021), like Isah, she found diversity vivifying because it precipitated a need for mutual exploration and bridge-building, nurturing 'humility and a lack of judgment,' which she considered Christlike. As mentioned earlier, this constitutes an experience of a fuller stature of Christ, (Walls, 2002, p. 82) through personal transformation brought about by the harmonious co-existence of diversity, without eradication or compromise of the latter. Significantly, she did not feel compelled to conform to imposed social norms – either from her Nigerian upbringing, or in 'white spaces' where she felt it was difficult to fit in. Nailah was able contextually to select what she considered to be appropriate and authentic for her.

The sociological benefits of diversity extended beyond positive intercultural and interpersonal interactions to the observation of alternative familial cultures, with both British- and non-British-born gaining different benefits. For example, the quietness and gentleness experienced by Nailah (2023) in a British household contrasted with her more vivacious family upbringing, 'I gained loads of joy just by being around the Hursts. They are wonderful.' Conversely, the experience of more inclusive and enduring relationships, from African families who appeared especially inclusive to those from outside their immediate familial units, was greatly valued by British-born Paula: it provided some counterbalance to a sense of isolation as a single woman by connecting her to an expanded network of fictive siblings. This was because African sociality 'is more community than just the nuclear family,' (Paula, 2023). Mia and Crista also commented that exposure to inclusive African families had positively influenced their own intra-family closeness and commitment with the result that 'we're very connected now,' which had precipitated a 'bettering' of their family, (Crista, 2023).

The learning was not simply sociological: it was theological in that it enabled fresh perspectives on divine encounters in worship. For example, the diverse ecclesiology permitted Akin (2021) to experience God in richer dimensions and savour a foretaste of the eschatological reality of diverse worship through his own experiential theological revelation: 'It's a preview of what heaven would look like or what heaven looks like... It also gives a sense of belonging.' Richer belonging was attributed by Akin (2021) to the uniquely diverse worship context which stood in marked contrast to his previous experiences of monoracial congregations from which he concluded 'the church that is one colour does not appeal to me.' It was an experience of the fuller stature of Christ himself *alongside* close but distinctive others, (Walls, 2002, p. 82).

Akin (2021) cited the stability he had experienced was positive because it 'depicts togetherness. It depicts orderliness,' a pre-requisite, he asserted, for the building of healthy ethnoracially-diverse communities. Nigerian-born Sani and Alice agreed noting that 'orderliness… structure is good,' (Sani, 2023) because they facilitated consistency and thus confidence in 'inviting people' to Sunday meetings, (Alice, 2023). Another contrastive experience for Nailah (2023) was the way worship and preaching were led in which British-born leaders were 'quite gentle in their approach, even though they can be direct as well.' This led her to conclude that 'I am experiencing life in God in and with his people in a way that I haven't seen before… Yeah, I gained so much,' (Nailah, 2023). The gentleness of the leaders was novel to her, but ultimately expansionary in that she was able to experience aspects of God, hitherto hidden, *in* distinctive others to reveal a fuller stature of Christ, (Walls, 2002, p. 82).

Similarly, Ghanaian Martha claimed that, through the close observation of British Christians' faithful lifestyles, her own discipleship had been greatly enriched. She believed that mimicking such faithfulness had promoted stronger obedience and closeness to God. This had subsequently transformed her into an 'ambassador and a witness' that glorified God more intensely: 'It was the best thing that ever happened to me,' Martha (2022) concluded, despite all the preceding losses she had articulated.

The benefits of ethnoracial interaction flowed both ways. For instance, the different prayer styles of Africans could unveil a fresh sense of God's dynamism for European-born participants. For example, Jeremy's (2022) experience of Africans in the church was that 'they have a bit more passion about them… I find them inspiring… their perspective is different… generally they wake us up a bit.' Steffi's (2022) view was that she had also learned from others specifically in terms of 'the ways that people from different cultures pray and worship,' and she anticipated that embracing more of these influences in corporate church life would be highly beneficial.

Significantly, the most rewarding gains were those which seemed to be additive, not subtractive. In other words, they could be added to existing cultural paradigms (sociological or theological) without subverting commitments or norms embedded within participants' own heritage cultures. For example, Nailah (2021) claimed that her ‘blackness’ (a key part of her social identity that she linked to her home and family, as well as to a broader category of non-Caucasians) was never unacceptable or ‘other’ when she was in a diverse ecclesial setting. Neither did she have to ‘prove [it] nor defend it,’ (Nailah, 2021). Her positive experiences of the ‘other’ were additive and did not displace those from her birth heritage: for example, her experience of living with the Hursts was expansionary: ‘I gained loads of joy,’ (2023). However, this did not eradicate or subvert her more vibrant upbringing. These additive experiences changed her and others, not by expunging treasured or embedded heritage cultural or idiosyncratic ideals, but by blending them with new ones, unveiling an expanded experience of Christlikeness, (Walls, 2002, p. 82).

