1. INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH PROJECT

1.1 The Research Problem

This study is born out of a concern toward the issue of why many established churches today are proving ineffective in reaching the members of Generation X, the first post-modern generation. Furthermore, it is rooted in a desire to discover how these churches might improve upon this situation. I am motivated to undertake this study in part by my own experiences within churches facing this struggle. Throughout my high school and university years, and again during my first several years of pastoral ministry, I found myself in churches that had enjoyed rich histories of vital ministry, but that now struggled in the face of this new dispensation. In each of these congregations, the percentage of the church body composed of members of the post-modern generations was unflatteringly disproportionate to that of the surrounding community. Unless this trend is reversed, each of these churches eventually will be forced to close its doors. Through my experiences of reading, travel, and dialoguing with pastors and laypeople from other churches, I am convinced that this crisis is widespread and worthy of considerable attention. Perhaps most significantly, as both lover of the church and Gen Xer, I possess a deep drive to work as a member of both groups in promoting a better future.

In recent years, I have come to be introduced to the idea of sustainable community as a theological category (Hendriks 2004:19-34). This means in part that, in light of the belief that the local church has been constituted as an eschatological community, it should recognize the challenge of enduring faithfully in the power of the Spirit "until he comes" (I Cor. 11:26) as integral to its identity. However, in order for this to occur, a congregation must strive to perpetuate its witness throughout each succeeding generation. Historically rooted in the intergenerational imperatives of the Hebrew tradition, Christians have demonstrated a keen awareness of this responsibility and the challenges that often accompany it.

This sense of duty has been given expression in a variety of published manuscripts released throughout the last 250 years. For example, Alexander Moncrieff published *Christ's Call to the Rising Generation in 1759*, which was followed by Eli Forbes's *The Importance of the Rising Generation* in 1795. Within two decades of this came

George Clayton's *A Pious Regard to the Interests of the Rising Generation* (1807) and James Bennett's *The Duties of the Churches Toward the Rising Generation* (1813). A century later, during the period between world wars, came Harris Elliott Kirk's *One Generation to Another* (1924), Francis James Grimke's *The Church Faces the College Generation* (1930), Edwin Edward Aubrey's *Religion and the Next Generation* (1931), and William Cameron's *Jesus and the Rising Generation* (1932). Since the late 1960s, books of this nature have been produced at an unprecedented rate. The fundamental reason for this lies in the fact that, as our society has experienced dramatic change at an accelerated rate, the church has struggled as never before to fulfil its intergenerational calling.

Most recently, much attention has been lent to the reality that, as our society journeys through the *post-modern shift*, many churches steeped in the culture of modernity are experiencing crisis. While major paradigm changes naturally come to bear on all sectors of society, such *shifts* impact the various generations who live through them differently. This is so by virtue of the fact that each generation experiences the movement of time through its own distinct "age location in history" (Strauss and Howe 1992:48). Thus, as the church endeavours to sustain its witness through any period of major societal change, the impact of this change will tend to manifest itself along generational lines to a certain degree. In the present era, Generation X provides a clear example of the impact of "age location in history." As Long (1997:2) has convincingly demonstrated, the "peer personality" of this generation is so closely linked with the influence of post-modernity that it must be described as the first fully "post-modern generation." Thus, while many churches fail to respond creatively to the challenges of post-modernism, the impact of this change in society is being manifested along generational lines through the increasing absence of Gen Xers from their pews.

Furthermore, the specific legacy of social upheaval that has been visited upon Western society during the last forty years has posed particular challenges for the cause of intergenerational community. Lecturing in New York in 1969, Margaret Mead (1970:79) observed on the basis of her vast knowledge of human culture that, while generational gaps had occurred throughout human history, the divide that was developing between the Boomer generation and their elders represented "a deep, new

unprecedented, worldwide generation gap." As the idealistic and notoriously self-focused Boomer generation challenged virtually every institution of society, considerable conflict arose. This tension extended to vast numbers of churches, which struggled to understand how to reach and retain the members of this generation.

As a by-product of the social upheaval that was taking place throughout their childhood years, Gen Xers, the next rising generation, fell victim to *kinderfeindlichkeit*, a society-wide hostility toward children. While the adults around them remained preoccupied with their own pursuits, many of these "latchkey kids" were essentially ignored. As they reached their teen years, Xers were dubbed "slackers" and viewed with suspicion. Even as the members of this generation have advanced into full adulthood, many continue to perceive that they are misunderstood and ignored, and that their full inclusion within social structures, including the church, is resisted. Indeed, Mahedy and Bernardi (1994:25-26) insist that the experiences of this generation have been so difficult that many of its members have come to exhibit signs of "post-traumatic stress" worthy of comparison to that evident in many Vietnam veterans. Thus, largely as a result of the upheaval that has been visited upon society and the resulting social fragmentation, the generations have arrived in the present in a state of considerable alienation from one another. Generation X has suffered the impact of this intergenerational fragmentation at least as much as any other generation.

This being the case, many churches have come through this time in a desperate situation. Now, having devoted so much time and energy to the preoccupation of assimilating the Boomers and having all-too-uncritically adopted the negative view of Xers prevalent within society at large, as many churches weigh the implications of post-modernity, they also grapple with the concomitant implications of the absence of post-modern young adults from within their ranks and the prospect that their capacity to sustain their witness through this transitional period is in jeopardy. Thus, the core problem that this study is intended to address is the following:

> **As American society journeys through the post-modern transition, many established churches are struggling to respond faithfully to culture change within a complex generational context. The resulting ineffectiveness of these churches in transmitting their faith traditions to**

Generation X, the first post-modern generation, threatens the capacity of these churches to sustain their witness through this transitional period.

1.2 Surveying Prior Research

In response to the challenges posed by the post-modern generations, an abundance of books and articles have been written describing how the church might go about reaching these generations. These materials are of great value to churches that, like those described above, are struggling with the problem of ineffectiveness in reaching the first post-modern generation. If we take the theological vision of sustainable community seriously, then we should resolutely desire and seek ways to aid them in being restored as flourishing centres of multigenerational life. At the very least, if we are to uphold the perpetuation of the Christian witness through the post-modern generations as being a priority, then from a purely utilitarian perspective we must strive to maximize the involvement of established churches, for their facilities, members, and legacies are invaluable resources. Thus, the materials that have been made available to address this challenge must be seen as providing an important service.

Generally speaking, the vast majority of these books and articles have been written from one of two perspectives. In the period between the early 1990's and 2000, authors seemed to be concerned with studying Generation X and proposing strategies for engaging in ministry among them. Selected examples of this include helpful resources such as the following: *Baby Busters* (1994) and *Generation Next* (1995) by Barna; *Inside the Soul of a New Generation* by Celek and Zander (1996); *The Bridger Generation* by Rainer (1996); *Virtual Faith* by Beaudoin (1998); *Reckless Hope* (1996) and *Gen Xers after God* (1998) by Hahn and Verhaagen; and *Crossing the Bridge* by Roxburgh (2000).

Since 2000, however, an increasing number of authors have begun to produce resources reflecting a new character. Whereas the previous group was devoted to *prescribing* action, this new crop is devoted to *describing* that which is proving effective in ministry among the post-modern generations. Thus, these studies reflect a progression from a purely hermeneutical basis for strategic action to one that is

founded in empirical evidence. Sources worthy of note in this category include Rabey's *In Search of Authentic Faith* (2001), Webber's *The Younger Evangelicals* (2002), and *Gen X Religion*, edited by Flory and Miller (2000). More recently, studies by Flory and Miller (2007) and Wuthnow (2007) have continued to enrich this body of research.

While each of these resources offers something of value to this discussion, a few critical shortcomings are apparent. First, while this literature is devoted to aiding the church in reaching the post-modern generations, all too much of it is rooted in modernistic assumptions. For example, apart from some notable exceptions (e.g., Roxburgh and Webber) many of these authors seem to assume, either explicitly or implicitly, that the Homogeneous Unit Principle provides the matrix through which to arrive at the best ways of reaching the postmodern generations. This viewpoint is manifested in these authors' advocacy of the creation of *monogenerational* congregations. It is understandable that this path would be adopted, as it reflects the given-ness of the differentiation embedded in our society and as, in such an environment, it is pragmatically convenient. However, some critics of this approach insist that terms such as "Gen X church" are inherently contradictory. The church must not be the property of any one generation, they argue, but must always exist equally for the next generation. As another example of the influence of modernistic assumptions in this discussion, some of the existing literature tends to reflect a program-driven understanding of the church. Such thinking demonstrates a lack of penetrating perception of what is truly appropriate and relevant in reaching the post-modern generations.

Second, many of these authors treat ministry among the post-modern generations as though it is something to be carried out in isolation from the other living generations. Some authors, such as Hahn and Verhaagen (1996, 1998), give considerable attention to developing theological themes that support the cause of reaching the post-modern generations. However, few of those mentioned above actually acknowledge, or attempt to develop, any theological agenda that would call for an intergenerational initiative. Thus, the implementation of their proposals become problematic within the normal congregation composed of parishioners from across the spectrum of ages. Indeed, Moore (2001:15), while providing a very helpful practical resource,

unapologetically claims in his introduction that it would have to be left to someone else to clearly articulate the "how-to's" of implementation.

Third, this lack of proper attention to the process of implementation only stands to fuel fear and anxiety and the multiplication of misunderstandings in congregations in which a divide exists between the generations.

Fourth, many of these authors seem to view new church development as the key to reaching the emerging generations. Indeed, some proponents of the "emerging church" have at times seemed almost to view the "death" of local established congregations as a welcome and inevitable reality. While new church development does play an important role, I am troubled by the lack of concern that some of these authors seem to have demonstrated toward the impending death of many established churches.

Fortunately, several other authors have recognized the need to address the inherently intergenerational nature of the problem facing many local congregations. This is reflected in McIntosh's *Three Generations* (1995), *Make Room for the Boom…or Bust* (1997), and *One Church, Four Generations* (2002); Loper's (1999) *Building an Intergenerational Church*; *The Multigenerational Congregation* by Rendle (2002); *Bridging Divided Worlds* by Carroll and Roof (2002); *God and the Generations* by Hilborn and Bird (2002); and *Generations of Faith* by Eeman (2002). In addition to this, several dissertations and theses have been written that lend attention to this issue. One example of this is Codrington's dissertation at UNISA, *Multi-generational Ministries in the Context of a Local Church* (M.Diac., 2001). Other selected examples include the following D.Min. dissertations: R. J. Bales's *Four Generations and Visionary Change* (Asbury Theological Seminary, 1999); W. R. Shettler's *Generational Ministry in the Twenty-First Century* (Drew University, 2000); D. G. Vinzant's *Building Community among Adults of Different Generations* (Abilene Christian University, 1997); and T. L. Mann's *Preparing a Traditional Church for Ministry to a Non-Traditional Generation* (Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1999).

Each of these authors makes a worthwhile contribution to this discussion. Each one seems to be concerned fundamentally with promoting understanding between the generations, with the domains of change (e.g., preaching, worship style, etc.), or with models of ministry (e.g., blended worship or 2-service format). While they may offer many positive insights to this discussion, I would argue that none of these deals adequately with the problem of the apparent ineffectiveness of many churches in reaching the post-modern generations.

1.3 The Research Gap

While strategies and programs are vitally important, the present research project is guided by the assertion that all of the resources surveyed above are plagued by a fundamental oversight: none of them deals substantively with the place that intergenerational alienation and conflict holds in this equation. This oversight is particularly astonishing when considered in light of the reality that several secular authors examining generational dynamics within organisational life have lent central focus to the problem of intergenerational conflict (e.g., Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak 2000; Lancaster & Stillman 2002).

Several of the authors surveyed above do draw attention to this problem. McIntosh acknowledges this issue briefly, while Carroll and Roof address it at greater length, albeit largely from an empirically descriptive perspective. Rendle's *The Multigenerational Congregation* (2002) and Regele's *Death of the Church* (1995) both constitute substantive contributions that strike closest to my own aim. However, whereas Rendle deals explicitly with the tense relationships and frequent misunderstandings that often arise between generations in the local church, he does not frame this issue in terms of the bearing of such relationships up the renewal of the church's mission in the post-modern transition. Conversely, whereas Regele explores the significance of generational differentiation in missional renewal, he demonstrates little concern to address the implications of intergenerational conflict and alienation for the pursuit of such renewal. Whitesel and Hunter (2000) and Kew (2001) also provide important contributions to this subject. Yet their central objectives also differ from my own. Recently, practical and insightful contributions by Hammett and

Pierce (2007) and Howard Merritt (2007) have come closest to addressing the core issues with which this thesis is concerned.

My hypothesis is that, if churches are to regain their missional identity in the post-modern transition, this must come about in part through a commitment to intergenerational reconciliation and justice as integral components of the process of renewal. By focusing upon programs and procedures, the authors surveyed above seem either to presume the existence of the conditions that promote change in a local congregation or to fail in addressing this consideration at all. My assertion is that the conditions for change must be cultivated in order for processes of change to be implemented successfully. Thus, if the intergenerational alienation and discord present in society is reflected in the church, and if the cultural impact of post-modernity is being manifested along generational lines, then authentic missional renewal in the post-modern context must be seen as coming, in part, through the generations opening their hearts to one another. This requires a more penetrating socio-ecclesial critique than commonly is offered in the sources cited above. Underlying its programmatic and organizational dimensions, the church must be recognized as fundamentally relational and systemic. When viewed in light of present intergenerational dynamics, renewed attention to the relational and systemic dimensions of the church's life should give rise to a corresponding concern with intergenerational reconciliation and justice. Any transitional strategies for the missional renewal of established churches in the post-modern transition must address these two perspectives and must recognize their interrelatedness.

The members of Gen X must be viewed as playing a critical role in this process of renewal; having reached full adulthood, this bridging generation has much to teach local churches about how to minister in the post-modern era. Yet, because of their particular generational experience, many Xers may never fully entrust themselves to established churches until a commitment to the path of reconciliation and justice is exhibited. Such reconciliation between the generations, as an initiative grounded in theological convictions, can be seen as a legitimate and significant form of congregational renewal in and of itself. However, the collaboration it enables holds great promise for generating further missional renewal, as well. Thus, as has been posited above, intergenerational reconciliation and justice must be recognized as

integral components of the process of renewal as churches endeavour to regain their missional identity in the post-modern transition.

In summary, then, the hypothesis being advanced here is the following:

> **If established churches are to sustain their witness through the post-modern transition, they must engage in a process of missional renewal that encompasses Generation X. When considered from both a sociological and a theological perspective, this process must be seen as entailing a commitment to intergenerational reconciliation and justice.**

1.4 The Epistemological Base

Once again, the central problem addressed in this study is that many churches today are proving ineffective in reaching the members of the post-modern generations. In response to this problem, I have hypothesized that, if churches are to regain their missional identity in the postmodern era, this must come about in part through a commitment to intergenerational reconciliation and justice as integral components of the process of renewal. Given the aim of this study, several key concepts must be defined with greater precision. Toward this end, I have found it necessary to engage in descriptive research drawing upon a range of theological, socio-scientific, historical, and philosophical sources.

First, this study focuses upon a limited category of established churches. In exploring the contour of this category, I have drawn upon numerous resources that provide insight into their socio-historical situation, such as *The Empty Church* by Reeves (1996), *Discontinuity and Hope* by Schaller (1999), Hall's *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity* (1997), Murray's *Church after Christendom* (2004) and *Post-Christendom* (2004), and *The Churching of America, 1776-2005* by Finke and Stark (2005).

Second, I have employed the assistance of the writings of Guder (1998, 2000), Hunsberger (1996), Van Gelder (1996, 1998a, 1998b, 2000, 2007a, 2007b), and Wright (2006) in defining what is meant by "missional." The Gospel and Our Culture Network's *StormFront* (Brownson et al 2003) and *Treasures in Clay Jars* (Barrett et al 2004) provide key assistance in this regard. The contributions of Roxburgh (1997,

1998, 2005, 2006) and Shenk (1995, 1996, 2001, 2005) also prove to be valuable to the development of this theme. Works by Bosch (1995), Riddell (1998), Gibbs (2000a), Snyder and Runion (2002), Frost and Hirsch (2003), McNeal (2003), Conder (2006), and Frost (2006) also are important in exploring the missional church.

Third, in endeavouring to define the phenomenon of post-modernity, I have drawn upon a wide range of philosophical, theological, and sociological resources. Anderson (1990, 1995), Best and Kellner (1991, 1997), Dockery (2001), Erickson (1998, 2001), Greer (2003), Grenz (1996), Harvey (1990), Middleton and Walsh (1995), Penner (2005), Smith (2006), and Veith (1994) have proven to be richly valuable sources in exploring this theme.