These additive experiences align closely to Berry, et al.’s (2006, p. 325) *integration* adaption profile in which being simultaneously immersed in twin cultures promotes the most salubrious psychological and sociological outcomes and belonging. Liebkind (2003, p. 314) concludes that the mutual embracing of twin cultures is ‘the most preferred acculturation strategy… in virtually every study… for all types of acculturating groups.’

Interestingly, such positive outcomes are not restricted to first generation migrants: they are bi-directional because they apply also to host-culture constituents, (Berry, et al., 2006, p. 325). Consequently, similarly positive and expansionary outcomes (sociological and theological) were apparent for British-born participants. Paula spoke of her desire to ‘learn things from each other… [to] challenge[] some of your own ideals,’ and the devotion of African-born Christians in helping her to feel needed and loved as a single woman. As noted, Jeremy spoke of the impassioned contributions of Nigerians as rejuvenating.

All such additive experiences were possible by virtue of the contrast between two co-existent cultures dependent upon simultaneous experiences of both. They enabled British-born and non-British-born participants to experience positive shifts in their states of *Being* through additive *Becoming*, a becoming possible only through experience of others from different heritages. Indeed, social psychology seems to anticipate such salubrious 'Ephesian moments' evincing a fuller stature of Christ *in* and *alongside* distinctive others, (Walls, 2002, p. 82) through its paradigm of *Being* and *Becoming*. Within this, increased psychological and socio-cultural well-being occur through additive multiculturalism, (Triandis, 1994, p. 241), made possible by dual immersion in heritage and host cultures, (Berry, et al., 2006, p. 313), (Liebkind, 2003, p. 314).

This creative and additive blending of sociological and theological disclosures from other cultures is what DeYoung, et al., (2003, p. 169) term *mestizaje* (from the creation of Latino culture out of the mixture of different human groups that influenced it). This *mestizaje* congregational culture 'transcends the worldly cultures… relying on the distinctiveness of its different cultures and peoples to create a unity far more complete than can be done otherwise.' They liken it to a choir in which the different voices blend to produce a richer experience than possible with single vocalists, their distinctive qualities instead creating 'a cohesive new whole,' (p. 169).[228]

They argue that this blending simultaneously eradicates cultural elimination and creates 'space for a new, shared experience. Perhaps this was what the author of Ephesians described when referring to Jews and Gentiles become "one new humanity" (2:15).' It could well constitute an 'Ephesian moment,' (Walls, 2002, p. 82) or indeed a plethora of them, uniquely made possible by multi-ethnoracial church belonging, underpinned by the courage of those who commit to their diverse fictive siblingship. Distinctiveness is anticipated in Pauline ecclesiology, in which differences between siblings 'appear to be viewed as given and acceptable,'

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[228] Similar to King's espoused theology, (KCHW, 2019, p. 12) in Chapter Three.

(Aasgaard, 2002, p. 307) but accommodated by a common status of sonship through *huiothesia*.

Whilst Newfrontiers and King's espouse a theology of common citizenship (for example, see (Virgo, 2007, p. 230), (KCHW, 2021b)), this never appeared in participants' self-reports. Rather, fictive sibling and parent metaphors dominated within a conceptualisation of church as family. This paradigm appears much richer than a reconfigured adherence to a new spiritual kingdom alone. Multi-ethnoracial *huiothesia* instead holds the potential to reconfigure loyalties, affections, learning, serving and relationships (interpersonal and with the Godhead): whilst it is accompanied by loss, it offers the potential to be powerfully expansionary, precipitating salubrious changes in *Being* through expansionary *Becoming*.

7.5. SUMMARY

Key normative familial metaphors, such as spiritual siblings and parents, espoused by aspects of Pauline ecclesiology are foregrounded in participants' data, and these correlate with participants' reports of ecclesial belonging. They can also be explained by social psychological and other theories. For instance, newcomers often appeared to engage an evaluative and liminal phase of circumspect 'pre-belonging' on arrival to the church, consistent with Turner & Turner's (2011) liminality theory. To overcome this, participants required leaders to act as guides and spiritual parents, steering newcomers into enriched sociality. Furthermore, leaders were expected to exemplify key aspects of the ecclesial culture, consistent with some Pauline *paterfamilias* qualities, (Perkins, 2012, p. 80), (Bruce, 1971, p. 51), (Fee, 1987b, p. 185) such as approachability, care, concern, adaptability and prayerfulness alongside authoritative leadership encouraging ethnoracial inclusivity. This is partly because participants evaluated leaders as exemplary prototypes, consistent with SCT, (Hogg, 2001, p. 69).

The ‘familiness’ of the church was judged according to participants’ pre-existing comparative and normative criteria of what should constitute healthy communal family life, again as predicted by SCT, (Turner & Reynolds, 2003, p. 137), (Spears, 2016, p. 173), (Wright, 2003, p. 415), (Hornsey, 2008, p. 208). Baptism as a foundational entry rite was conducive to belonging (for both neophytes and onlooking congregants) to the fictive family and to God. This echoes key Pauline themes of the effects of common pneumatological *huiothesia* and especially its power to resocialise neophytes (and onlookers) into a new community of believers, as well as to Christ Himself, thereby reinforcing ‘group integrity and solidarity,’ (deSilva, 2000, p. 207), (Atkins, 1991, p. 174), (Meeks, 2003, p. 88).