Fourth, I have sought to ground this study in the existing literature on generational theory. Perhaps most notable within this category is the definitive work of Strauss and Howe (1992, 1997, and 2000). However, as I note in Appendix B, their work also is the most controversial and thus is employed here in a measured way. This being so, insight is appropriated from a wide range of reputable anthropological and sociological sources. These include Altbach and Laufer (1972), Mead (1970), Milson (1972), Pfeifer and Sussman (1991), Pillemer, Keeton, and Suitor (2000), and Strommen et al (1972). Socio-historical examinations of the contemporary generations also make a crucial contribution to this study. For example, studies by Cohen (1993), Dunn (1993, Barna (1994), Côté and Allehar (1995), Craig and Bennett (1997), Bagby (1998), Beaudoin (1998), Hersch (1998), Flory and Miller (2000, 2007), Carroll (2002), Lynch (2002) and numerous others provide valuable insight into the shared experiences and central tendencies of Generation X, the generation with which this study is primarily concerned.

Fifth, I have made a point to draw upon sources that specifically examine the intergenerational dynamics faced by many local congregations. *Bridging Divided Worlds* by Carroll and Roof (2002), Gambone's *All Are Welcome* (1998), *God and the Generations* by Hilborn and Bird (2002), Loper's *Building an Intergenerational Church* (1999), Rendle's *The Multigenerational Congregation* (2002), Vanderwell's *The Church for All Ages* (2008), Whitesel and Hunter's *A House Divided* (2000), and works by McIntosh (1997, 2002) are notable examples within this category.

Sixth, the concepts of reconciliation and justice are explored with the assistance of two categories of sources: (1) those that examine these terms as theological themes, and (2) those providing insights from systems theory and other theoretical perspectives. Theological resources that have contributed significantly to this project include Birch's *Let Justice Roll Down* (1991), *Reconciliation* by DeGruchy (2002), DeYoung's *Coming Together* (1995) and *Reconciliation* (1997), *Proclaim Jubilee* by Harris (1996), Schmiechen's *Christ the Reconciler* (1996), and Wright's *The Mission of God* (2006). In addition, the writings of Schreiter (1992, 1998, 2005), Law (1993, 2000, 2002), and Volf (1996, 2005) factor prominently in the theological framework articulated within this study. Resources reflecting a systems perspective include Robinson's *Creating a Healthier Church* (1996), as well as *How Your Church Family Works* (1993) and *Healthy Congregations* (1996) by Steinke.

Seventh, the idea of *processes of renewal* is considered in light of several resources devoted to the theoretical foundations of congregational revitalization and change. This study is particularly indebted to the insights of Nel (2003), Butler Bass (2004), Hadaway (2001), Kew (2001), Kitchens (2003), Mead (1991), Regele (1995), Snyder (1989, 1996), and Visser't Hooft (1956).

While endeavouring to develop the central hypothesis through this descriptive research, I also have engaged in quantitative research as a means of testing this hypothesis. This involved a survey conducted among 150 churches, thirty from each of five different denominations, the results of which are summarized in chapter eight of this study.

1.5 Practical-Theological Methodology

In the pages that follow, the theme introduced above is explored within the parameters of the discipline of practical theology. This being the case, it is essential at this point to attempt to provide some sense of the understanding of the discipline that will guide this study. Practical theology is a discipline concerned with action. This is a central assertion of Gerben Heitink in his text, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains: Manual* (1999). He begins this text by observing that, in recent decades,

practical theology has come to be seen as "a theological theory of action, with a methodology that is closely linked to the social sciences" (:1); it is a "crisis discipline" that entails problem-based research and offers proposals for restoration and renewal (:3).

As a foundation stone to his discussion of practical theology, Heitink (:6) submits the following definition of this discipline as a theory of action: "practical theology as a theory of action is the empirically oriented theological theory of the mediation of the Christian faith (praxis 1) in the praxis of modern society (praxis 2)." While this definition certainly offers much that could guide and sustain a discussion of the nature of practical theology, Heitink (:104) actually chooses to employ a definition developed by Mette in outlining his own position: "Practical theology must be conceived of as a theory of action within a theology that is understood as a practice-oriented science." This definition provides the conceptual parameters within which Heitink chooses to unfold his survey.

There are many notable texts devoted to practical-theological method (e.g., Browning 1996). However, in this study we will employ the practical-theological framework developed by Heitink. Before proceeding with an application of this model to the exploration of intergenerational reconciliation and justice as essential dimension of missional renewal, however, we will devote the remainder of this chapter to an overview of practical theology as outlined in Heitink's text. This being the case, I will follow closely the logical progression he employs and will join him in adopting Mette's definition as my point of departure. Toward the conclusion of this chapter, I will return briefly to Heitink's definition in order to lend consideration to its implications for the shape of this discipline and, finally, for the study contained in the chapters that lie ahead.

1.5.1 Practical Theology: A Theological Discipline

In exploring practical theology as a theological theory of action, we must give focused attention to the first portion of Mette's definition: "Practical Theology must be conceived of as a theological theory of action." With this affirmation in view, we may wish to ask, "In what respect is practical theology a *theological* discipline?"

Heitink (:104) suggests that, in light of the original objective of theology, all theology must be seen as practical. Hence, the aim of practical theology is by no means foreign to that of the overall theological enterprise. Theology can be described as a systematic reflection upon the Christian faith for the purpose of helping others to believe. Thus, faith requires thoughtful reflection and articulation.

Indeed, while it is common for us to affirm that practical theology is oriented toward the life of the "whole people of God," this discipline would likely never have grown into its present form apart from the need generated by the existence of faculties devoted to training theological students who possess the motivation to explore the practical implications of their faith for themselves and others. This reality is just one example pointing to the fact that, as Heitink (:105) suggests, "all learning is based on prior, nonscientific experience, and usually has a practical purpose." Theology has its origins in experiential knowledge and has an inherently practical orientation toward faith and action (Heitink :105).

1.5.1.1 A Hermeneutical Approach

While it is appropriate for us to affirm this practical aim as fundamental to all theology, at the same time we must recognize that practical theology has developed into a separate practice-oriented discipline that offers its own distinct contribution. Yet, as Heitink (:110) cautions, it "must not be allowed to function independently." He continues, "Theology is about the unity of knowledge, faith, and action." This gives rise to the question of how practical theology can contribute, as a *theological discipline*, to this overall aim. Heitink advocates a hermeneutical approach as the answer to this question. He suggests that "the anthropological shift that is apparent in theology since the days of Schleiermacher" should serve as our point of departure in undertaking this hermeneutical approach. He adds, "Not God himself, but the human experience of God, the Christian faith, now takes central stage as the object of inquiry." Thus faith, rather than God, is the direct object of theology. God, while the direct object of faith, can only serve as the indirect object of theological inquiry.

By adopting this hermeneutical approach, we can recognize the object of theology as "the Christian faith, as we know it through its (1) sources, (2) traditions, and (3) in its

past and (4) present manifestations of belief (:111). Hence, (1) biblical, (2) systematic, (3) historical, and (4) practical theology, while retaining their distinctiveness, must be seen as "hermeneutically tied together" (:111). "After all," observes Heitink, "hermeneutics is a matter of 'saying,' 'explaining,' 'translating' (R. E. Palmer 1969, 12ff.), of 'knowing,' 'interpreting,' and 'acting.'" This approach can be illustrated with a hermeneutical circle, which moves from understanding (discernment) to explaining (definition) to interpretation (internalization). As Heitink (:111) suggests:

> Comprehending the Word demands thought interpretation of that Word in contemporary language, through exegesis, so that people will grasp what it says, in the context of their own world....[T]his understanding presupposes in its turn the experience and presuppositions of the subject, who tries to understand, interpret, and communicate the Word on the basis of her or his own experience.

This hermeneutical point of departure is crucial to any exercise in practical theology, for "the hermeneutical and the agogic moment in practical theology" are unified (:111). The word has the power to clarify, by which understanding emerges; and the power to influence, by which change is initiated.

1.5.2 Practical Theology as a Theory of Action

If we continue in following Mette's definition, having briefly considered practical theology as a theological discipline, we must also consider this discipline as a theological *theory of action*. This term, "theory of action," was first introduced by Shelsky in 1963 and adopted into the practical theology discussion around 1970. By 1980, Firet was suggesting that this term clarified nothing about its theological content or its academic status (Heitink :124). Seeking to respond to this shortcoming, Heitink insists that a practical-theological theory of action must encompass two key perspectives: (1) the aim of describing and explaining reality, and (2) the aim of influencing and changing that reality. An action is an intervention in the course of events, controlled by the one who acts. To act, furthermore, is to work toward an intentional and active realization of a certain goal, by employing specific means in a particular situation. Action always occurs within a social context. Any action, then, must be described within the framework of a theory of social action and be recognized as an intersubjective event (:126).

It is important to note that many theologians have been critical toward affording the concept of a theory of action a central place in practical theology. Many of these critics seem to fear that placing emphasis upon a theory of action will detract from the importance of the divine praxis and cause practical theology to become empirically self-contained. In answer to such reservations, however, Heitink (:127) clarifies that "those who want to develop practical theology as an empirical theory of action do not want to cut all ties with dogmatics....But they do want to free the discipline from its image of an applied science, and to intend, from an empirical perspective, to build a separate, independent approach to the object of theology." Thus, those desiring to promote practical theology as a theory of action are not endeavouring to reinvent the whole theological enterprise, but rather to provide a unique contribution that compliments and further strengthens it.

1.5.2.1 Action as the Object of Practical Theology

If indeed practical theology is concerned with being a theological theory of action, then the question must be raised of precisely what sort of action serves as its object. As Heitink (:129) observes, "Over the years, a consensus has developed that the object of practical theology is broader than that of earlier pastoral theology. It is generally felt that this action should not be restricted to the activities of church and ministers." In light of this, how can the object of practical theology be defined more precisely? Heitink turns to Firet and van der Ven as two authors providing distinct and valuable answers to this question.

Firet insists that practical theology does not deal with human action in general, nor necessarily with the action of the believer or religious servant, "but specifically with action that has to do with the actualization and the maintenance of the relationship between God and humanity, and humanity and God." In developing this position, Firet seems to be concerned to uphold a clear distinction between action and behaviour. He argues that sociologists have done us a disservice by describing *action* as a central sociological category. In using this term, they really seem to mean human *behaviour* to which the actor assigns subjective meaning (Heitink :129).

Firet has identified the "disciplinary matrix" of practical theology as being "communicative action in the service of the gospel." This description limits the scope of practical theology and "refers to a normative and critical element" in practical-theological theory. Firet further explicates this position by suggesting that such communicative action encompasses "all efforts to ensure that the gospel of the kingdom of God reveals its power in the human situation in general, or in the concrete situation of a specific individual or some individuals." Firet thus concludes that a "theory of action" is useful only if it contains the following components: (1) it deals with concrete domains of action; (2) it analyzes the context of the actions and the actions themselves in the present situation and with regard to their potentiality; (3) it does this on the basis of an empiricism-transcending critical theory with the purpose of developing action models and strategies for the various domains of action (Heitink :129-130).

Van der Ven also grants a central place to mediative action in his view of practical theology. He describes practical theology as "the theological discipline of religious-communicative action, which is the focus of pastoral activity" (in Heitink :130). Van der Ven distinguishes between the formal object of practical theology in a broad and a more narrow sense. Broadly speaking, it concerns "factors, processes and structures that determine and foster today's personal and social life from the perspective of the kingdom of God." In a more narrow sense, however, it addresses pastoral practice: "to foster religious communicative action in the personal and social life of today through pastors, other professionals, and volunteers." Van der Ven understands the uniqueness of practical theology to lie in its empirical-theological approach.

1.5.2.2 The Communicative Action Theory of Jürgen Habermas

Since the 1970's, practical theology has been influenced by the work of the German social philosopher Jürgen Habermas. This influence is attributable in part to the fact that, as Heitink (:133) notes, "Habermas's philosophy establishes a link between the metaphor of conversion and the perspective of time." Habermas's way of dealing with time reflects the influence of Heidegger, whose view of temporality emphasizes that decisively anticipating the future is necessary to enable us to return to the past and to be free to shape the present as we desire. As Heitink (:134) suggests, "This is

not a matter of building on the past but of anticipating the future, and from there critically remembering the past." This dialectical bond between *anticipation* and *anamnesis* is characteristic of Habermas's work. Habermas draws this motif of anticipation from Bloch's "principle of hope," the utopian dream of a society free from controversy, in which the vehicle of language has given shape to a whole new world (Heitink 1999:134).

According to Heitink (1999:134-135), the metaphor of turning around and this dialectic of anticipation and anamnesis lead to two components that constitute the core of Habermas's theory of communicative action: the ideal context for dialogue and the colonizing thesis. Habermas distinguishes between instrumentary action (based on technical knowledge), communicative action (based on practical knowledge), and emancipatory action (based on a critical knowledge). The central question in Habermas's theory of action is, "How do societies continue to exist?" Chiefly, Habermas insists, they must be able to link action and the consequences of action in a way that enables a stable network to emerge. This is achieved through the use of language.

This leads to Habermas's central concept of communicative action. As Heitink (:135-136) explains,

> This is the tool the actors use as they negotiate their aims and the circumstances in which they find themselves. Through negotiation they coordinate their actions into networks. As they negotiate, the situation is categorized into existing facts, norms to be followed, and feelings of the actors. Through language, Habermas thus partitions communication into three worlds: facts, norms, and feelings. In this context one must accept three validity claims: that the alleged facts are true, that the norms are correct and fair, and that the feelings are genuine. The actors want truth, fairness, and genuineness. They must reach a preliminary consensus on this. Then a discourse begins, in which the validity claims with regard to truth (theoretical discourse), fairness (practical discourse), and genuineness (esthetic-expressive discourse) are successively tested on the basis of arguments. When this does not occur, the actors embark on strategic action, using mere power to exert influence.

Habermas insists that, to the fullest extent possible, a social order should be established through democratic negotiations. He argues that an order dependent upon strategic action lacks solidarity.

It is important to note, despite all that has been said here, that the distinction between communicative and strategic action is not one of absolute contrast. Practical theology aims to develop action strategies for various forms of communication "in the service of the nurture of the church" (:140). Hence, it cannot operate apart from certain forms of strategic action. "However," cautions Heitink (:140), "strategic action must be permeated by communicative action, by taking human beings seriously as subjects. If that does not happen, strategy will be lost in a type of action that is merely technical or utilitarian."

1.5.2.3 The Interpretive Theory of Paul Ricoeur

A second philosopher whose theoretical contribution has had significant bearing on the shape of modern practical theology as a theory of action is Paul Ricoeur. Heitink (1999:141) introduces Ricoeur's work as an effort to build a bridge between the interpretation of texts and the interpretation of social reality. He hypothesized that, if certain problems are raised by the interpretation of texts because they are texts and not spoken language, and if these problems are what constitute hermeneutics, then the human sciences may be said to be hermeneutical "(1) inasmuch as their object displays some features constitutive of a text as text, and (2) inasmuch as their methodology develops the same kind of procedures as those of Auslegung or text interpretation" (Ricoeur 1991:144-145). In reflecting upon this assertion, Heitink (:141) posits that "The confirmation of this hypothesis is of great importance for practical theology as a theological theory of action, since it attempts to bridge the gulf between text (Scripture and tradition) and action (the praxis of mediation)."

Ricoeur's theory rests upon an examination of the usage of language, which Ricoeur differentiates from a language system or code. Language usage, he argues, is an event. Hence, this usage of language differs from a language system in four key ways: (1) it is realized in time. Explains Heitink (:141), "The spoken word is a fleeting event that demands to be recorded. What is recorded is not, however, the language event as an event, but the content of what has been said, the meaning of that event (the noema)." The usage of language entails three levels: locutionary (propositional) action, illocutionary power, and perlocutionary effect. (2) It requires a subject. Who is communicating? (3) It deals with something in a referential sense

and, thus, possesses a symbolic function. (4) It is directed toward the other, the one who is addressed (:141).

How is this framework to aid the student of social phenomena in determining what constitutes meaningful action? Ricoeur (1991:151) identifies four criteria issuing from the paradigm of the text. First, through comparison, we discover that meaningful action can become the object of scientific inquiry only if it can be objectified. *Understanding* differs from *interpretation*. Essentially, the *meaning* of an action can be separated from the *event* of this action. We must be able to clarify the *who*, *what*, *where*, *when* and *how*: the structure of an event. Second, very much as a text becomes detached from its author, so an action also becomes detached from its actor. Essentially, actions gain an independent status. Third, then, this status provides a link to the concept of meaningful action, "the kind of action with a significance that transcends the original situation" (Heitink :144). Finally, human action is accessible to others and, as a result, is open to interpretation.

This dialectic between action and interpretation has important methodological implications for the human sciences. Ricoeur suggests that there is a dialectical relationship between explanation and understanding, similar to that between writing and reading. The path from understanding to explanation can be seen as similar to that from guessing to validation. In the interpretation of a text, guesswork is "divination;" one sometimes experiences a "sudden flash of insight" (Hetink :144). Through guessing, one strives to arrive at a construction of the meaning of a text. Validation, however, represents the grammatical moment of examining the context to determine whether the statement makes sense. While a given text could be read and interpreted in any of a number of ways, validation gives rise to arguments that make one interpretation emerge as most plausible.

Similarly, the significance of human action often is expressed through different voices and, therefore, must be constructed. As Heitink (:145) observes, "Before one can interpret any action, one must understand the intention and motivation underlying the action. One is here dealing with the relation between the *what* and the *why* of an action." For action to be deemed meaningful, a motive must exist that serves as a *reason for*, not merely as *cause of*. This motivational dimension demonstrates the

presence of intentionality in the action. This way of viewing action, which must be accompanied by a certain distanciation on the part of the subject, is comparable to the interpretation of a text.

1.5.3 A Practical-Theological Theory of Action

The two previous sections have been devoted to exploring practical theology as a "theological theory of action" from two different perspectives: as a theological discipline and as a theory of action. In this section, I will follow the logic of Heitink's approach by exploring how these two elements interrelate to constitute the core of the practical-theological enterprise.

1.5.3.1 The Relation between Theory and Praxis

In the modern era, theory and praxis have ordered the world of Western society. However, the opposite was true in ancient times. As Heitink (:149) observes, "[T]hought and action were the human answers to a predetermined world order." In the classical era, the formation of critical theory was considered as the highest human achievement, enabling humans to see things in their essence. Aristotle distinguished this contemplative knowledge from practical action, which he divided into the categories of *poiesis* and *praxis*. *Poiesis* is action that brings results based on skills. Conversely, in the case of *praxis*, one acts on the basis of life experience. The action itself serves as a goal. *Poiesis* is reduced to technology when severed from *praxis*. Similarly, observes Heitink (:150), "When we speak of the practice of faith, in the sense of 'praxis pietas' or 'orthopraxis,' we think of a faith that lives through experience and manifests itself spontaneously...For that reason *poiesis* may not detach itself from *praxis* as we develop our practical-theological theory."

While over time this Aristotelian conception of the relationship between theory and praxis has been usurped by a modern view, the nature of this relationship has continued to hold a central place in philosophy. Practical theologians share the concern over the interaction between theory and praxis. However, for the practical theologian, these terms must be "defined from a theological perspective and directed toward the praxis of mediation, as the specific practical-theological focus" (Heitink

:151). Hence praxis must be understood as action inspired by the Christian tradition and the missional vocation of all Christians. Theory must be seen as "a comprehensive hermeneutical-theological statement that relates Christian tradition to experience, to the life and actions of modern humans" (:151).

In exploring the relationship between theory and praxis, Heitink (:152) sees the principles of Greinmacher as being instructive: (1) There is no pure theory of praxis. Theory always bears the influence of history and is conditioned by society. True acknowledgement of this reality demands that we call into question the possibility and desirability of a truly deductive Word theology. Even the best and most teachable listener is always a child of his or her own time. (2) Praxis always has an underlying theory. (3) The primacy of theory over praxis, long defended by practical theologians, must be rejected. (4) Similarly, however, the primacy of praxis over theory must also be rejected. The argument that theory is totally defined by praxis is a form of determinism. This view relieves people of their responsibility to think critically about their situation and to challenge unacceptable praxes. One must simply accept traditional forms, as though it would be useless to renew one's praxis through a new theory. (5) The relationship between theological theory and ecclesiastical praxis must not be seen as entailing either a complete separation or identification of the two, but rather "a bipolar tension-filled combination." Practical-theological theory must always be critical theory (:151).

These principles can help us recognize the wisdom in the following comments by Heitink (:153): "[I]n our various actions we will more than ever have to depend on an intersubjectivity, in which people, on the basis of a shared commitment, become the veritable subjects of their own experience. This requires a constant interaction between text and context, theory and praxis." Thus, this relationship can be envisioned as a cyclical series of movements, in which an experience of praxis becomes the object of theological reflection. In turn, critical questions lead to an examination of the original theory, which can bring about a rereading of Scripture, and, subsequently, a revision of the theory. This new theoretical insight then asks crucial questions regarding the current praxis, thus giving rise to further questions about theory. Any resulting answers can prompt those concerned to initiate change,

making possible a renewal of the praxis. In turn, this can prompt questions that will lead further into a circular process of reflection.

1.5.3.2 A Paradigm for a Practical-Theological Theory of Action

Having considered the relationship between theory and praxis, we must also give consideration to the specific elements that constitute the *paradigm* of practical theology, the generally accepted theoretical basis for this discipline (Heitink :155). A paradigm provides a "disciplinary matrix," and thus must not be confused with methodology. Heitink (:156) points to the phrase introduced by Firet, "Communicative action in the service of the gospel," as providing a widely accepted paradigm for this discipline. Such communicative action concerns the mediation of God's kingdom in time and space. It "forms the basis for forms of mediation...that want to change the reality in such a way that it answers to a greater degree to the perspective given us through faith and in the hope of the coming of God's kingdom."

In considering communicative action, it is appropriate to return to a consideration of Ricoeur's model of text interpretation, which provides a paradigm for the study of meaningful action. Most statements about action are complex. As Heitink (:157) observes, "To understand fully the structure of an action, one must ask: *Who* does *what* (in relation to *whom*), *where*, *when*, *why*, and *how*?" This question acknowledges that meaningful action entails (1) the actor, (2) the kind of action, (3) the modality (how the actor did it), (4) context (where, under what circumstances), and (5) the reason for the action. This description helps to reveal "not only the structure of an action but also its implications as a social phenomenon" (:157). An action system may be examined in much the same way that a document or a language system is interpreted through structural analysis.

Within a complex action statement, one can recognize the three levels Ricoeur previously was shown to have distinguished. First, the circumstances or context may be referred to as the locutionary level of the action. Simply stated, an action has to do with concrete reality. Something of the noematic (meaning) structure of the action can be made apparent through mere description of it. Second, through the specific activity, such as a sermon, the uniqueness of a theological action is revealed. The

present circumstance may be interpreted in light of a faith reality that is mediated by a text. This represents the illocutionary level of the action. Third, there is a realization: that which is achieved through the action or which the actor hopes to achieve. Reality can come to be assigned a symbolic character (e.g., the identification of ecclesial praxis with christopraxis or the call for individuals to be "crucified with Christ" in the face of suffering). This is the perlocutionary level. As a result of this interpretive process entailing the dialectic of event and meaning, "the clear distinction between interpretation and text is no longer there" (Heitink :158). This gives practical-theological interpretation its own character. Yet, it also necessitates that this interpretation entail a critical perspective, taking "prejudice" into account."

If we endeavour to employ this interpretation model in a penetrating manner, we must acknowledge the central question asked of the structure of any action to be, "Who does what (in relation to whom)?" This question leads to three, somewhat distinct, perspectives. These correspond to the hermeneutical, empirical, and strategic perspectives of an action (Heitink :159). First, one must ask, "Who does what: why/about what?" The "why" dimension addresses the intentional and motivational aspects of an action. Furthermore, the connection between the "what" and "why" also impacts the "about what." This is the referential dimension of an action. It can be described as the movement from "sense" to referral, from that which is said to that about which it is saying something. Again, this calls for a critical approach. One must consider whose interests certain action structures and processes may serve. This reveals the moral dimension of the question "why?" In summary, the link between "what" and "why" relates to the hermeneutical meaning of an action. As Heitink (:160) suggests, "It is a matter of interpretation with a view toward arriving at understanding."

The second question is "Who does what: where/when?" This question addresses the situational aspect. Every specific action entails a number of variables that, when placed within a broader theoretical framework, can enable one to compare this event with other events. This, in turn, makes possible the formation of hypotheses that "may lead toward knowledge with a more general validity" with regard to a given phenomenon (Heitink :161). Rooted in empirical methodology, this process entails personal distanciation and, thus, enables one to develop greater insight regarding

underlying and external action structures. Explanation commands a central place in this process.

The third question is "Who does what: how/with what intent?" This refers to the instrumental aspect of an action. The "how" must serve the "what." As Heitink (:161) observes, "[A]ny form of mediative action must always serve the intended communicative goal...What goal sanctions what means? The 'how' thus receives a depth of content by linking it to the 'for what purpose.'" In short, any mediative action has a strategic meaning; it "is an intervention in the surrounding world and is directed toward change." All three of the perspectives surveyed here are closely related by virtue of their relationship to the core question of "who does what?" Thus, a perspective can be said to belong *chiefly* to one of these categories, but not *wholly* so.

1.5.3.3 The Methodology of a Theological Theory of Action

Having been introduced to the relationship between the hermeneutical, empirical, and strategic perspectives, we must extend this discussion by lending consideration to three corresponding concepts: understanding, explanation, and change. As has already been mentioned, understanding and explanation may be regarded as the two poles of the hermeneutical circle. In addition, as we have already seen, change is understood as inherent to any action; indeed, it is the direct object of mediative action. Recognizing the importance of these concepts, we must give consideration to the methodological relationship between them. Each of these three perspectives offers a circular process by which its own methodology is carried out. This also is worthy of some exploration here.

a. The Perspective of Understanding: The Hermeneutical Cycle

The perspective of understanding is central to the hermeneutical theory of interpretation. Ricoeur (1991:159) characterizes the reconstruction of an action structure as a circular movement from guessing to testing (or verification). Through "guessing," one strives to gain understanding of a unique action as an individual and incidental reality. This interpretation can lead to possible understandings, which can

be sorted through on the basis of the logic of subjective probability. In the pursuit of understanding, practical theology is greatly indebted to theoretical contributions from philosophy and the social sciences (Heitink :163).

Heitink (:184-185) affirms Hans-Georg Gadamer as one who offers some helpful observations with reference to this theme of "understanding". Gadamer (2005:233) insists that, in our attempts to understand texts or reality, we all have biases determined in large degree by historical, sociological, and historical factors. Essentially, understanding is always conditioned by context. Thus, for Gadamer, historicity is assigned the value of a hermeneutical principle. Our prejudgment of a given situation raises questions that help us to understand a text from the past better. As Heitink (:184-185) comments, "This anticipation of its meaning, which guides us in our acquisition of knowledge, opens up the meaning of a text to us. It is the task of hermeneutics to clarify the conditions that facilitate such understanding."

Within this understanding of the hermeneutical task, the distance between the present-day reader and the historical context is viewed as positive (Gadamer 1989:265). It helps the reader to discover the historical nature of his biases. One's situation is hermeneutically determined by her particular horizon of understanding. If one wishes to place himself in another's position, he must begin this movement from his own. Allowing the tension between past and present to become explicit may lead to a "fusion of these horizons." Genuine understanding is rendered possible when the historical horizon is fused with our own horizon. Present and past enter into a relationship of dialogue as authentic "I-Thou" partners. Thus, hermeneutics involves nurturing conditions that make genuine understanding possible.

b. The Perspective of Explanation: The Empirical Cycle

At the other pole of the hermeneutical circle lies the perspective of explanation, which is central to the empirical method. The term, "empiricism" is derived from the Greek, *empeiria*, which bears the meaning of "experience." This term represents an epistemological approach that sees all scientific knowledge as based on experience and deducible through sense perceptions. It demands a testing process for the purposes of establishing validity and veracity. In doing so, it aims at providing

explanation oriented toward the general and universal. In the specific case of formulating a theory of action, it helps to provide a scientific basis for academic inquiry into the meaning or effectiveness of action (Heitink :221). Heitink delineates an empirical cycle that follows the path of “observation”—“experiencing”—“choosing”—and “evaluating.” The explanatory knowledge gained through this process brings the cycle to conclusion, while also presenting new opportunities for observation.

The practical theologian may draw upon several currents in empirical research while engaging in his or her craft. For example, both qualitative and quantitative research offer great benefit as the practical theologian engages in the testing process. However, these must be used in compliment with one another in order to counteract the weaknesses inherent in each (Heitink :223). Clearly, because “improvement of the situation toward the desired praxis is the underlying interest of practical-theological research,” practical-theological research must be seen as belonging to the category of *action research* (:225). Within a given study, one may employ research aimed at systematic description, provisional exploration, or the testing of hypotheses (:228). However, these are rarely employed in isolation from one another; rather, it is common for a study to use them in combination with one another.

c. The Perspective of Change: The Regulative Cycle

The third perspective, focused upon change, differs from these two other perspectives in that it entails *practical* thinking leading to actions informed by knowledge. All practical theology inevitably takes change as its object. Such change is envisioned as being undertaken through a process of management and steering, of methodical action guided by a plan. Heitink (:212) finds Van Strien’s three characteristics of such praxis-oriented thinking to be instructive: (1) It is not generalizing but particularizing in nature and focuses on a specific situation. (2) Its ultimate product is not academic statements, but rather actions based on academic considerations. (3) Its interventions are guided by standards, since it endeavours to correct or improve what is not good. According to Heitink, Van Strien refers to the resulting action cycle as “the regulative cycle”, which moves according to the basic pattern of (1) definition of the problem, (2) diagnosis, (3) plan, (4) intervention, and (5) evaluation.

d. The Relationship between the Three Perspectives

One distinct characteristic of practical theology as a discipline of mediative action is the way in which these three perspectives interrelate. As Heitink (:165) comments, these three perspectives form

> a distinct circulation system or 'circuit' of theory formation. The three circles correspond to the distinctive goals of the discipline: the interpretation of human action in the light of the Christian tradition (the hermeneutical perspective), the analysis of human action with regard to its factuality and potentiality (the empirical perspective), and the development of action models and action strategies for the various domains of action (the strategic perspective).

The first of these perspectives is focused upon providing meaning, the second upon testing action, and the third upon systematic action. Heitink suggests that they interrelate in a conceptual triad that moves along the path of "understanding—explanation—change" (:235). He further expands this by encouraging one to engage in a course of practical theological research along a "hermeneutical path": observation—description—analysis—reflection—suggestions for action (:238).

1.5.3.4 The Relation between Praxis 1 and Praxis 2

We now are able to return briefly to Heitink's definition of practical theology and make several observations regarding the relationship between praxis 1 (the mediation of the Christian faith) and praxis 2 (the praxis of modern society). First, we can see that praxis 2 clearly provides the context for praxis 1. The praxis of the church cannot be detached from its context. While the church, in its praxis, is shaped by its social setting, it also is able to exert a corrective influence on the praxis of society. Second, we would do well to give attention to what is meant by "mediation of the Christian faith." Speaking in generalities, Heitink (:168) indicates that the relationship between any theory and its praxis "requires" mediation. Thus, people and institutions assume mediative roles.

This is true also for the mediation of the Christian faith, although in this case the role of the Holy Spirit must be seen as crucial. This mediation occurs within three primary domains that share a common practical-theological theoretical base, yet must be

differentiated from one another: the private life, social establishments, and the public sector. This being said, as Heitink (:169) argues, "It is clear that this mediation, this communicative action in the service of the gospel, demands a form of church life as an organizing umbrella and an integrating force. This leads to a dynamic ecclesiology." In other words, the church is not a static reality. Because this is true of the church's nature, the effectiveness of its praxis is dependent in part upon the degree of its attentiveness to praxis 2. As Christians strive to formulate methods for mediation, the world must be seen as a subject from which it can learn much and to which it must respond.

1.5.4 The Present Study as Practical-Theological Endeavour

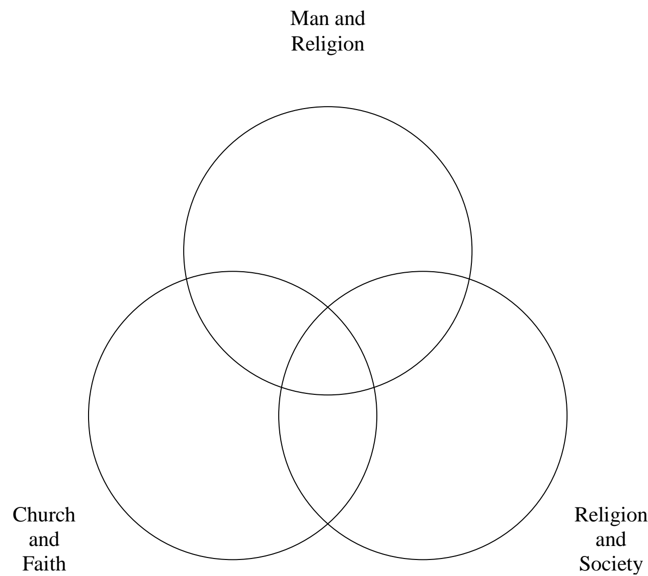
Before proceeding with our study, it will be helpful to explain briefly how Heitink's approach will influence the contour of this project. Within the present study, we will employ the approach outlined by Heitink. Chapters two through seven will be devoted to the hermeneutical cycle. Chapter two will contribute to this interpretive exercise by outlining a body of foundational theoretical concepts. Chapters three through five will be devoted to fostering an interpretation of the problem introduced above in section 1.1. Then, in chapters six and seven, we will turn our attention toward providing a hermeneutical account of the hypothesis being advanced in this study. Chapter eight will be devoted to the empirical cycle. This chapter will provide a summary of quantitative survey results employed in testing the interpretation articulated in the preceding portions of the thesis. Our study will conclude in chapter nine by lending attention briefly to the regulative cycle. This chapter will provide strategic insights into how the concepts outlined in the previous chapters might be translated into action.