More resilient and profound belonging depended upon *philadelphia*, (Aasgaard, 2004, pp. 159, 165), (Moo, 1996, p. 779), (Sherwood, 2020, p. 438) and *pietas* (Dixon, 1992, p. 46), (Aasgaard, 2002, p. 521), (Saller, 2009, p. 131) in which enduring relationships of depth were established with other congregants: these were to mirror fictive familial sibling and parenting roles in which practical acts of care were discerned from others. These were often experienced within small groups, along with purposive serving. The latter was especially conducive to belonging when it was ‘expansionary’ in terms of gifting, competence and the promotion of interpersonal relationships, aligning with Balswick, et al.’s (2021, loc. 209) trinitarian paradigm of *Being* and *Becoming* of a reciprocating self through activism. Furthermore, common familial experiences of God in corporate settings through Sunday worship, weddings and funerals nurtured participants’ belonging, which could exceed that of biological family, predicted by Newfrontiers’ ecclesiology, (Virgo, 1993, p. 6) and aspects of Jesus’ teaching, (Morris, 1995, p. 332), (Elliott, 2002, p. 79). These experiences could be expressed through a unique and exclusive ‘ecclesial vernacular,’ consistent with Pauline *huiothesia* precipitating common sonship and pneumatologically-endowed language, (Dunn, 1993a, p. 221), (Meeks, 2003, p. 88), (Moo, 2013, p. 269).

The co-existence of key distinctives along intergenerational, believer/non-believer, male/female and ethnoracial delineations could promote or hinder belonging. Intergenerationality is foundational to Johns' (2002, p. 72) normative conviction that it simultaneously comprises an 'end and a means to an end' for God's mission and function of the church; consistently, positive intergenerational experiences could significantly promote belonging. Intergenerational engagement was especially significant for first generation migrants, often required to provide practical support in parenting, for example, which biological parents still living abroad would otherwise have offered.

Distinctives enriched belonging when they were, again, expansionary in terms of performativity, sociality and experiences of God, but highly aversive when contractionary. For instance, when women or ethnoracial minorities felt excluded from serving in senior leadership roles, it could compromise belonging, especially when it was deemed to be illegitimate, unstable and non-consensual, (Turner & Reynolds, 2003, p. 138) and likely to trigger resultant dissent, (Mummendey & Otten, 2003, p. 126). This is partly because it constituted a stifling of the expression and growth of women's or ethnoracial minorities' gifts and, within Balswick, et al.'s (2021, loc. 107) paradigm, comprised a deleterious constraint on *Becoming*. It also breached Pauline injunctions to mutual honouring within the ecclesial family irrespective of preceding social status, (Bartchy, 1999, p. 73).

Ethnoracial boundaries could determine the relative balance of gains and losses experienced by participants, with first generation migrants experiencing greater losses, possibly because the costs of acculturation are more acutely borne by non-dominant groups, (Berry, 1988, p. 41) These could significantly disrupt belonging and could be socio-cultural or ecclesiological. Some of the former were due to *non-isomorphic attribution*, (Triandis, 1994, p. 182) in which two parties separated by significant cultural distance, (Babiker, et al., 1980, p. 109), (Searle & Ward, 1990) attributed different reasons underlying a specific behaviour, such as expressions of hospitality. Other socio-cultural losses caused participants to constrain their sociality or worship of God, leading to a sense of inauthenticity. This comprised *subtractive* multiculturalism, (Triandis, 1994, p. 241) which is associated with 'feelings of alienation, loss of identity,' (Berry, et al., 1989, p. 188) leading to negative affect, and compromised belonging, (Searle & Ward, 1990, p. 450).

Conversely, gains particularly enhanced belonging through *additive* multiculturalism, which is posited to promote both well-being and socio-cultural competence, (Triandis, 1994, p. 241). This could yield distinctive 'Ephesian moments' through the experience of diverse cultures by virtue of ethnoracial diversity, consistent with Berry's (2006, p. 325) integration adaption profile. The latter was contingent upon intentional engagement with twin cultures: a participant's heritage culture combined with a second novel and possibly inscrutable familial or ecclesial culture. This additive blending of sociological and theological disclosures from previously disparate ethnoracial groups can create a blended *mestizaje* congregational culture, in turning yielding a unity more profound than would otherwise be possible, (DeYoung, et al., 2003, p. 169).

This is in part because constant changes in the state of *Being* through *Becoming* could cause participants to merge their self-concept and outcomes both with close others and the familial ingroup, consistent with IOS and IIS theories, (Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2016, p. 89). Such expansionary transformations also enabled participants to experience a growth in Christlikeness *in* and *through* others, unveiling unique 'Ephesian moments' precipitating a fuller disclosure of the stature of Christ, (Walls, 2002, p. 82). Equal status across various groupings (ethnoracial, leader/congregant, fictive siblings, male/female) could enhance participant belonging, alongside the presence of superordinate goals contingent upon the mutual expression of diverse giftings, (Triandis, 1994, pp. 239-240), (Hogg & Abrams, 2006, p. 85) precipitating an inclusive ‘congregational identity,’ (Marti, 2009, p. 56).