In addition, before advancing to the next chapter, it will be helpful to clarify more precisely where this study fits within the broad discipline of practical theology. Heitink (:241) suggests that practical theology is concerned with three "domains of action" that are distinct, yet interrelated (diagram 1):

1. **Man and religion:** this is concerned with issues of theological anthropology, the meaning of life, religious development, and religious experience (:260-268).

2. **Church and faith:** this addresses the ecclesiastical implications of the faith (:275-285).
3. **Religion and society:** the church's witness and service within the world is of central concern (:292-303).

Figure 1.1: Heitink's Domains of Action



Within each of these categories, several sub-disciplines can be identified:

1. **Man and religion:** (1) *Poimenics* encompasses theories regarding the pastorate; (2) *Religious pedagogics* is concerned with religious education and training, particularly as it relates to the faith development of the young; and (3) *Spirituality* addresses religious experience and those practices by which it is fostered (:269-273).
2. **Church and faith:** (1) Church development (*oikodomics*) explores processes for the building-up of the church in accordance with its true purposes and potential; (2) *Catechetics* is devoted to studying the church as a learning community; (3) *Liturgics* focuses upon the corporate worship life of the congregation; and (4) *Homiletics* addresses the proclamation of the Christian faith (:285-291).
3. **Religion and society:** (1) *Evangelism* is concerned with the communication of the good news to the world; (2) *Diaconics* explores the

church's service for the sake of God's reign within society; (3) *Equipping the laity* addresses the training of the God's priestly people for ministry.

Table 1.1: Sub-disciplines of the three domains of action		
Man and Religion	Church and Faith	Religion and Society
Poimenics Religious pedagogics Spirituality	Oikodomics Catechetics Liturgics Homiletics	Evangelism Diaconics Equipping the laity

The problem and hypothesis being advanced within this study relate closely to several of these sub-disciplines. The objectives of *oikodomics* factor most prominently in the pages that follow. However, as will become evident, the intergenerational focus of this study causes *pedagogics* to be of considerable importance, as well. The concern for a missional understanding of the church will cause evangelism and *diaconics* to be brought into this discussion. The desire for renewal will cause us to lend attention to *spirituality*. Finally, the challenges associated with change will cause us to delve into the realms of *catechetics* and *equipping the laity*. In the pages that follow, it will become clear that, as Heitink (:258) asserts, while there is need to treat these disciplines in a differentiated fashion, they also "overlap" and are linked in the way that their relationship emerges throughout the practical-theological research process.

1.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have introduced the central problem and hypothesis to be explored throughout the remainder of this study. As we have seen, we are endeavouring to address the following problem:

> As American society journeys through the post-modern transition, many established churches are struggling to respond faithfully to culture change within a complex generational context. The resulting ineffectiveness of these churches in transmitting their faith traditions to Generation X, the first post-modern generation, threatens the capacity of these churches to sustain their witness through this transitional period.

In response to this problem, the following hypothesis is being proposed:

> If established churches are to sustain their witness through the post-modern transition, they must engage in a process of missional renewal that encompasses Generation X. When considered from both a sociological and a theological perspective, this process must be seen as entailing a commitment to intergenerational reconciliation and justice.

In the preceding pages, we have given a brief account of the rationale for this study by pointing to a gap that exists within in much of the existing literature. We have highlighted the specific body of literature that will be employed in developing our position throughout the pages that lie ahead. Furthermore, through an appropriation of the work of Heitink (1999), we have defined and described our understanding of what it means for this study to be located within the discipline of practical theology. We have explained specifically how Heitink's practical-theological model will guide the structure of this study. Finally, we have located this study more specifically within the sub-disciplines of practical theology and have referenced how these sub-disciplines will prove to be of significance to this project. Having provided this introductory material, we now will proceed to chapter two, which will be devoted to articulating several core theoretical concepts of importance to this study.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1 Introduction

The present thesis is guided by the assertion that, as American society journeys through the post-modern transition, many established churches are struggling to respond adequately to cultural change within a fragmented generational context. It further is being argued that the resulting ineffectiveness of many of these churches in transmitting the Christian tradition to Gen Xers, the first post-modern generation, threatens the ability of these churches to sustain their witness through this transitional period. As we saw in chapter one, this study is rooted in an understanding of practical theology as "the mediation of the Christian faith in the praxis of modern society" (Heitink 1999:6). Furthermore, this study is rooted in an awareness of the reality that the witness of the church is not something that can be achieved in its fullness at any one particular moment; rather, if the church is to sustain a vital witness across time, this requires a dynamic and ongoing process, one that is inherently intergenerational in nature. Thus, in the present chapter, we will provide further theoretical foundations for this study by exploring the *intergenerational* praxis of the church within the *intergenerational* praxis of society. As we shall see, the story of how societies and individual congregations located within them sustain their existence through time is inextricably linked to the intergenerational dynamics that emerge among the generations of which they are composed.

Thus, the present chapter will serve as a prelude to the heart of the study that follows. Toward this end, this chapter will be devoted to providing a sound theoretical foundation for the rest of this project by exploring the following themes:

1. Section 2.2 will introduce the preservation and perpetuation of any cultural tradition, whether that of a society or any group within society, as entailing an intergenerational dynamic requiring the participation of successive generations. This will provide a helpful basis for exploring the intergenerational objectives and challenges that can arise both within society at large and within the church specifically.
2. In section 2.3, we will give attention to the role of the generation within the praxis of society by endeavouring to define the "generation" as a socio-historical phenomenon. Consideration will be given to how we might speak

meaningfully about generational identity, as well as the limitations and cautions to be kept in view as we endeavour to do so.

3. In section 2.4, this focus upon the praxis of society will be developed further as we explore a theoretical understanding of the inherently *intergenerational* processes by which all generations are formed in relation to, and in distinction from, their cultural forebears. Particular attention will be given to common causes of the intergenerational "problem" within societies experiencing significant cultural change.
4. Section 2.5 will translate the implications of the intergenerational "problem" into the intergenerational praxis of "small world" settings. A "small world" context, explain Gubrium and Rittman (1991:94), is "an interpersonal domain of understanding," a particular setting with "experiential boundaries."
5. Section 2.6 will give attention to the intergenerational implications of the church's praxis within society. We will explore the responsibility of the church toward each rising generation and the individuals of which it is composed. In addition, we will examine some of the challenges that churches may encounter as "small world" contexts as they seek to fulfil their intergenerational praxis within a changing society.

2.2 Introducing the Intergenerational Dynamic

Over time, the existence and vitality of any group depends in large part upon the ability of its members to sustain a consensus regarding the meaning of life and what are appropriate ways of thinking, feeling and acting (Westerhoff 1974:38-39). Indeed, it can be asserted that, in the case of society at large, the church, or any other community within society, if a group's identity is to be sustained across time, its members must "actually identify themselves as members of that people" (Kennedy Neville 1974:54-55). This essentially necessitates that the members of a given group strive to preserve and perpetuate the *cultural tradition* reflected in its symbols, practices, and institutions (Bass 1994:172; Kraft 2005:38). In seeking to understand this claim, it will be helpful for us to be clear regarding what we mean by *culture*. Newbigin (1986:3) suggests that culture consists of "the sum total of ways of living developed by a group of human beings." Thus, it is an integrated system of learned behaviours (Angrosino 2001:7; Kraft 2005:38).

Hiebert (1985:31) explains that any culture can be dissected into three layers, which he views as addressing "ideas, feelings, and values," respectively. The uppermost stratum, which is most readily available to conscious and critical reflection, consists of the cognitive dimension (knowledge, logic and wisdom) of a cultural framework; the middle stratum involves the affective dimensions (feelings, aesthetics) native to a culture, while the deepest layer, that which is often least subject to the conscious faculties of a society, is composed of the evaluative dimension (values, allegiances). On the "surface," a particular culture can be distinguished from other communities by the behaviours (thinking and acting) and products (art, law, custom, roles, etc.) it generates (Westerhoff 1974:37-38; Hiebert 1985:35-36). Roxburgh (2005:133) suggests that "society", which entails "the relationships and products we develop to express and give life to our culture," occurs at this surface level. As he explains, "The primary relationship moves from culture out toward society; the former generates and shapes the latter. Our social interactions are the rich variety of ways we respond to the cultural forces shaping our collective lives."

As the above description attests, within any cultural context, there is much more at work than what readily meets the eye. The "deeper" layers of culture constitute the "worldview" that a group of people or society create and share, and through which the members of that group see, cope with, and understand the world (Bosch 1995:49; Roxburgh 1998:14; Taber 2000:57). Kraft (2005:43) offers a helpful description of this concept of worldview:

> The worldview of a cultural entity is seen as both the repository and the patterning in terms of which people generate the conceptual models through which they perceive of and interact with reality…The worldview of any given people presumably began with a series of agreements by the members of the original group concerning their perception of reality and how they should regard and react toward that reality.

Kraft (2005:44-46) further explains that, as the "central control box" of a culture, worldview guides the organization and behaviour of that culture. However, the members of a society may not even be conscious of the various ways in which their worldview impacts them. As Sire (1988:17) asserts, the presuppositions inherent within a given worldview are "generally unquestioned" by their adherents.

Tradition provides an integral dimension of culture (Kraft 2005:38). Carroll (2000:10) explains that the term *tradition*, derived "from the Latin root *tradere* (to hand over or entrust), refers generally to the collective memory of a particular group through which it passes on its accrued wisdom…from generation to generation." A given tradition, Pelikan (1984:6, 20) suggests, actually provides the "social glue" within a given group and, over time, provides social continuity involving a partnership of past, present, and future generations. As the observations of Carroll and Pelikan suggest, the long-term capacity of a society or group to perpetuate a consensus surrounding its accumulated cultural tradition has inherently *intergenerational* implications. Mannheim (1972:107) explains that, because, through birth, (1) "new participants in the cultural process are emerging," (2) it is "necessary continually to transmit the accumulated cultural heritage;" thus, (3) "the transition from generation to generation is a continuous process." This being the case, the elders within a group must employ a "formal and informal, conscious and unconscious" process of "socialization" or "enculturation" as a means of transmitting their social attitudes, norms, and expectations from one generation to another (Westerhoff 1974:37-39; cf. Taber 2000:57).

Westerhoff (1974:45) insists that the family, as "[t]he first and most important socializing agency," has a particularly critical role in this process (cf. Loper 1999:5). Indeed, as Mead (1970:2) has attested, the coexistence of three generations (grandparents, parents, and children) is necessary for the transmission of a cultural tradition to occur. Beyond this, however, the entire community contributes to the formative process through its shared institutions, social networks, ceremonies, and rituals (Kennedy Neville 1974:54-55). The envisioned outcome is that members of the rising generation might come to identify and conduct themselves as "self-regulating" participants in that tradition (Mogey 1991:55). By this intergenerational process, says White (1988:125), "we make and keep life human."

Understanding that the long-term viability of both church and society is dependent upon this "intergenerational" dynamic, it will be helpful to clarify briefly the significance of this term, "intergenerational." Newman and Smith (1997:4) offer the following explanation: "At the foundation of the intergenerational concept is a relationship that is as old as the institutions of family and community. Its roots can be

seen in the connections that link specific generations within families—the elder and younger members" (cf. Mogey 1991:48). Pillemer, Keeton, and Suitor (2000:1386) suggest that those who have studied these relations from a historical perspective "have identified changing patterns of relationships between the old and the young" over time.

According to sociologists, these intergenerational patterns can be studied on two levels (Pillemer, Keeton, & Suitor 2000:1388). First, the *macrosociological* approach is concerned with a generalized analysis of the relations between generational cohorts on a societal scale. Second, the *microsociological* approach involves an examination of intergenerational relationships within the family or within particular social groupings of society. In essence, this perspective is concerned with what Gubrium and Rittman (1991:94) have termed "small worlds." These authors describe a "small world" as "an interpersonal domain of understanding," a particular setting with "experiential boundaries."

A fundamental assertion of this thesis is that the *microsociological* and *macrosociological* facets of the term "intergenerational" are dynamically interrelated. Relational patterns emerging through the former category of inquiry do impact the latter, albeit only to the extent that the widespread existence of such patterns contributes to the development of phenomena arising within the latter category of inquiry (Zimmerman 1995:43). At the same time, developments occurring within the latter category prove to have a significant impact upon intergenerational patterns within the *microsociological* context. In fact, in examining such small worlds, one is able to gain an appreciation of the concrete impact of "global" (i.e., *macrosociological*) intergenerational trends upon what people think, feel, and do in these specific social situations. Recognizing this, we will endeavour throughout this study to explore the interplay of these two senses of the word *intergenerational*.

While this study is concerned ultimately with the life of the church, the approach being employed here is founded upon the conviction that analysis of the praxis of the church must occur with reference to the praxis of society; thus, if we are to understand the praxis of society, we must grasp that the historical development of the praxis of a given culture occurs through time in conjunction with the ongoing emergence of a

series of successive generations. In appropriating this *macrosociological* perspective, we are able to explore matters such as how the relational structures, modes of interaction, and attitudes that exist between the members of two or more generations within a society develop across time. In turn, this enables us to consider the praxis of the church, the household of faith, as a *microsociological* "small world" entity, with a view to understanding the way in which its intergenerational objectives come to be impacted by broader social trends.

As we consider the impact of intergenerational relations upon the successful perpetuation of cultural traditions within church and society, the issue of intergenerational "solidarity" proves to be of central significance. Social scientists have advanced this concept of "solidarity" to describe the "glue" by which "group cohesiveness" is maintained within a given society or community (Roberts, Richards, & Bengston 1991:12). Roberts, Richards, and Bengston (:15) cite one study that identifies four key dynamics of interaction contributing to the level of solidarity within a group:

1. **Interaction**: the degree of contact and interconnectedness between the actions of one group member and another.
2. **Activity**: the breadth of activities in which group members engage together.
3. **Sentiment**: the degree of mutual affection between group members.
4. **Norms**: shared standards regarding membership and interaction.

This study found that more cohesive groups were those in which frequent interaction, shared fondness, and commonly held normative commitments were present. Another study referenced by these authors similarly found that, when high levels of both "contact" and "similarity" are present within a group, a stronger "sentiment" of solidarity will exist than in those groups that interact regularly, but share few common interests (:16). As we progress through this exploration of society-wide and "small world" intergenerational dynamics, the degree of solidarity among the generations will prove to be a primary factor impacting the degree to which a group's cultural tradition is passed successfully from one generation to the next.

2.3 The Generation within the Praxis of Society

The ultimate aim of the present study is to address challenges that have emerged within and between the contemporary generations amid the post-modern transition. This being so, if our desire is to respond to these challenges by exploring the intergenerational praxis of the church within the praxis of society, it will be helpful at this point to proceed by lending more precise definition in response to a fundamental question: What do we mean when we speak of a *generation*? Indeed, this question is crucial to the integrity of this thesis. It must be acknowledged that some influential Christian leaders within the ranks of the generations most directly influenced by this transitional period (Gen Xers in particular) are inherently sceptical of the notion that one can even speak meaningfully about generational identity on a *macrosociological* level and, thus, question whether the concept of the generation should influence the way in which the church conceives its praxis. For example, Gen Xer Andy Crouch (2001:83) maintains that, apart from the Boomer generation, which he views as an undeniably cohesive group, the notion of generational identity in American history is a "myth."

Those advancing such an opinion generally insist that generational identity is purely an artificial construct created and advanced by marketing and media specialists. As one Gen Xer author articulates, "Using a 'divide and conquer' methodology, marketers drew somewhat arbitrary lines around us in order to have a defined target at which they could shoot their products in order to make money. The generational divisions resulted in what we now know as Gen X" (Cox 1998:20-21). On this basis, some of these critics may wish to invalidate the exercise being undertaken here. In light of the media saturation and post-modern fragmentation to which they have been subjected throughout their lifetime, one can understand how Gen Xers could hold such an opinion. However, while it may be true that media and marketing experts are responsible for promoting reductionistic generational stereotypes, the members of the Yankelovich group, perhaps the foremost proponents of a generational approach to marketing, adamantly insist that their adoption of this framework actually came about in *response* to generational trends that became perceptible to them in 1968 (Smith & Clurman 1997:xi-xiii). Could it be that Gen X critics have chosen to respond to reductionist stereotypes by employing reductionist arguments as the basis for

dismissing the significance of generations within church and society? Might it not be fair to enquire as to whether some measure of discernable distinctions in generational identity were evident on a *macrosociological* scale prior to, and independent of, the particular cultural influences often cited by these Gen Xers?

2.3.1 Establishing a Historical Precedent for the Study of Generations

Several millennia prior to the advent of the post-modern generations or the media forces to which some sceptics attribute responsibility for the existence of generational consciousness, the presence and significance of generations within society was being recognized. Generational theorists Strauss and Howe (1996) provide the following observations:

> There is nothing either recent or arbitrary about generations. In cultures all over the world, archaic myths and epics originally relied on the generations—not years—as the standard unit for tracking the rise and fall of empires and religions. Some of the most renowned pioneers of the western study of history…pondered obsessively over how generational changes regulate the ebb and flow of events.
> (www.fourthturning.com)

It would be an "etymological fallacy" to superimpose a contemporary definition of "generation" upon the manner in which this term was used within ancient civilizations or to suggest uniformity in the meaning that has been applied to it throughout history (Hilborn & Bird 2002:13). However, it is worthwhile to note that the concept of the generation was being recognized, if even primitively, in the earliest epochs of recorded history as an important social reality.

Within the modern Western context, interest in the significance of generations first arose among propagandists of the French Revolution in the 1780s and 1790s. They sought to understand how political generations of like-aged leaders influence the formation and establishment of new rules for society. Many of these theorists, observe Strauss and Howe (1992:438), "took great care to define generations and locate them in history."

Beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century, a growing number of scientists and philosophers began to develop a serious interest in the study of generations. However, their attention extended beyond mere political impact to the influence of

generations upon social progress in general. One school of thought, represented in the work of August Comte, asserted that, within the modern world, generations had become the causal dynamic of the pace of all social change. Another tradition was nurtured by scholars such as Dilthey who, in their search for a means of identifying the unique *gestalt* of specific historical periods, concluded that this "inner totality" could be found in the specific historical experience of a generation (Kohli 1996:1-2). Later, following World War I, Karl Mannheim, José Ortega, François Mentré, and numerous other scholars, "produced perhaps the most cogent body of generations writing ever" (Strauss & Howe 1997a:63). In addition to this academic exploration of the subject, on a popular level, "Europeans were becoming acutely aware of generational differences in their cultural and political life;" as a result, "By the end of the nineteenth century, the European elite chattered incessantly of generations." Clearly, in spite of the claims to the contrary cited above, there is a compelling historical precedent for recognizing generations as a valid social reality.

2.3.2 Establishing a Theoretical Framework for the Study of Generations

As this thesis unfolds, it will become evident that, in direct contradiction to the claims of the critics cited above, it now is possible to speak more intelligibly of generational identity than perhaps at any previous point in modern history. This being the case, attention must still be lent to the fundamental question of "What is a generation?" As may already be apparent, this term has several different applications, each of which bears a distinct meaning. For example, one can use the term *generation* to refer to those possessing a parallel location within the genealogy of an individual family or to refer to the actual process of *begetting* by which a family line is propagated (Mogey 1991:48). As has already been suggested above, such intra-familial dynamics do come to bear on the subject being considered here. However, in this context, we are concerned centrally with the broader concept of what sociologists commonly refer to as the *social generation* or *generational cohort*.

2.3.2.1 The Generation: A Historical and Sociological Phenomenon

As we consider this concept of the generational cohort, we can note that biology provides the most basic dimension by which it might be defined (Mogey 1991:48-49).

Simply stated, a generation is composed of a wide variety of persons who, by virtue of having been born at approximately the same point in history, are involuntarily and permanently bound together by a "common age location in history" (Strauss & Howe 1992:48). Thus, the members of a generation move together across time, journeying "upward in age" from birth to death (Riley 2000:342).

While this similarity in age is fundamental to the definition of a generational cohort, this alone cannot account for the formation of such cohorts. In addition to this, as Mannheim (1972:106, 113) asserts, the members of a generational cohort must share a common *social* location. According to Mannheim, shared social location entails participation as an integrated group in common experiences that engender a collective predisposition to certain characteristics, modes of thought, and historically relevant action. In essence, shared experience of social institutions and social circumstances provides a generational cohort with common "sociological conditioning" (Esler 1971:30). As a cohort moves through time together, such experiences cause each generation to develop "a distinct biography and a distinct lifecycle" (Strauss & Howe 1992:48; cf. Twenge 2006:2). In other words, as Riley (2000:342) observes, "As they age, the people in each cohort are changing socially and psychologically as well as biologically; they are actively participating with other people; and they are accumulating knowledge, attitudes, and experiences." Through this process, each generation forms its own *weltanschauung*, a unique "peer personality" or "generational style" composed of similar patterns of belief, values, behaviour, and ways of expressing social identity, or "central tendencies" (Smith & Clurman 1997:xv; Williams & Nussbaum 2001:8; Carroll & Roof 2002:6; Lancaster & Stillman 2003:13-14); Mannheim (1972:125) has described this as a generational *entelechy*.

2.3.2.2 Common Age Location: Clarifying the Perimeters

With consideration having been lent here to the roles of common age location and shared social location in the formation of generational cohorts, two further issues arising from this discussion are worthy of brief consideration. First, if common age location is part of that which shapes a generational cohort, the question of how one defines the span of the birth years of a generation logically follows. In order to

engage in any empirical analysis of generational groups, as we shall attempt to do in this study, it is essential to assign fixed birth-year parameters to each cohort. However, as Strauss and Howe (1992:60) observe, "Although social philosophers over the last two centuries have often (like ourselves) defined a generation as a cohort-group, they have had difficulty explaining how long it should be." Some scholars have simply chosen to assign fairly arbitrary lengths ranging from ten to thirty-three years (Zimmerman 1995:43; Williams & Nussbaum 2001:144). Some theorists, seeking to provide a more reasoned theoretic basis for addressing this question, suggest that the length of a generation should be seen as corresponding to the average number of years that span between being born and entering parenthood. However, insist Strauss and Howe (1992:60), this "family time" perspective does not produce any single thread of "social time." Rather, they argue, the length of generational cohorts is best understood as corresponding to the length of a phase of life (e.g., "youth," "rising adulthood," "midlife," "elderhood"), which does provide a common basis of shared experience. Within the modern American context, they suggest, generations have ranged in length from 18 to 25 years, with approximately 22 years constituting the norm (Strauss & Howe 1996; www.fourthturning.com).

This assertion by Strauss and Howe is consistent with the claims advanced by the bulk of literature examining recent American generations. This being said, it is significant to note that considerable diversity exists between generational theorists regarding the precise birth-year parameters of specific generational cohorts. In some cases, this reflects differences in the value that theorists assign to key formative events in shaping rising generations. For example, most theorists insist that the transition from the Silent to the Boomer generation effectively began with the conclusion of World War II. Dunn (1993:8), for example, suggests that the baby boom began nine months after VE day and "kicked into high gear" nine months after VJ day. In contrast to this, however, Strauss and Howe (1992:299) identify the Boomer generation as commencing in 1943. The counsel of Altbach (1972:7) is instructive in explaining how such diversity can arise: "There is no neat break which defines the different generations…Many people fall into a transitionary category, but generally ally themselves with either the younger or older generational perspective rather than forming a separate generational consciousness."

Marías (1970:102) has suggested that the succession of generations is best pictured as a series of mountain ridges, with those born in the "watershed" basin between two ridges as constituting a generation (Zimmerman 1995:44). When understood in this light, however, the study of generations becomes dependent upon identifying the precise "pinnacle" moments that divide the generations. While in some cases the transition between two generations may be precisely this "pointed," in others it simply is not. As Codrington and Grant (2004:18) note, "icon moments" producing an immediate shift in culture are rare. This being so, it is wise to heed the advice of Lancaster and Stillman (2003:13-14); while observing that "[t]here really is no magic birth date that makes you a part of a particular generation" and that "[g]enerational personalities go much deeper," these authors caution that the age ranges used by scholars to define the members of the generations must be viewed as "just guidelines." Perhaps Williams and Nussbaum (2001:144) capture this best in suggesting that the "perceptual boundaries" separating generations are "fuzzy."

2.3.2.3 Common Social Location: Considering the Parameters

A second issue that arises out of the explanation of generational cohort formation provided above is the question of whether it truly is possible for the members of a society who possess common age location to share enough common social experience to result in the formation of a unified peer personality. Writing in the 1920s, Mannheim (1972:101, 119) expressed caution regarding the degree to which one could speak of a monolithic generational culture on a broad scale within a given society. From the present vantage point of fragmented post-modern culture, it is good to revisit this consideration. Chapters two through four have been written with a view to providing a thorough response to this question. At this point, however, it is helpful to submit that, at the very time in which Mannheim was writing, social conditions were beginning to take form that would make the examination of generational peer personality on a societal scale a more meaningful endeavour than ever before. Indeed, Williams and Nussbaum (2001:44) express "little doubt that common experiences can unite a cohort."

This being said, a balanced study of this subject must be rooted in the acknowledgement that no generation is marked by absolute uniformity of belief and practice. Because every generational cohort is composed of members representing a range of other demographic variables, one must exercise great care in employing generalizations. It seems unlikely that we should attempt to attribute to each cohort a generational "group mind," that "singular harmony of outlook" of which Esler (1971:32) wrote. At the same time, the acknowledgement of diversity within a generation does not necessarily imply rejection of the concept of a unified peer personality. Strauss and Howe (1992:64) observe that "[i]ndividual divergences from peer personality, and how those divergences are perceived, can explain much about a generation." In addition, as Mannheim (1972:130) suggests, "polar opposites within an epoch always interpret their world in terms of one another, and constitute attempts to address the same problems and issues of destiny."

Thus, what both Strauss and Howe and Mannheim seem to be suggesting is that diversity evident among the members of a generation will prove to centre and cohere around, and be subject to the judgement of, certain core elements of a unified peer personality. Hicks and Hicks (1999:49) choose to employ a bell curve to demonstrate the reality that, even while "deviations" of one sort or another may exist within a cohort, the majority shares a commitment to common values. This being said, it is important to note the clarification of Raines (2003:11) to the effect that, when speaking of generational cohorts, one must be careful to draw a distinction between "generalizations," which are flexible and helpful guidelines for understanding one another, and "stereotypes," which are rigidly and inflexibly applied to all members of a group.

As chapters three and four will demonstrate, as the generations born since the early twentieth century have advanced along their respective life cycles, they have experienced critical "generational markers," collective experiences that have shaped their values and attitudes (Smith & Clurman 1997:7). From a socio-psychological perspective, it can be suggested that the individual stories belonging to the members of each generation have interrelated and "meshed" with the cultural narratives that have shaped, and have been shaped by, their respective generations (Roof 1993:28-30). Thus, while this affirmation is not intended to diminish the status of the

individual within society or to deny the cultural diversity represented within a given cohort, it is difficult to divorce the experience of the individual from that of his or her generation. In fact, acknowledging this interrelationship is essential; as Strauss and Howe (1997:68) observe:

> Ortega wrote that the generational experience is a "dynamic compromise between the mass and the individual." To refuse this compromise is not easy; indeed, total refusal forces a person to become painfully aware of outsider status. The German sociologist Julius Peterson observed that any generation includes what he called "directive," "directed," and "suppressed" members. The directive members set the overall tone; the directed follow cues (and thereby legitimize the tone); and the suppressed either withdraw from that tone or, more rarely, battle against it.

Having laid this theoretical foundation for understanding the nature of the generation, we now are positioned well to consider more closely how this concept factors into the intergenerational praxis of society, as well as that of the church in its relation to society.

2.4 The Intergenerational Praxis of Society

2.4.1 The Intergenerational Problem

The present study is guided by the recognition that many established churches, as *small world* contexts, are struggling to respond faithfully to an increasingly complex generational context. Indeed, it will be argued here, the *macrosociological* intergenerational situation within which the church is called to carry out its witness today is one fraught with a lack of solidarity. The experience of intergenerational problems certainly is not unique to recent decades. Eisenstadt (1972:139) suggests that tensions between generations have been evident in various forms throughout recorded history. Bengston (1972:198) illustrates this point by sharing the following brief survey:

> Egyptian and Hebrew sages defined wisdom in terms that implied dire consequences for youth who forsook the way of their elders. The Maxims of Ptahhotep—the first document on ethics of which there is record—was...already concerned with the problem of generations. Plato and Aristotle incorporated generational struggle in their theories of political change. Aristotle suggested the cause of political struggle could be found in the conflict of fathers and sons.

While intergenerational tension has been a reality throughout many eras and in many cultures, as has already been mentioned, Margaret Mead (1970:79) suggests that the

conflict between Boomers and their elders that emerged in the 1960s amounted to "a deep, new unprecedented, worldwide generation gap."

In contrast to the gap of which Mead wrote, Hersch (1998:20) suggests that the crisis that has arisen in the contemporary generational context "has nothing to do with [affecting] social change, with intellectual questioning or opposition to causes." Rather, Hersch (:20, 23) insists that the generations of today actually have come to experience a state of virtual "separation" and that, as a result, our society is faced with "a gaping hole that severs the continuity of generations." Other authors describe "a great division among the generations" (Loper 1999:36), one that has "increased in potency" (Whitesel & Hunter 2000:10), that is "wider than ever," and "of greater strategic importance" than ever before (Lancaster & Stillman 2003:5). Gambone (1998:17) assesses the condition of recent intergenerational relations by concluding that "[m]ore people are living longer and more people feel further apart from each other than at any other time in history." This contemporary situation is rendered more complex by the fact that, not only are there several generations existing together, but also several distinct, generationally based sets of value systems at work within society, "each with its perceived needs and perspectives" (McIntosh 2002:10). The existence of ancient antagonisms hardly accounts for such unprecedented discord and complexity. Thus, further consideration must be lent to the particular history that has given rise to this situation. Chapters three and four will be devoted to this task.

In recent years, a multitude of attempts to gauge the unfolding struggles between the generations has been conducted from the perspectives of disciplines as diverse as church growth, sociology, political science, economics, educational leadership, marketing, and organizational management. The considerable diversity of opinion represented among those who have engaged in these investigations illustrates the reality that, just as one must avoid the tendency of adopting caricatures of individual generations, one also must avoid simplistic caricatures of the *gaps* between generations. As Strommen et al (1972:230) caution, such gaps are never simple. Bengston (1972:195) even suggests that it may not be appropriate to view a generation gap merely as a gap. Rather, the relationships between generations must be seen as complex, involving points of agreement and tension in varying combinations. However, while the nature of recent intergenerational discord may be

difficult to define in precise terms, there seems to be little doubt among those who have addressed this subject within their respective fields of inquiry that it is a very real and very pressing issue. Indeed, As the recent volume *Linking Lifetimes* (Kaplan et al 2002) compellingly demonstrates, at the beginning of a new millennium, generational alienation has become a global phenomenon.

Once again, it is helpful to keep in focus the aim of this study, which is concerned with the meditative action of the church within the praxis of society. Specifically, we are concerned with the intergenerational bearing of tradition within both society and church and the generationally-borne praxes that either promote or prevent this central concern. If the context of the society in which the church endeavours to carry out its mission is one marked by a lack of shared activity, affection, and values among the generations, it seems fitting to explore how this has come about. Bearing in mind the explanation of cohort "peer personality" formation provided above, one might expect to encounter evidence of intergenerational differences between the contemporary generational cohorts. However, this theoretical framework does not explain sufficiently how differences between generational cohorts have come to be perceived as being so pronounced, or why the relationships between these generations are subject to such discord. Thus, in service to our concern for locating the praxis of the church within the praxis of society, we will do well to outline a hermeneutical framework for understanding how such a disruption might occur within the intergenerational praxis of society.

2.4.2 The Significance of Formative Experiences

As the focus of this investigation turns to a theoretical consideration of the breakdown of intergenerational solidarity and the disruption of the intergenerational perpetuation of tradition, it will become evident that all generations contribute to such discord. However, it must be acknowledged that primary responsibility for this phenomenon tends generally to be attributed to the *rising* or youth generation. As Milson (1972:39) wrote in the early 1970s, "All over the contemporary world people seem to be talking about the 'youth problem'." This tendency to attribute blame to the young makes sense when the theory of generational cohort formation provided above is considered from an intergenerational perspective.

As the influential works of Erickson (1959) and others (e.g., Kohlberg 1973) have demonstrated, the potential for development persists throughout the human life span (cf. White 1988:128). However, the pre-adult years have long been acknowledged as a crucial passage in human development (Codrington & Grant-Marshall 2004:13). As Hamburg (1992:19-20) notes, these years "provide the fundamental opportunity for learning the basic elements of what we need to know—about ourselves, about each other, about the world around us, about ways to cope and to solve the problems of living." As a result of this learning process, suggests Westerhoff (1974:165, 166), "By the time a person has reached adulthood, he or she has internalized a whole package of cultural meanings, signals, and symbols which indicate 'right' ways of doing things and 'appropriate' ways to behave."