With all these factors in mind, which recommendations could optimise ecclesial culture further to promote belonging across key distinctives such as intergenerational, believer/non-believer male/female and ethnoracial ones? These will be proposed in the next chapter to assist in ‘the creation of more critically held theory-laden practices,’ (Browning, 2005, p. 7).

8. MINISTERIAL OUTCOMES: REFINEMENTS TO ECCLESIAL PRAXIS TO REINFORCE ETHNORACIAL BELONGING

An objective of Practical Theology within Swinton & Mowat's (2006, p. 4) paradigm is to enable the 'faithful performance of the gospel,' through identifying vivifying praxis which facilitates this. Within this project, such faithful performance is the successful and harmonious blending of congregants from a variety of different nations and cultures to create a cohesive and diverse 'One New Man,' central to Newfrontiers' ethnoracial convictions, (Virgo, 2005, p. 6), (Jeffery, 2019b, p. 14). This is based upon scholars' views of *huiothesia* in which Paul attempts to unite previously divided ethnic groups, (Atkins, 1991, p. 187) in order to demonstrate a fuller 'stature of Christ,' through 'Ephesian moments,' facilitated through the co-existence of multiple cultures, (Walls, 2002, p. 82). Furthermore, it presages the reality of Revelation 7:9 in which a multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language stands before Christ worshipping in unison and unity, (Hylton, 2009, p. 105), (Benham (2012, loc. 2184).

As has been shown in Chapters Four and Seven, newcomers often engage a transitory and circumspect liminal state of 'pre-belonging,' representing detachment from a previous stable state (sometimes of adherence to a previous church) and into a boundaried but ambiguous limen (or margin). This requires guidance from others to assist newcomers to transition to a more stable state of aggregation. Leaders were often pivotal in this transition by acting both as social guides into more immersive community, and as ecclesial cultural exemplars.

Key qualities of the latter were those of approachability, prayerfulness, care and concern alongside decisiveness. When newcomers believed they were known by leaders and they experienced the above qualities from leaders, this combination was highly conducive to the exploration of deeper belonging. Therefore, how leaders become and remain accessible to newcomers requires consideration. A priority on Sunday morning meetings should be engagement with newcomers (despite the pressure to engage with more established congregants) and to be present where newcomers are encouraged to congregate. Leaders' availability to pray with newcomers (as part of a Sunday morning prayer team, for instance) should also be prioritised as a way of evincing expansionary Christlike qualities whilst also setting ecclesial cultural norms; participants' data clearly showed the benefit of these.

Furthermore, leaders (including those in any specific Welcome Team) should consider how expeditiously to invite newcomers into group life, and especially into bespoke newcomers' groups. Leaders' presence in newcomers' early small group experiences was significant in the research, and thus it is important that leaders consider their engagement with these. For instance, leadership should be present during newcomers' early steps into community, including by teaching, socialising and being strategically present at these groups so they feel known by newcomers. Additionally, leaders should consider how to engage newcomers in areas of expansionary serving as quickly as possible. This can be facilitated through simplifying sign-up and introductions to serving team leaders, for instance, by including an overview of serving opportunities and how to register interest within newcomers' groups' curricula.

Baptism by full immersion was mutually beneficial for belonging for baptisees and onlookers: continuing to promote baptism combined with testimonies from previous baptisees who have experienced tighter belonging to the church and God should be sought and, where permission is granted, shared with the wider church during corporate Sunday worship. Consistent signposting to the Exploring Baptism course should be maintained and promoted online and in newcomers' welcome literature.

More stable aggregation was achieved when congregants felt known and cared for by others in the church. This most often happened within small groups. A Welcome and Integration Team that tracked the progress of newcomers into group life appropriate to them was significant for some participants: invitations into group life by Welcome and Integration Team members are important, as well as follow-up to check up on the suitability of the small group to the newcomer. Newcomers should be assigned to one or two specific integrators who track their progress and contact them by the means approved by the newcomer. Testimonies of the vivifying (and 'expansionary') nature of salubrious group life need to be foregrounded, especially from newcomers. They should be highlighted regularly in Sunday worship meetings and newcomers' groups, and they could be facilitated through videoing suitable testimonies to ensure consistency and quality. These testimonies should also include messaging on the need to be committed to groups (consistent with participants' data), and the associated increased belonging such commitment can foster.

Some newcomers left because they could not navigate the self-selecting style of small groups: having a small group champion available during small group sign-up periods (once per term in the case of the King's Church) to assist and guide congregants could provide support to discuss the best choice of small group. Specifically, newcomers' small groups should include a session on the variety of small groups available after the newcomers' curriculum has finished, and outline the process of selection of small groups. Attendees of newcomers' groups should be asked whether they would prefer leaders to make that selection for them. A termly check by a small groups champion should be made to discern who is not attending small groups (monitored using the church database software), and contact made to find out the cause of any poor attendance or disengagement, alongside suggestions for other suitable groups the congregants could attend should they wish.