Westerhoff (1974:166) adds to this the vital clarification that these cultural norms "are always learned within the context of a human group." Because we are embedded in relationships, the influence of relationships is of central significance in our development (White 1988:91, 94; Williams & Nussbaum 2001:6; Ramirez 2005:70). Thus, human development can only be understood properly against the backdrop of what has been articulated above regarding the perpetuation of cultural traditions as a process rooted in particular communities. As Smith (2006:131) notes, "To be human is to be temporal; to be temporal is to be traditioned, which is simply to say that we are always and only temporal in a social or communal manner."

Whereas, in section 2.2, we entertained the concept of cultural tradition from the perspective of the community, it will be helpful here to explore this concept from the perspective of the rising generation. As the younger members of a society or group learn from and observe the behaviour of their parents and elders, the cultural tradition into which they are being inducted serves three primary functions: (1) it provides self-identity, or the ability to "locate oneself in the larger narrative of family, tribe, or community;" (2) it clarifies values, or "the basic frames or perspectives through which we view the world;" and (3) it defines roles, or "what is expected of us, in a general sense, both in day-to-day routines and in relationships with others" (Carroll 2000:10-13; cf. Westerhoff 1974:37-39; White 1988:98). In essence, as Kraft (2005:43) notes, "each youngster reared in a given society is conditioned to interpret

reality in terms of the conceptual system of that culture." Because "socialization involves a process of enculturation", individuals come to bear and transmit culture "because they have participated in some way *in* culture" (Thompson 2003:70).

While this process of cultural transmission is of critical importance in the formation of each generation, Inglehart (1990:4) suggests that the worldview of a generation "does not depend solely on what their elders teach them; rather, it is shaped by their entire life experience." In other words, the *overall* formative experiences of each rising generation, including "historical and social change," "the interrelationships among [life] transitions," and "the intersections among life domains," are of vital significance (Pfeifer & Sussman 1991:83). While critical formative events and conditions can arise at various points in the course of a generational life cycle, it is widely held that the most influential "generational markers" commonly occur during adolescence and young-adulthood (Bennett, Craig, & Rademacher 1997:5). During this stage in life, the members of a generation have gained enough maturity to comprehend the significance of critical events and conditions, yet remain young enough to be malleable or psychologically adaptable.

Hamburg (1992:15) asserts that, as a result of this formative stage, "What people experience early in life provides the basis for all the rest." Westerhoff (1974:38-39) similarly refers to the "perhaps *irreversible* influences of early experience" (italics added for emphasis). As a generation advances through its life cycle, its members employ a "dialectic of consciousness," by which early experiences provide the first critical stratum upon which all later consciousness is built (Mannheim 1972:113). Even if the perspective forged through this primary stratum is somehow later negated, it will still serve as the predominant influence and reference point for a generation.

This emphasis on the importance of enculturation and formative events is not intended to suggest that the process by which generational peer personality is developed is merely a passive one. Generations are not simply shaped *by* traditions, language, events, and conditions. Rather, they also play an *active* role in the formation of their own generational identity. Development involves a transactional dynamic by which we both produce and are produced by our environment (Williams & Nussbaum 2001:130). Thus, while cultural customs "shape" their participants, they cannot be

construed as *determining* the behaviour of these participants (Kraft 2005:56). This being the case, the emergence of new cohorts results in the continuous experience of "fresh contact" with the accumulated heritage of a society, a process that can be "potentially radical" because of changes in the attitudes of these rising generations toward that social heritage (Mannheim 1972:108-109). In exploring this encounter of each generation with its cultural heritage, Carroll (2000:10-11) suggests that it is helpful to draw a distinction between *traditum* and *traditio*: "The former term refers to the core 'deposit' of the collective memory, while the later refers to the core's various adaptations as it is handed down from generation to generation." Essentially, in its actual *performance* of learned cultural patterns, each generation is faced with making choices in relation to its social heritage that impact the degree to which the process of cultural "accumulation" is perpetuated, adapted, or interrupted (Kraft 2005:38, 57; Roxburgh & Romanuk 2006:73).

Howe and Strauss (2000:62) posit that this *active* process by which generational identities are forged must also be understood as entailing a *reactive* dynamic provoked by prevailing cultural conditions. They assert that a rising generation will tend to (a) solve a problem of the prior youth generation, whose style has become dysfunctional in the new era; (b) correct for the behavioural excess it perceives in the current midlife generation; or (c) fill the social role being vacated by the departing elder generation. Regardless of whether the reactive behaviour of generational cohorts can be reduced to these specific patterns identified by Howe and Strauss, the basic point these authors provide remains an important one. As consideration is lent to this *reactive* dynamic of the adolescent formative period, benefit can be drawn from the following words of counsel by Nel (2000:48): "The very fact of being reactionary is interwoven with the character of adolescent development. When you accept responsibility for your own life you experience times of intense emotional insecurity, accompanied by suspicion of reigning customs." It is perhaps because of the experience of immersion in this active and reactive process of differentiation that, as Esler (1971:32) suggests, the self consciousness of a generation tends to be greatest when its members are young (cf. Williams & Nussbaum 2001:10).

It is important to clarify that, as has been implied above, the outcome of the *active* and *reactive* dimensions of generational identity formation will be restricted by the reality

that this process is inescapably *interactive* in nature. In other words, it is an *intergenerational* process. Thus, as Milson (1972:28-29) observes, because

> [o]ne generation is obviously linked to another by cultural tradition…[c]omplete discontinuity between generations would be impossible….Thus one generation is bound to another: there is a communication of norms and the values which lie behind norms. To parody Donne, 'no generation is an Island, entire of itself'.

Because their socialization is so thoroughly dependent upon the cultural inheritance transmitted to them by their elders, Mannheim (1972:115-116) insists that even the most pronounced expression of "revolution" among youth can only address the uppermost stratum of consciousness open to their reflection.

While our exploration of the impact of the post-modern cultural shift may lead us to question that assertion, we can affirm Mannheim's (1972:130-131) claim that, far from inventing their own generational cultures *ex nihilo*, "Emerging generations superimpose their entelechies upon comprehensive entelechies." Indeed, these generational styles can only be recognized as such because of the prior existence of the "trend" entelechy within society. Thus, while the development of new habits and patterns "is always with us," says Kraft (2005:61), many aspects of the cultural experience of rising generations "are so unconsciously employed…that it never occurs to us to reevaluate or to change them." Even when the differences between generations are perceived as being quite dramatic, there is a very meaningful sense in which the rising generation, as it "arrives at its own definition of reality…through some meaningful blending of past and present," is "a carrier of culture" (Carroll & Roof 2002:7).

By viewing the formation of generational peer personalities from this intergenerational perspective, one can begin clearly to account for the existence of differences between the generations. Bengston (1972:200) outlines the following summary of factors that contribute to the reality of generational differentiation: (a) the birth cycle difference between generations; (b) the decreasing rate of socialization with the coming of maturity; (c) the resulting intrinsic differences between parents and children in the physiological, sociological, and psycho-social planes of their behaviour. In the face of such differences, it is understandable for the rising generation to be perceived as presenting a problem. As Nel (2000:41) explains,

"[W]hen yesterday's young people become today's adults, a strange thing happens. The new adults begin, perhaps in another way than their parents and the latter's contemporaries, to (re)define and protect the symbols of adulthood." The new contribution of the rising cohort to the generational mix is always that which disturbs the status quo (Prevost 2000:1). Thus, in considering the process by which intergenerational differentiation emerges, Altbach and Laufer (1972:7) are compelled to conclude that "generational discontinuity is developed *over time* and expresses the *differing images of man and society* held by generations engaged in conflict" (italics added for emphasis).

2.4.3 The Significance of Social Change

The rate at which the process of discontinuity develops, and whether or not it actually entails the conflict to which Altbach alludes, certainly differs from society to society and even at different historical points within a given society. Kraft (2005:62) notes that change has been a reality within societies throughout history. However, as Roxburgh (2005:55) suggests, societies may experience "highly predictable" periods of stability, in which "[a]ssumed traditions and rituals guide actions and shape the perception of reality." During such periods, changes tend to be "continuous" with the "prior understanding of the world" and, thus, are able to be assimilated or adapted into this understanding (:29). These changes tend to be small, gradual, and incremental, and usually are guided by the internal demands of the existing systems and practices (:57). In such contexts, certain aspects of the culture may even be designated as legitimate areas for innovation and creativity (e.g., fashion), while others are not open to such change (e.g., religion, politics) (Kraft 2005:62).

In contrast to this, however, some periods are characterized by "discontinuous change" (Roxburgh 2005:57). The transformative impact of such periods may penetrate far beyond "surface-level" social traits to "core" cultural traits (:134). Roxburgh (:29) explains the potential impact of such times:

> It exhausts our physical, mental, and spiritual resources by its sheer magnitude. While we may find some success adapting to changes in one or two areas of our lives, pervasive, discontinuous change forces us to deal with changes on every front simultaneously. What's more, these changes build on

each other, making it even more difficult to know which to pay attention to and what to do next.

This experience of profound discontinuity can render the tradition that had been so crucial in "the stability phase" powerless in functioning as "the glue to hold the system together" (:61). The resulting process of "disembedding" tends to entail "the uprooting of deeply connected relationships, beliefs, practices, and values" (:62). Kraft (2005:46) notes that this "distortion" and "disequilibrium" can produce cognitive dissonance; in turn, as the members of a society endeavour to resolve this dissonance and to process the implications of how their perspective is changing, profound shifts may occur in the prevailing worldview (Kraft 2005:46, 59-60). Understandably, this often is the cause of much stress at both the individual and societal level.

Mannheim (1972:126) observes a relationship between the prevailing tempo of social change and patterns of generational differentiation. He insists that changes in generational style are dependent upon the trigger action of social and cultural processes (cf. George & Gold 1991:67). Milson (1972:28-29) mirrors this assertion in observing that "the links between generations are patently not equally strong. In some ages men are found stressing stability and authority; in others, their attention is caught by new ways and discontinuities." Mead (1970:1) illustrates this point in her reflections upon the existence of *postfigurative* cultures, in which change is so gradual that little difference between the experience of grandparents and that of their grandchildren is perceptible, or even conceivable. She observes, "The past of the adults is the future of each new generation; their lives provide the ground plan" (cf. Gubrium & Rittman 1991:89-90). Clearly, Côté and Allahar (1995:xi-xii) are correct to suggest that the coming of age often associated with conflict between "neophyte and adult members of societies….varies according to one's culture, and within specific cultures, and tensions run higher during certain periods of history."

While this may be so, this present study is purported to be concerned with a period in which social discontinuity has resulted in the contemporary American generations being marked by pronounced differentiation. The observation by de Tocqueville (1990:58-59) in the 1830s that, "in America, each generation is a new people", while reflecting the reality that change has always been part of the American social

landscape, remains hyperbolic even today. Similarly, the claim by Esler (1971:31-32) that social change makes it possible for "a new world" to be forged by each generation also is certainly exaggerated. However, this does not dismiss or diminish the apparent relationship between rapid social change and the development of discontinuity between generational cohorts. Against the backdrop of her description of *postfigurative* cultures, Mead (1970:63) insists that societies experiencing rapid social change tend also to experience a radical departure from traditional models of intergenerational relations. Indeed, rapid rates of social change produce *heterogeneity*, rather than *homogeneity*, among the generations (George & Gold 1991:71-72). In these *prefigurative* contexts, suggests Mead (1970:63), young people can say to their elders, "You never have been young in the world I am young in, and you never can be." Such situations illustrate the legitimacy of the observation by Mannheim (1972:116) that the generations grow up facing different adversaries.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, such changes within society can foster the erosion of solidarity among the generations. In the face of rapid change, the youth of society can grow impatient in listening to older members of the community. As Milson (1972:31) observes, "For a new situation, their longer time on earth is counted as irrelevant." As a result, youth can become unwilling to view the adult "as one to be attended to and to learn from" (Elkind 1984:112). At the same time, Milson (1972:35-36) suggests, "The cultural discontinuities associated with rapid change press upon adults as they approach young people and try to build relationships with them....Adults can no longer assume that they know everything that the youngster needs to know in order to be fitted for adult life." Thus, the reality that positive communication between the generations requires a mutual willingness to listen and learn can become intimidating to adults in such times. As a result, adults may be tempted to abdicate their positions of influence in the lives of young people. In turn, suggests Elkind (1984:14), the proper protection, guidance, and instruction of the young will tend to be neglected. The resulting breakdown of communication robs both older and younger members of society of opportunities to explore and strengthen commonalities that transcend obvious differences based in age (Milson 1972:109-110).

Furthermore, as Elkind (1984:112) explains, when communication between the generations breaks down, youth are prevented from engaging in "productive, if

painful, battles over ideas and actions." Without trustworthy and concerned adults who are willing to serves as "healthy opponents against whom to test their own opinions and values," youth lose "an important opportunity for growth by differentiation and integration." In correlation with this, a process of cultural *detraditionalization* can ensue (Butler Bass 2004:28). In other words, the received traditions may come to be perceived by the young as no longer providing adequate meaning and authority in everyday life. Furthermore, the changes occurring within society may actually present these young people with multiple, even conflicting traditions (Carroll 2000:11). As a result, youth can come to lose their faith in the received tradition and adopt a critical disposition toward it; the resulting cultural shift from the univocality of the inherited tradition to multivocality can profoundly impact traditional authority structures (Butler Bass 2004:28, 30). Essentially, the "novelty" of the world created by the parents of the younger generations can come to be emphasized (Eisenstadt 1972:147-148; Kraft 2005:57), and the critical process of cultural transmission can be dramatically interrupted. The desire for change among the young is likely to be most urgent in relation to those facets of society where a lack of fit between conventional cultural patterns and their own experience "hurts" most (Kraft 2005:57).

The assertion that rapid social change fosters pronounced generational differentiation is widely held. Yet, in recent decades, two challenges to its validity commonly have been posed. These are important to address briefly because they also challenge the validity of the thesis being advanced here. First, some suggest that accounts of discontinuity between the generations fail to take into account *aging* or *life cycle effects*; those advancing this argument expect younger generations eventually to "grow up" and begin conforming to "established" cultural patterns and values. Second, contrary to the notion that social change fosters generational differentiation, some critics suggest that all generations are somewhat similarly impacted by *period effects*. Bennett, Craig, and Rademacher (1997:3) summarize the essence of these two criticisms:

> Young people sometimes think and act differently from their elders simply because they are young and not because they have spent their "formative years" being influenced by the tides of history. In other instances, the attitudes and behavior of young and old alike will shift in a similar direction (and perhaps to a

> similar degree) because both have been exposed to and affected by the same historical forces and events.

These criticisms do offer necessary cautions against the tendency to draw unfounded or extravagant conclusions. However, do they invalidate the theoretical position being advanced here?

The research of Inglehart (1990) essentially upholds the theoretical position being advanced in this chapter by providing compelling responses to both of these objections. Contrary to the second criticism mentioned, the results of quantitative research by Inglehart (1990:73) indicate that the impact of social change has been manifested differently among the generations, with the younger generations demonstrating greater variance from previous norms than older generations. Furthermore, in contradiction to the first objection caricatured by Bennett, Inglehart (:85) points to longitudinal studies that have revealed the differences evident between cohorts in 1970, widely recognized as a watershed moment in the development of generational conflict, to be truly long-term rather than merely attributable to age differences. Thus, this evidence seems to support the conclusion that, because they are not faced with overcoming the resistance caused by the experience of incongruous earlier learning, as are older members of society (:19), the young are genuinely influenced by periods of rapid social change in ways that are both distinct and enduring (Milson 1972:32; Roof 1995:xiii). As we will see, this poses significant challenges for the church as it engages in its praxis within society.

2.4.4 The Significance of Youth

While it is essential to discuss in broad terms the impact of social change upon the development of generational identity among rising cohorts, it must be acknowledged that changes in the culture-specific experience of *youth* also contribute significantly to this developmental process. Eisenstadt (1963:24) asserts that, while youth may be a universal phenomenon from a biological perspective, it is always defined culturally. He provides this explanation:

> There are two major criteria that shape the social organization of the period of youth. One is the extent to which age in general and youth in particular form a criterion for the allocation of roles in a society...The second is the extent to which any society develops specific age groups, specific corporate organizations,

> composed of members of the same "age," such as youth movements or old men's clubs. If roles are allocated in a society according to age….youth becomes a definite and meaningful phase of transition in an individual's progress through life, and his budding self-identity acquires content and a relation to role models and cultural values. No less important to the concrete development of identity is the extent to which it is influenced, either by the common participation of different generations in the same group as in the family, or conversely by the organization of members of the same age groups into specific, distinct groups. (:29)

Thus, the formative experiences of the members of a rising generation will be shaped both by the attitude society has toward them based upon their age and by the specific ways in which society either structures their passage through youth or fails to do so. Howe and Strauss (2000:33) claim that this consideration is so significant that "[t]he leading edge of every generation is accompanied by a shift in how children are perceived."

This being said, the formative framework provided for young people depends to a large extent "on the stability and coherence of the culture in question" (Côté & Allahar 1995:71). To illustrate this point, Milson (1972:34) observes that "[s]ocieties of consensus—that is where the inherited value and normative systems are not seriously questioned—do not in fact emphasize age as a principle of social differentials;" such societies "are not notable for the development of a 'youth subculture.'" Similarly, Mead (1970:19-20) cites examples of *postfigurative* cultures within which rebellion by each rising generation is evident, yet in which it simply constitutes a normative, traditional step toward eventual assimilation into the customs of a relatively unchanging society.

The situation is often quite different in societies marked by significant social discontinuity. As we have already considered above, the challenge of learning new roles in periods of rapid social change impacts all parties, including adults. Thus, as Milson (1972:34) suggests, social changes inevitably "affect the approaches which the adult population make to the young." As Côté and Allahar (1995:71) observe,

> If a culture is going through rapid change or is otherwise unstable, an ambivalence toward the young can develop. As the identity of adult members becomes ambiguous, they are less able to guide the young through the self-discovery process that is an integral part of forming an identity. Consequently, they may feel alienated from their juniors, and be less likely to welcome them into adult society.

In the face of such conditions, in addition to the breakdown of communication cited above, adults may choose to respond to the instabilities of social change by structuring the world of young people in such a way that they, in effect, become a marginalized sector of society. In turn, the passage of youth becomes a "liminal" phase (Carroll & Roof 2002:24). Concomitantly, these societal structures have the potential to foster and reinforce the further erosion of intergenerational solidarity.

Milson (1972:111) posits that what youth truly desire is "to be treated seriously as members of the community, junior partners of older people, with all that involves in terms of respect, expectation and affection." Essentially, youth wish to play a meaningful *role* within society. Westerhoff (1974:45) sees the assigning of such roles, "the grooves in which behaviour is channelled," as an essential dimension of socialization. However, when the prevailing conditions of a society withhold such opportunity from its young, resulting in "role diffuseness" rather than "role specificity," this can have a pronounced effect on the formation of the rising generational cohort (Carroll & Roof 2002:24).

Eisenstadt (1963:24-42) hypothesizes that, in those societies in which inadequate provision has been made for the socialization of young people, "youth groups" tend to form. Nel (2000:48) offers a similar assertion in observing that the experience of marginalization commonly compels adolescents to form their own "subcultures." Regarding such subcultures, he explains,

> [T]he "growing one" grows in an almost artificial emotional and social vacuum...People and structures that were supposed to support and motivate change become a hostile opponent in the process of change. One still changes but no longer because of...It is almost changing *'against'* the adult community and no longer in *fellowship* with them. In this subculture people who were supposed to be co-workers become 'opponents'. The adolescent often experiences mature society as antagonistic.
>
> (:32)

Milson (1972:31) suggests that this experience of marginalization may give rise to the emergence of a "cult of youth." At the very least, it is likely to foster the conditions for the development of distinct cultural forms among youth.

Certainly, the shape and character of youth cultures is not the same in all times and places. Rather, teen culture is evolutionary in nature, involving a developmentary progression (Palladino 1996:197). As Nel (2000:48) explains, this evolutionary process occurs along an intergenerational trajectory: “The youth subculture and the reigning culture of the parental community are inextricably linked. The one calls the other into being. It can be safely said that youth subculture in history has usually been a certain reaction to the culture of the parental community.” This reaction by the rising generation might not necessarily involve an “anti-cultural” rejection of, or rebellion against, adult standards. However, in forming their own subcultures, the members of the rising generation may simply respond to the experience of marginalization by adopting “their own style of living” (Milson 1972:42). As Westerhoff (1974:46) asserts, “the peer group often socializes persons into new emerging values, new understandings of life, and new actions…independent of parents and other adult authorities.” Nel (2000:28) provides the helpful clarification that, “Because the term ‘culture’ usually refers to a blueprint for the behaviour, norms and values is a given society, subculture often refers to the same kind of phenomenon, but then in a smaller group in society.” In the case of youth, the spirit of this sub-cultural reaction can be expressed in the following: “According to your rules we are not allowed this or that therefore, in the meantime, we do it like this: our language, our values, our fashions, our terms, our religion” (:33).

Youth subcultures tend to be fairly fluid in character. As Nel (2000:28) observes, “It seldom happens that certain trends last long enough to manifest themselves clearly and recognizably in subcultures.” The trends arising within youth subcultures may be fleeting and thus perhaps may have only limited long-term effect on the formation of generational peer personality. This being said, because, as Strauss and Howe (1992:61) suggest, a sharp contrast between the experiences of youths and adults can “fix important differences in peer personality that last a lifetime,” the broader experience of devoting their formative years to defining themselves in distinction from the adult population does contribute appreciably to the process by which the members of a generation develop an enduring sense of differentiated generational identity. Indeed, in light of the fact that Inglehart (1990:85) has shown the generational differences evident in 1970 to be of a lasting nature, it is significant that the research conducted by Strommen et al (1972:222-223) found the “peer-

orientation" of the youth of that time to be the most notable factor contributing to the emergence of these differences. As we will see in the chapters that follow, recent developments of this sort within American society have greatly complicated the experience of local congregations as they live and minister within society. Before proceeding with an examination of this particular socio-historical case, however, we will need to establish further a hermeneutical foundation for exploring the theme of the intergenerational praxis of the church.

2.5 Intergenerational Praxis in Small World Contexts

In section 2.2, the theme of intergenerational solidarity was shown to be of vital significance to the life of any group desiring to perpetuate its tradition from generation to generation. It was explained that a stable sense of group solidarity is promoted by the presence of frequent interaction, shared fondness, and commonly held normative commitments. As one might anticipate, when changes occurring within the structures of any society alter the interaction, sentiment, and shared values among the generations, this can have a lasting, perhaps debilitating, impact upon the patterns of intergenerational relationship within that society. Once the members of generational groups develop distinct cultural forms or begin to define themselves over against one another, this has the potential to pose a hindrance to group solidarity. As a result, small world contexts can become faced with immense challenges as they endeavour to function intergenerationally within such a cultural climate.

In this study, we are concerned with one specific order of small world contexts, the local congregation. This investigation is being conducted against the backdrop of an awareness that the church is at all times both a spiritual *and* a sociological phenomenon (Van Gelder 2000:25). Thus, the church is not exempt from the sorts of intergenerational dynamics that emerge in other small world contexts. In fact, the reality that the church often grapples with the same intergenerational dynamics evident within the broader society merely serves to demonstrate the church's solidarity with all human groupings. Furthermore, as it endeavours to carry out its prophetic mission as the community of the Spirit within the world, the church is faced with the challenge of doing so within the intricate web of small world contexts in which the intergenerational praxis of society is manifested. Thus, as we continue to

cultivate a foundation for understanding the praxis of the church within the praxis of society, it will be helpful for us to give attention briefly to some of the patterns that tend to emerge in small world settings in the midst of a changing culture.

2.5.1 The Emergence of Intergroup Dynamics

Williams and Nussbaum (2001:7-8) point to "intergroup theory" as a means of helping us understand the complex dynamics that can arise in the interactions between generations within small world settings. This theory, born out of the European social-psychological tradition, "places a central importance on social identity and accounts for the way that people behave as members of different groups" (:7). These authors suggest that "we have an inherent tendency to divide our social world into groups and social categories" and that we "are aware of our own and other's membership of particular social groups" (:8). They note that, as soon as we recognize ourselves and others as belonging to distinct groups, we tend to favour those that we see as being part of our own group, regardless of how trivial the perceived distinctions between groups happen to be. At times, this causes individuals to behave as stereotypical "ingroup" members, "emphasizing the attributes that we believe portray who we are and where we belong" (:8). As an example of this, Williams and Nussbaum refer to the practice among members of youth subcultures of using the way they dress as a means of communicating with one another. Furthermore, this tendency to think in terms of group identity causes individuals to categorize those we perceive as different in terms of their "outgroup" membership.

When thinking of ourselves as group members, we tend often to engage in social comparisons in an attempt to assess the standing of our group relative to others (Angrosino 2001:36). This might be motivated by the pursuit of self-esteem, by the desire for a coherent sense of identity, or by a need to establish the meaningfulness of one's experience. The intent in comparing "us" and "them" is to draw conclusions and to achieve a sense of distinctiveness favourable to one's own group; thus, this process tends to result in favouritism toward the ingroup and the denigration of the outgroup. It also can lead to the treatment of others in light of the stereotypes and prejudices associated with their social groups, which often results in negative evaluations, misunderstandings, and conflicts.

The tendency to be influenced by such stereotypes is especially strong when interactants have limited personal information about one another (Williams & Nussbaum 2001:10). Suggests DeYoung (1997:8),

> When our perceptions do not intersect with those of others through dialogue and shared experiences, we are isolated. When we experience life from an isolated perspective, we have no real knowledge of others. A lack of dialogue and honest sharing with others can result in a de facto segregation. Often isolation is based on a simple lack of information about the lives of others, and this ignorance, if left unaddressed, can reinforce stereotypes and insensitivity.

As our perceptions of another group become reduced to the stereotypes we associate with that group, we can fail to view the members of that group in terms of their individuality. Angrosino (2001:35, 51) describes this as “essentialism”. Furthermore, we can employ controllable, oppressive categories based on these reductionist social stereotypes as a means of gate-keeping or punishing, a tendency described by Shults and Sandage (2003:72-73) as “totalizing.”

Angrosino (2001:35) cautions that almost all groups of people are capable of looking at others as “strangers.” In light of the material surveyed in the preceding sections of this chapter, the relevance of intergroup theory for understanding intergenerational interaction should not be difficult to recognize. Williams and Nussbaum (2001:10) observe that *age* is one “categorization device” that we might employ. When this occurs, we are prone to associate particular traits and stereotypes with different age categories and to amplify our perception of the differences between generational groups (:46). These age stereotypes tend to be “a simplified, undifferentiated portrayal of an age group that is often erroneous, unrepresentative of reality, and resistant to modification” (Cook 2001:45). Particularly in those contexts in which cultural distinctions have arisen between generational cohorts, many intergenerational interactions actually function as intergroup in nature and consequences. Thus, intergenerational interaction can sometimes seem very much like intercultural interaction.

Williams and Nussbaum (2001:11) note that, when differences between generational groups pose a threat to the members of a particular group, this actually may cause them to “shore up” the boundaries between themselves and competing groups “by

emphasizing differences." It can motivate the members of a generational group to employ speech patterns that accentuate the differences ("divergence") between themselves and the members of other generational groups (:11-12), thus rendering productive intergenerational interaction difficult. The stereotypes that exist between younger and older interactants can essentially come to constitute "depersonalized 'thing' categories" (Kraft 2005:295), which may cause "I-Thou" relations to be subverted by "I-It" dynamics.

According to structuration theorists, the habitual practices guiding interactions between generational groups within a small world context can actually be "self-fulfilling prophecies" (Williams & Nussbaum 2001:290). Such interactions are guided by structures entailing three key dimensions: 1) interpretation or understanding (signification); 2) a moral order dictating proper conduct (legitimation); and 3) a sense of power operative in the interaction (domination). Differences that emerge when the members of multiple generational groups interact "may feed back into the system and eventuate in unintended consequences, which were not anticipated or intended by the original action" (:21). Indeed, Williams and Nussbaum (:21-22) emphasize that it is possible for "actors" within the system to contribute to the transformation of behavioural norms, particularly when contradictions are found to be present within the system. However, quite frequently, the communication problem arising out of "the rules and resources employed by younger and older people in their interactions reproduce the very conditions that brought them about in the first place" (:22). Stereotypes provide one example of this principle. The stereotyping of young and old is guided by habitual practices that "are shared by all interactants." Stereotypes are not merely imposed by one group and embraced or resisted by another, but rather involve a complex shared understanding and structure in which the actions of both young and old are guided by the same rules (:290).

2.5.2 The Escalation of Conflict

In the midst of periods of pronounced social change, the breakdown of solidarity among the generations experienced within many small world institutional settings can rise to the level of conflict (Palmore 2005:8). Gangel and Canine (1992:131) note that conflicts arise when two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive

as being attainable by one or the other, but not by both. They further characterize conflict as involving a struggle over values or over claims to scarce status, power, or resources. Age conflict, then, is "an extreme form of ageism in which two or more age strata conflict with each other" (Palmore 2005:8). It involves a struggle over scarce resources or values and tends to occur when "the disadvantaged age group makes claims for more power or other scarce goods, and the more privileged group seeks to protect privilege."

Williams and Nussbaum (2001:231) note that, among generational groups, "intergenerational conflicts may evolve around the management or mismanagement of a number of relational-dialectical tensions—between autonomy-connection or independence-interdependence, openness-closedness or expressiveness-protectiveness, and predictability-novelty." The influence of stereotypes, role relationship expectations, and ingroup processes actually may serve an "intervening and mediating influence" in these intergenerational conflicts, and "may well exacerbate positive processes and outcomes, conflict resolution, satisfaction, and the like" (:233). Williams and Nussbaum assert that "conflict between relative strangers, acquaintances, neighbors, and even coworkers…may be most susceptible." While intergenerational conflict in these small world settings may not be likely to express itself as "competition among organized interest groups," it is more likely to be reflected "in individual perceptions and norms, analogous to racial tension and conflict" (:242). The impact of the prejudices born out of these differing norms upon intergenerational communication has the potential to cause intergenerational dissension to escalate in intensity.

2.5.3 The Impact of Subjectivity

As we consider the stereotypes, miscommunications, and conflicts that can arise and persist among the generations within small world contexts, it is important to appreciate that interaction between the generations is not guided so much by objective reality as by the attitudes and beliefs influencing people's subjective perceptions (Williams & Nussbaum 2001:26). For example, notions about the nature and existence of a "generation gap," whether or not such a thing is empirically verifiable, may "preinteractionally" influence one's perceptions of what is possible in interaction

across generational lines (cf. Gubrium & Rittman 1991:91). As Angrosino (2001:35) notes, the real issue is "perceived" differences. As an example of the significance of subjectivity, we can note that, because intergenerational knowledge can be gained through a number of sources, not only the frequency of interaction between generations, but also the "quality" of such interactions will contribute to how accurate or skewed one's perceptions of generational "outgroups" and the individuals of which they are composed prove to be (:28-29).

In addition, groups' subjective perceptions of their *vitality* relative to outgroups is another factor that can impact intergenerational solidarity within small world contexts (Giles & Johnson 1987). Perceptions of relative vitality can result from comparisons of groups' institutional support, demographics, and status. As Williams and Nussbaum (2001:242) assert, "The concept of vitality for understanding the perceived relative strength of different age groups…may be an important way of understanding how young, middle-aged, and older adults perceive their respective groups." They further explain that "[s]ubjective vitality is important because it can directly affect intergroup perceptions and intergroup communication regardless of any objective state of affairs." Thus, the perception that a particular generational group is being threatened, marginalized, or subjected to inequality can foster competition or conflict that disrupts the solidarity between the generations.

Finally, it is important to recognize that the generations may not assign the same subjective value to the patterns emerging through intergenerational interaction. Bengston and Kuypers (1971:249-260) have introduced the concept of "generational stake" to describe the degree to which each generation has a vested interest in intergenerational solidarity. As Antonucci and Akiyama (:104-105) explain,

> [T]he older generations have a greater stake in perceiving similarities across generations than younger generations. Older generations want to believe that they have contributed to younger generations in various ways, that they have socialized, transmitted, or in some other way provided the next generation with important characteristics, attitudes, or assets. On the other hand, the younger generations are more interested in making their own, separate and different contribution. Younger generations are more invested in perceiving dissimilarities across generations in order to maximize their own contribution to the family, community and society separately from past generations.

These thoughts echo what has been articulated above regarding the process of *differentiation* by which each new generation is formed. However, in those contexts in which pronounced cultural changes have caused the interactions, sentiments, and values evident among the generations to be marked by complexity and contention, the differences in generational stake can be the source of much pain and struggle. The efforts of small world groups such as the church to perpetuate their traditions intergenerationally can face considerable challenges. With this reality in view, we will turn now to a hermeneutical exploration of the intergenerational praxis of the church, the specific small world context with which this study is centrally concerned.