Being cared for was highly salubrious, the opposite deleterious. Small group leaders' training should include specific guidance on how to facilitate this within their groups, and this should also include the leaders of more serving-based activities (such as worship, audio-visual, prayer/prophetic teams). This is to avoid detached 'professionalism' cited in which serving eclipsed relational interactions, which was so aversive for some participants. For example, guidance could be given to small group leaders about how to delegate such care to other group members, and to ensure that each group member is allocated to someone else in the group (possibly not the leader) for pastoral support. Furthermore, how best to deploy technology (such as WhatsApp, takethemameal.com, regular phone calls) to facilitate mutual care and support should be incorporated into such training.

Serving, when deemed as expansionary of competence, gift and interpersonal relationships, was particularly conducive to enhanced belonging. A clear route into serving opportunities needs to be provided. This should take two forms: first, the identification of gifting and calling and, second, the appropriate signposting into relevant opportunities in the church. The first component was trialled by the author after the research element of this project had been completed. This was partly in response to the data participants had provided. It comprised a three-month curriculum evaluating attendees' calling, spiritual gifts (with tools to discern these), strengths (using standard online tests), resilience and future actions, with mentoring and one-to-one coaching built-in: a prophetic team who did not know attendees was also brought in to offer personal words of prophecy for attendees to weigh. Attendees were encouraged to devise personal action plans (which were discussed with mentors) for which they were encouraged to take responsibility and pursue. Furthermore, they were offered the opportunity to find a longer-term mentor to support them should they wish. Encouragingly, many attendees reported greater clarity about giftings and calling on completion of this curriculum.

The second component is that of signposting: as noted earlier for newcomers, all serving areas available within the church should be detailed with responsibilities, qualifications, demands on time and how to engage with the relevant team leader. This information should also be provided to those on the church's membership course, and then discussed during their post-course discussion with a leader to signpost congregants into appropriate serving. Newcomers' groups should also include one week in which they engage in serving an outreach ministry of the church (e.g., the homeless, those in debt, those trapped in commercial sexual exploitation, or street outreach) to permit a 'taster' of more courage-based ministries (which were especially conducive to closer belonging). This latter component has been trialled and, when done with group members serving together, found to be positive for congregants' mutual belonging and desire to be further involved in outreach.

Another element which promoted belonging was that of discerning God's direction and guidance in corporate worship meetings. This enabled participants to experience a fuller stature of Christ's qualities and presence alongside others, (Walls, 2002, p. 82). Space should be regularly created in such corporate worship to permit congregants to hear God speak to them, and to receive follow-up prayer and guidance afterwards from a trained prayer team.

The intergenerational nature of the church was hugely significant in promoting belonging for participants across a wide age range. Family days, such as picnics and family activities, which cater for all age ranges with activities for children and youth should be planned annually to create a cross-generational family environment. Corporate Sunday worship should incorporate testimonies from those who serve with youth and children to express the expansionary nature of such intergenerational interaction: conversely, children and youth should be encouraged to pray in such gatherings and share testimonies (with parental permission) of God's activity in their lives. Older children and youth with appropriate ability should be encouraged to play and sing in worship-leading collectives when ready.

The expansionary nature of serving in which participants felt needed can be especially challenging for those in retirement, even more so for those with mobility issues; retiree Jeremy showed considerable sensitivity to this himself. A consultation with this age group should be established to identify activities in which their wisdom, prayer, passions and gifts can be expressed in expansionary ways which contribute towards the health of the wider church body. Conversely, leadership should consult with young adults and student groups about the unique generational pressures they may be encountering that could be easily hidden from older leadership (for example, Nailah spoke about her 'blackness' and Steffi about the generational sensibilities to male/female leadership role models).

Specifically, regarding the latter, Newfrontiers' current stance too easily precipitates (possibly generationally-specific) *aversive anachronism.* It is aversive because the outcomes of its stance principally represent to some women an unwarranted contraction of women's development, in marked contrast to secular praxis and discourse. In terms of its theological rationale (which means, in evangelical terms, its justification from the New Testament – and especially Pauline – corpus which it considers normative, (Jeffery, 2019b, p. 12), (Pettit, 1993, p. 20)), it needs to re-clarify a settled position: possibly one promoting some form of a more feminist 'discipleship of equals' embracing equalisation of roles alongside soteriological status, or a more traditional Newfrontiers complementarian one.

Should the latter be chosen, its position needs to be discerned as stable, legitimate and consensual amongst congregants. To achieve this, it needs to constitute *additive anachronism* and to articulate why such a stance does not constitute aversive constraint but, instead, permits salubrious *Becoming* which is essential for the flourishing of self, (Balswick, et al., 2021, loc. 209). This requires explicit articulation of what is expansionary for women within such complementarian differentiation: for instance, how divinely apportioned gifts and talents will be expressed and developed, the gains women will experience in terms of their relationships with God and others, and how women will be valued and honoured within the ecclesial family. There may be no pain-free route forward: maintenance of complementarian praxis will be (possibly generationally) problematic as noted, but so may a shift to an egalitarian stance. This is sensitive because Newfrontiers' original conservative position may be seen by many (possibly older) adherents not as 'restrictive but as providing divinely ordained, effective structures for human (notably women's) flourishing,' (Aune, 2004, p. 19).

Outreach, especially social-action based, was particularly effective in increasing participants' sense of belonging to the church and one another. Whether or not this was because those who shared this were especially gifted or motivated in this area is not known, and how ubiquitous such upgraded belonging can be across a wider range of personalities and giftings is also unknown. Notwithstanding, an annual celebration of outreach in which practitioners share their 'expansionary' testimonies of increased courage, boldness and closeness to others (including those whom they serve) could precipitate a greater awareness of the vivifying nature for practitioners of such activities. Having ministry leaders being available to converse with congregants and discuss their suitability for involvement, including straightforward mechanisms for sign-up, may also facilitate an expansion of people willing to participate.

Ethnoracial sensibilities were also apparent in participants' reports. One refinement to praxis is that the church establishes a 'council of reference' to serve the eldership and senior leadership teams. This council should comprise those are born overseas, recently arrived in the UK (from Europe, the Americas, Asia and Africa) and who have been involved in the church for fewer than five years: they can thus readily recall the challenges they faced. They could meet with senior leaders twice yearly to identify issues of specific salience to migrants, including difficulties understanding or navigating both the internal ecclesial and the external secular cultures. What was apparent in the research data was that many aspects of ecclesial life were confusing, distracting or alien to some newcomers (such as the lack of a choir, the lack of priority given to some culturally-specific rites like newborn dedications and New Year's Eve Watch Nights), and these could be flagged to leadership in an orderly and consultative environment.

Furthermore, the proclivity for some participants to construct an intergenerational fictive family of spiritual parents and siblings needs further discussion, including the role that intentional mentoring both from British- and non-British-born congregants could play in assisting migrants' transition into the church and broader British society. The council of reference could assist in discussing perceptions and sensibilities around this issue. The composition of the council could be reviewed every two years, and it should be made clear that its role is strictly advisory and not governmental.

Leadership also needs to be attentive to the significance of its demographics and who is being represented and conversely who is not. Three biblical norms should be borne in mind: the release of marginalised leaders in Acts 6, Paul's deliberate appointment of leaders from across Jew/Gentile boundaries with Barnabas and Titus, and the Pauline metaphor of *huiothesia.* The latter equalises status of all congregants to adopted sons of God and thus as constituting mutual and reciprocal fictive siblings. Within this reconfigured socialisation, honour must liberally be apportioned across preceding divides with all congregants treated as blood kin. The release of suitable leadership is part of such honouring by recognising this ubiquitous sibling status. It should also be 'expansionary' in developing appropriate leadership talent across demographics as well as in enabling the church to achieve a 'fuller stature of Christ.'

Furthermore, ways to articulate the losses and gains of ethnoracial diversity need to be considered. Whilst the metaphor of an orchestra in rehearsal with the odd clanging cymbal or off-note was preached in the local church, (KCHW, 2020) more specific recognition of actual losses and gains could be expressed through personal interviews: this could be done annually during Sunday morning worship. These should enable all congregants to appreciate better the differential balance of losses and gains, and to be more aware of others' sensibilities. This could be embedded into a derivative of the 'Invited' series (see Chapter Three) in which congregants are encouraged to invite others from different ethnoracial and cultural backgrounds into their homes for food and hospitality.

The aim is to erode social barriers which may seem inscrutable or impermeable for both British- and non-British-born congregants. This is in recognition of the *Integration* adaption profile, (Berry, et al., 2006, p. 325) which was the most beneficial for socio-cultural competence and psychological well-being for both host *and* migrant cultures. It also appeared salubrious for participants in this study. Similarly, a refreshed 'Invited' series could also highlight sensibilities for singles in the church, who could feel marginalised and not well known. A speaker during the series could expound some of the challenges of singleness, and the actions others could take (such as inclusiveness, pro-active involvement in 'nuclear' family life) to embrace singles more meaningfully.

Finally, the status of leaders in the eyes of congregants requires action. It was noteworthy that some participants (see section 4.4) considered the presence of leaders in social-action-based ministries (such as outreach to the homeless) to be unifying, promoting a form of equal-status within the activity. It was also seen as promoting the church as a 'big family to bring more people… into… God.' (Amila, 2021). A review by leadership of the outreach and serving activities in which it is involved which facilitates a more 'familial' culture of interaction between leaders and non-leaders should be conducted. This is partly because it models the Pauline injunction of imitation of leadership lifestyle (1 Corinthians 4:16) which was based on immersion in the community life of the church, (Dawn & Peterson, 2000, p. 74).

It is hoped that incorporation of these ministerial outcomes will further boost congregants' vivifying and expansionary experiences of the fuller stature of Christ through unique 'Ephesian moments,' (Walls, 2002, p. 82) solely possible because of the richness of the ecclesial family's God-given ethnoracial diversity.

9. CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored the following: how do participants self-report their own sense of belonging and which elements facilitate or hinder such belonging? Within this broad question, it has also considered: which metaphors are deployed to frame these self-reports of belonging? For instance, how do, citizenship, corporeal or familial metaphors feature and how do these inspire and explain mutual belonging, and how do these differ across ethnoracial boundaries? In terms of entry into the church, what is the effect of water baptism on ecclesial belonging for participants and observers? Furthermore, what is the influence of leadership on belonging and which qualities of leadership promote belonging, and which dilute it? How does serving of others within the church and to those outside through evangelism influence belonging? It has also considered what is the role of ethnoracial background in determining what participants are gaining and losing as they negotiate community life in a diverse ecclesial setting, and how does the balance of these affect belonging? Furthermore, how does an ecclesiology which promotes uniquely male senior leadership influence belonging across male/female delineations?

This thesis demonstrates that the depth of participants' belonging depends upon their experience of the church as a coherent, loving, nurturing and performative family. This is because belonging is framed primarily within familial metaphors, especially fictive siblings and parents. Within these, leaders are evaluated as spiritual parents, guides and exemplars of Christ, in which qualities such as authority, approachability, care, prayerfulness and adaptability are anticipated. When experienced, participants' initial liminal and insecure attachments can be strengthened into subsequent deepened longer-term belonging. Fellow congregants are viewed primarily in siblingship but also more occasionally in parenting terms. Belonging is fortified when familial relationships of depth evincing positive affect and reciprocal care are established. Many first-generation migrants are especially sensitive to establishing fictive spiritual parents to compensate for the lack of biological family's closeness, support and care. Notably, self-reported ecclesial belonging can even surpass that within biological families.

The ecclesial fictive siblingship needs also to comprise a locus of performative serving of others. Within this, spiritual and practical gifts need expression and development. This is because belonging is contingent upon an expansionary instinct within which both relationships and serving competence undergo constant, positive and additive transformations. Consequently, discernment of relational or performative contraction is deleterious to belonging.

Siblingship relies upon a dialectic of similarity and difference. Whilst congregants' common sibling status is anticipated, differences across intergenerational, believer/non-believer, male/female and ethnoracial distinctions are simultaneously required and salubrious when harmonious. However, imbalances in leadership representation across ethnoracial and/or male/female delineations are aversive when they are considered to be illegitimate contractions of relational and performative engagement, and to chafe against egalitarian siblingship conceptions. This is especially significant within Newfrontiers ecclesiology which privileges solely male senior leadership, and it may specifically be more intensely aversive for younger participants immersed within pro-active societal egalitarianism.

This thesis further notes that the balance of gains and losses is especially onerous for non-British-born congregants necessitating attention from incumbent leaders. Finally, this thesis highlights 'Ephesian moments' uniquely made possible by ethnoracial diversity. These include refreshed revelations of God's nature and character, upgraded discipleship, and enhanced and deepened sociality.

The strengths of this study also comprise its potential weaknesses. I was an employed leader in the church (during the research phase), immersed in its culture and in the lives of some of the participants. This gave me an 'insider' perspective, not only on some of the personal histories and pastoral issues underpinning participants' contributions which may have been opaque to an external researcher, but also in terms of understanding the internal ecclesial language and ecclesiology. The study was longitudinal which enabled me to discuss changes in belonging over time, and to discern the elements underpinning these.

Conversely, some of the weaknesses are that I am a white, male leader. Consequently, sensibilities may have been unarticulated, consistent with one participant's assertion that he would only raise certain matters with those from a similar culture: a female or non-British researcher may have uncovered other data or a different balance of data. Furthermore, some participants may have wished to please me by overly positive comments by virtue of my leadership status[229] and my 'insider' perspective may also well have masked some significant factors. These may have been more evident to a true 'outsider' who could have discerned novel aspects of the research by contrast to other very different experiences. The focus group format may also have privileged more voluble participants, even though each participant was offered identical time for presentation of images. The research also considered the perspectives of those who were connected with the church at the time of the research: those who had left were not included although some participants expressed views that they claimed represented those who had done so.[230] Finally, the research was based on participants' subjective self-reports of belonging which may have been mutable and highly subjective.

Future research could investigate the longitudinal effects of greater female leadership representation in Newfrontiers, considering both male and female congregants, and the resultant changes in congregational balance between the two sexes.[231] This could consider the ecclesiological effects of this as well as resultant changes to participants' sense of belonging. Other projects could consider more deeply generational sensibilities to belonging, both for British-born and non-British born congregants, as well as self-reported belonging of participants focusing specifically on those from different socio-economic backgrounds. Additionally, future research could consider the degree of attachment to God and associated ecclesial belonging to others.[232] The role of prayer and its interaction with belonging could also be further examined.

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[229] Although criticisms of deficiencies in church culture, including aspects of the church for which I was responsible, were highly evident in the data.

[230] Especially Martha, Isah and Steffi, as noted in Chapter Four.

[231] Building on the assertions made by (Francis, et al., 2009) in Chapter One.

In conclusion, a 'fuller stature of Christ,' (Walls, 2002, p. 82) seems to emerge as salubrious intercultural contrasts are experienced, not for the purpose of eradicating or diminishing their co-existing opposites, but as adding to them, complementing them, making them fresher and more vibrant by virtue of their simultaneous co-existence. For example, British quietness can yield a revelation of the gentleness of Christ, African vibrancy can speak of his spiritual zeal and fervour. Authentic Christian lifestyles seen through the fresh lens of a different culture can yield a richer ambassadorial commission to follow Jesus more faithfully and fully: it can well constitute the best experience in a person's lifetime. British orderliness can kindle a new confidence to invite others into experiencing Jesus, whilst African spontaneity can awaken and enliven spiritual 'smouldering wicks', like Jeremy, possibly close to expiring.

Worshippers can savour a temporal apéritif of eternally glorious and diverse worship. Families can live closer to one another through the embrace of different cultural sociality; singles can enjoy enduring fictive sibling and familial attachments. All these contrasts can blend harmoniously, not subverted nor demeaned, but co-existent and celebrated. They can build up, bringing congregants and the church to a fuller stature of faith and disclosure of Jesus. Notwithstanding all the losses that accompany such risky ecclesiology, ethnoracial diversity seems to evince 'Ephesian moments.' As Isah (2021) explained in Chapter Four, these hold the rich potential to be truly 'beautiful, beautiful' when underpinned by the harmonious and additive familial blending of different generations, cultures and nations.

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[232] Indeed, (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1992, p. 273) suggest a secure attachment to God may, in fact, correlate to more secure adult relationships.

APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPANT FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM AND EXPLANATION: ‘PHOTO COLLECTION TASK’

How do you experience belonging and participation in this church community?

This project is looking at how different people from different backgrounds and ages experience belonging the King’s Church, High Wycombe.

You should collect **4 pictures**. They can be of anything you like with the aim being that they show **how you experience belonging and participation in this church community.** One picture should show in particular one thing that would *improve* your experience of belonging or participation in the church.

You have around a week to collect these pictures. After this you will be invited to share some or all of your pictures at a group session via Zoom with other members of your small group who have also taken part. The Zoom meeting will be recorded. During this meeting, you will have a chance to look at what other people have produced and discuss the different ideas expressed in the pictures.

The pictures you take won’t be seen by anyone else beyond this group. However, after the group session I will ask you if you would be happy for me to use your pictures in my final thesis. You should also be aware that you are free to withdraw from the exercise at any stage.

My details are given below. If you would like any further information about the task, or would like to ask some questions as you take the pictures, I would be more than happy to speak with you at any stage.

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Supervisor: Professor Peter Ward, Professor of Practical Theology, Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University. Email: peter.ward@durham.ac.uk. Tel: 0191 334 3824.

FOR THE PARTICIPANT [to be filled out at the Focus Group]

- I voluntarily agree to take part in this picture exercise.

- The nature and purpose of the research in which I am involved has been explained to me in writing/verbally.
- I acknowledge that my work will not be shown to anyone outside of the group and that request shall be sought at a later date for reproducing my work in a final thesis.
- I understand that I can ask further questions at any time.
- I understand that I may withdraw from this research and remove permission for any data obtained from me at any point without having to give a reason for withdrawing. If I wish to withdraw permission, I will contact the researcher or supervisor to request this.
- I have received a copy of this consent form for my own records.
- I understand that all data will be anonymous, and details that could identify me personally will not appear in the final thesis.
- Thank you so much for offering to take part in my research.

Your name:	
Address	
Telephone number	
Email	
Signature	
Date	

Guidelines for Taking Pictures

- Imagine that someone asked you: **‘How do you experience belonging and participation in this church community?’** Your pictures should be an answer to that question.

- You should collect up to 4 pictures which express how you experience this church community and how you participate in this community. One of these pictures should indicate what would *improve* your experience or participation.

- You can obtain these pictures via any means you wish (for instance, the internet), and you take your own photos using any means you like (camera / camera phone / tablet etc.). Your final selection can be a combination of the two sources, however you wish.

- Some of your pictures may be well thought-through and planned, others might be spontaneous.

- Be as imaginative as you like. They might show actual people or places, but they might also be symbolic, representative or abstract.

- The quality of the pictures is not all that important. Do feel free to put in as much/little effort as you feel happy to.

- Once you have taken the pictures, you will need to give them to Richard Lodge before the group session starts so that he can label them. The best way to do this will be to email them to him at richard.p.lodge@durham.ac.uk. If you can’t do this, you can always print them out and bring them to the group with you. If you’re stuck, don’t worry, please feel free to ask Richard for guidance.

- **If you are taking photos of people, you should make sure that you have their permission. If you are taking pictures of people, it is best to try and make them non-specific or take a group photo rather than one that is focused on one or two individuals.**

- **If you want to take photographs of children, please speak to Richard Lodge about this before doing so: this way we can be sure we are abiding King’s Church High Wycombe’s Safeguarding Policy related to photographing children.**

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