2.6 The Church and the Generations

Thus far within this chapter, basic theoretical foundations have been provided for understanding several key concepts critical to the present study: 1) the importance of intergenerational solidarity for any group endeavouring to perpetuate its cultural tradition; 2) the social phenomenon of the development of generations across time; 3) the emergence of intergenerational discontinuity, particularly during periods of pronounced social change; 4) the dynamics by which this intergenerational discontinuity can come to be manifested within small world contexts. This study is purported to be concerned with recent challenges arising within these categories of inquiry within American society. More specifically, this study is intended to address the impact of these challenges upon the praxis of the church within society. Thus, having explored important aspects of the intergenerational praxis of society from a theoretical perspective, we now will undertake a similar exercise with reference to the intergenerational implications of the church's calling.

In section 2.2, we considered the reality that the intergenerational dynamic is critical to the perpetuation of the traditions of society, as well as every small world group within it. As we noted, this is true of the church as it is with any human community. Thus far in this chapter, we have sought to outline a compelling picture of the significance of intergenerational dynamics within the life of society. Recognizing this, what can we say further that might uniquely characterize the intergenerational praxis of the church within the praxis of society? As we will see, there is much to be considered. In the pages that follow, we begin by exploring the church's role and

responsibilities in relation to each rising generation. Following this, we will examine specific challenges with which the church may be faced as it endeavours to sustain its witness intergenerationally within the praxis of a changing society. This inquiry will provide a valuable hermeneutical framework for understanding the historical developments that will be surveyed in the chapters that follow.

2.6.1 Foundations of the Church's Intergenerational Praxis

2.6.1.1 The Historical Basis of the Intergenerational Mandate

In looking back upon the church's heritage, numerous authors have noted that, ever since the biblical era, the people of God have understood themselves to be a community that is intergenerational in nature (White 1988:70-71; Harkness 1998:431). In reflecting upon the narrative of scripture, Harkness (:433) explains that "intergenerationalism"

> was a feature of the faith communities in both Old Testament and New Testament eras…From its Old Testament Jewish roots, the early Christian church maintained its intergenerational entity with persons of all ages considered to be integral parts of it…Given this context, the range of metaphors used by the New Testament writers to stress the corporate nature of the church…arguably have an inherent sense of intergenerationalism about them.
>
> (cf. Glassford 2008:71)

Allen (2005:322) similarly observes that, "Emerging from its Jewish heritage, the early church was a multigenerational entity. All generations met together, worshiping, breaking bread, praying together, and ministering to one another." This emphasis clearly did not cease with the first generations of the Christian movement. Rather, as Harkness (1998:431) insists, "Ever since the development of Christian faith communities in the post-Pentecost era of Christianity, there has been a consciousness that such communities need to encourage and embody a genuine intergenerationalism" (cf. White 1988:75). Clearly, a compelling historical precedent exists for seeing the church as an inherently intergenerational entity.

2.6.1.2 The Eschatological Basis of the Intergenerational Mandate

The church's intergenerational responsibility is evident not only when we look back historically, but also as we look forward expectantly. The church is an eschatological community, one called to bear witness to the "already, but not yet" reign of God. We must acknowledge that, if taken seriously, the profound intergenerational implications of the church's eschatological identity must be considered. Frost and Hirsch (2003:216) point to the theme of "sustainability" as a key characteristic of any church that embraces fully its identity as a witness to God's reign, one that "ensures that the church keeps itself on task over the long haul." This objective of sustainability properly arises from the desire to provide a tangible expression of God's reign within a particular context. The church's self-concept as an eschatological entity, says Barrett (1998:124), motivates it to practice "what the New Testament often calls 'patient endurance' (Rom. 12:12; Gal. 5:22; Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:12; Rev. 1:9; 2:3; 3:10; 14:14)." This can be understood as entailing a commitment to cultivating a sustainable witness "until he comes" (I Cor. 11:26).

This challenge of enduring faithfully can be taken to mean that the church should strive to sustain its witness "throughout all generations" (Eph. 3:21). In reflecting upon the practical implications of the call to "patient endurance", Peterson (1989:47) suggests that, "If we are going to learn a life of holiness in the mess of history, we are going to have to prepare for something *intergenerational* and think in centuries" (italics added for emphasis). In other words, he suggests, the church is called to live according to "deep time." When viewed from a broad, catholic perspective, the oft cited aphorism that "the Church is always only one generation from extinction" is an absurdity; that "the gates of hell will not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18) is a certainty rooted in the covenantal promise of God. However, that the church in its local manifestation is always in jeopardy of nonexistence is an empirical reality that has been demonstrated far too many times throughout history (e.g., the church of North Africa). Thus, every local congregation that seeks to embody a commitment to eschatological sustainability must seek to perpetuate its witness intergenerationally. In other words, we must take seriously the intergenerational implications of the church's movement toward God's future.

2.6.2 The Traditioning of the Faith

The notion of the faith community being composed of multiple generations and being able to sustain its witness intergenerationally through time is appealing enough. However, if this vision is to be realized beyond the level of abstraction, within the concrete existence of local congregations, what does this require? To what sort of priorities and practices does this give rise? In section 2.2, we considered briefly the challenges inherent in the desire of any group to perpetuate its cultural tradition intergenerationally. However, within the context of the church, this task entails some unique considerations.

The tradition with which the church understands itself to have been entrusted is one concerned with the biblically faithful, culturally relevant mediation of the message of the gospel. Essentially, it is rooted in "the deposit of the faith." The concept of tradition, note Griffin and Walker (2004:70-71), was of considerable importance within the Christian movement even before the New Testament was written:

> In I Corinthians, St. Paul writes about right belief and practice around the Lord's Supper: "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you…" (11:23). At the very center of the church's worship is something handed over, or "traditioned"…Tradition in the New Testament, then, is much more than human invention. The sure word is handed over, or "traditioned."

Thus, from the earliest era of the Christian movement, the Christian tradition has continued to be shaped by the "amalgamation" of authorities that "take their cues from the central assumption of the tradition, namely, that Jesus is Lord and Savior" (:73-74). Leith (1990:27), in reflecting upon the place of tradition within the Christian faith, suggests that every generation must "be reminded of the same unchanged body of knowledge whose binding force exists in its going back in origin to a divine message as its source." However, in the face of a changing culture, how does the church promote the *enculturation* or *socialization* of new generations not only into established forms, but into a living faith and a life rooted in the reign of God?

Leith (1990:34, 36) describes the local congregation as being involved in a process of "traditioning," which he sees as entailing the incorporation of "each new person and

generation" into the community of faith. At its core, he suggests, this process is fundamentally the work of the Holy Spirit:

> The church lives, not by organization and techniques, but by the passionate conviction that Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh, full of grace and truth, that in his death on the cross our sins are forgiven, that God raised him from the dead for our salvation. No technique, skill, or wisdom can substitute for this passionate conviction. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit, who cannot be programmed by any technique or ritual, confirms faith in the heart. The faith is therefore traditioned on a level beyond observation and beyond the power of techniques.

It is fair to acknowledge with Leith that the process of incorporating new adherents into the gospel tradition cannot be achieved apart from the sovereign work of God, for living faith is God's gracious gift. However, because the church is both a spiritual *and* sociological phenomenon, such an acknowledgement does not relieve the church of active responsibility in the traditioning process. On "a human level," Leith (1990:34, 36) characterizes traditioning the faith as "an awesome responsibility." He suggests that this process involves three key dimensions: the faith community, the individual, and successive generations. We shall consider the role of each of these in turn here.

2.6.2.1 The Congregation as the Bearer of Faith Tradition

First, the faith tradition, notes Leith (1990:34), "is always handed on…in community, in the fellowship of believing, worshiping people." Congregations, as Bass (1994:173) suggests, function as "bearers of tradition." This commitment to the Christian tradition is reflected in the way in which the Bible and other revered texts are held up as authoritative and of central importance to the congregation's life. Furthermore, through its ritual practices, corporate worship, and shared way of life, the congregation also seeks to be a faithful, living social embodiment of a vital Christian tradition. The church endeavours to provide a setting in which families might be nurtured, individuals might gain a vital experience of faith and an authentic sense of identity, and in which successive generations might be incorporated into the Christian tradition (Leith 1990:36; Bass 1994:174, 175, 180). As Griffin and Walker (2004:74) note, the concept of "tradition" involves "the whole of the church's life as it works, in the Spirit of Christ, to bring everyone, everything, and every situation under the rule of Christ. The tradition is the specific, thick life of the church."

This being so, the congregation must not be understood merely as relating to its tradition as preserver and participant, but also as actively influencing the shape of that tradition as it appropriates and expresses it within a particular time and place (Bass 1994:185; Fowler 1995:9). As has already been asserted above, the elements of which a tradition is composed are not merely fixed phenomena. McIntyre (1984:222) has argued that, inherent within any *living* tradition is the continuous presence of an argument internal to that tradition regarding the "goods" with which it is concerned. If we apply this principle to the life of the Christian community, we can see that, as a particular expression of the Christian tradition is transmitted through time and into the particularities of various specific contexts, it is normative for this tradition to be subject to dialogue and debate regarding its essence. Such continuous dialogue and reflection helps to prevent homogeneity within a faith tradition (Bass 1994:177-178, 181-182).

Thus, the process of traditioning should be understood as dynamic, with change as an inherent characteristic and asset (Butler Bass 2004:40-41, 47, 50). The congregation belongs in the centre of a reflexive cultural task of "fluid traditioning", which necessitates that its members see themselves not only as "receivers" of tradition, but as makers of future tradition. This should inspire corporate vision and vitality as congregations "intentionally participate in both claiming the past and creating a better future" (:52). Rendle (2008:60) suggests that this process of "allowing new forms and practices that are fully embedded in ancient truth" to reshape the congregation's life "in a way that is sensitive to the eyes, ears, and hearts of those to whom the faith is to be given....is a missionary task—holding the unchanging truth but shaping it to be understood in the present and changing culture."

2.6.2.2 The Individual as Participant in Faith Tradition

a. Faith Formation a Choice and a Process

Second, the traditioning of the faith concerns the individual. As bearer of tradition, the congregation endeavours to see the lives of individuals transformed through faith in Christ. Indeed, Wright and Creasy Dean (2004:154) explain that, in the face of the numerous distortions of personhood promoted within human cultures, God's design is

to see individuals be provided the opportunity to experience the recovery of the *imago Dei.* This is made available by means of a response of faith in the gospel of Christ. As Leith (1990:36) expresses, faith "cannot be inherited as lands and houses are….[B]iological processes cannot transmit the faith. Culture may shape our lives and influence the idiom of our religious expressions and practices. Faith, however, involves decision, and Christian faith comes from hearing the Word."

Fowler (1995:9) suggests that living traditions have a powerful way of evoking this response of faith within the lives of individuals and groups:

> Like a dynamic gallery of art, a living cumulative tradition in its many forms addresses contemporary people and becomes what Smith calls 'the mundane cause' that awakens present faith. Faith, at once deeper and more personal than religion, is the person's or group's way of responding to transcendent value and power as perceived and grasped through the forms of the cumulative tradition.

Recognizing that this potential is powerfully resident within a tradition, we must acknowledge that Leith's basic point stands: the transmission of a living Christian tradition cannot occur apart from the necessity of individuals embracing, rather than rejecting, the expression of the Christian faith that it seeks to mediate. While this observation is not meant to be construed as a theological assertion about the nature of human will or divine election, from a sociological perspective, it is an empirical reality that some faith communities cease to exist by virtue of their failure to impact the lives of individuals. In the chapters that follow, we will encounter vivid evidence of precisely this point.

White (1988:30) notes that "religion is human concern for 'meaning and motivation' in life" as well as for one's "'movement' or behaviour in the world." Thus, as we contemplate the outcomes that faith communities desire to see accomplished in the lives of individuals, we would do well to take note of Pelikan's (1984:53-54) observation that neither an "infantile" and "blind" acceptance nor an "adolescent" disdain and rejection of tradition is adequate. "Maturity," he insists, entails "knowledge of the content of those traditions" and an understanding of "our origins in our tradition." This understanding of tradition should challenge us to make choices regarding "whether to be conscious participants" and to what degree we will adopt or reject the implications of "the tradition from which we are derived." Tradition should

entail "an active preservation," rather than a "mindless repetition" (Beaudoin 1998:153). As Beaudoin suggests, tradition should engage us "intimately and personally." This being the case, the congregation must concern itself with cultivating effective structures and processes by which to promote the faith formation of the individuals with which it comes into contact. As White (1988:31) notes, congregations are faced with the objective of facilitating "the movement of persons in holistic lifestyle toward the fulfilment of God, the world, and themselves."

The work of Fowler (1995:122-211) provides an important point of reference in helping us to understand the church's task of promoting the faith formation of each person. Fowler suggests that the faith development of individuals occurs along a six-stage path involving progressive ownership and integration of one's tradition. It is important to note that Fowler's theory has been challenged and critiqued by numerous parties within the fields of developmental psychology and theology. Furthermore, some critics of this theory suggest that Fowler's characterization of desirable advances in spiritual maturity is coloured by the prejudices inherent in his own particular theological *view-from-here*. Nonetheless, Fowler's concepts call attention to the reality that faith formation is a developmental process within which one's advancement in personal ownership and maturity cannot be deemed inevitable and in which one's formative years factor prominently. Thus, the development of faith is a matter to which intentional thought and attention must be lent.

Lytch (2004:10-11) observes that, even in the face of the congregation's best efforts to promote faith formation, the stances taken by individuals toward their faith traditions can fall into one of three camps:

1. Those who wholly adopt their religious tradition, some of whom do so only after wrestling deeply with this tradition or following a period of rejecting it.
2. Those who have rejected their religious tradition or who were not well enough socialized into it to have a basis on which to accept or reject it.
3. Those who participate in their religious tradition, yet for whom it does not constitute an important part of their lives.

Understanding this, if the church adopts as a goal in relation to each succeeding generation that the individuals of which it is composed will be empowered and equipped to develop toward maturity as followers of Christ, rather than toward

nominalism, what must this require? As she examines a range of "theoretical models of faith transmission," Lytch (2004:58-59, 211) concludes that at least two factors consistently prove to be prominent in solidifying the loyalty of young people to a particular religious tradition: consistent religious socialization and meaningful religious experience. While Lytch insists that these two factors function as interrelated dynamics, each is worthy of consideration in its own right.

b. Faith Formation Promoted by Religious Socialization

Religious socialization, explains Westerhoff (1974:41), "is a process consisting of lifelong formal and informal mechanisms, through which persons sustain and transmit their faith (world view, value system) and life-style." In an observation that echoes the comments in section 2.2 regarding the primary role of family in the process of transmitting any tradition, Lytch (2004:58) observes that one critical facet of religious socialization is "the consistency of [young people's] religious socialization in church and at home." Indeed, this interplay of family and faith community is shown in scripture to be integral to the process by which individuals come to know God (Allen 2005:322).

Within this framework, suggests Nel (2000:19-20), the home must be seen as occupying a place of primacy in laying the foundations of faith formation:

> In the Bible the family has a unique hermeneutic function. One could say that the child needs parents in order to gain understanding…When the story of God's dealings with his people come from the people whom you (are supposed to) hear first, and whom you can trust as to the veracity of the story, it makes so much more sense…What parents once heard as children from their parents, they recount, almost like children who have heard and now understand, to their own children. They tell the upcoming generation of the "praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power" (Ps 78:3, 4). In this sense the "home rules" of the New Testament should also be understood. They are about the handing down of this knowledge from generation to generation.

When parents connect their children to the church from a young age and teach them "the stories, symbols, and practices of their faith," observes Lytch (2004:200), this "is the source for many of the enduring traits of identity, religious experience, and patterns of thought and action."

In partnership with the family, the local congregation functions as an "extended family" in providing a "support system" in the process of faith formation (Nel 2000:21). Allen (2005:322) notes that, "In the religion of Israel, children were not just included, they were drawn in, assimilated, and absorbed into the whole community with a deep sense of belonging." As it endeavours to promote faith commitment, the tradition-bearing congregation reflects this ancient legacy of religious socialization (Westerhoff 1974:41), which Lytch (2004:58) describes in our contemporary context as

> the larger process that builds knowledge of the symbols, rituals, narratives, and texts, and it includes the habits—such as church attendance, praying, and Bible reading—that comprise the Christian life. Socialization occurs through the example and mentoring of others, instruction in the sacred texts, and in worship using the music, art, and drama of the Christian tradition. Socialization is social—it happens as a person lives in the religious community….[and] occurs in the regular, ongoing life of the church…It provides the context for interpreting and acting on their own religious experience, as well as for conducting and participating in religious ritual.
> (cf. Westerhoff 1974:44; White 1988:119)

According to Lytch (2004:59), young people with the most consistent exposure to the environment of the church are the most likely to remain in a particular tradition. While several studies call into question any strong correlation between high levels of adolescent religious experience and high levels of religious participation in adulthood, "it can be concluded that…low levels of youth religious activity and counterreligious influence does predict low adult religious participation" (:219-220).

c. Faith Formation Promoted by Religious Experience

In addition to consistent socialization, religious "experience" is a crucial factor contributing to the establishment of religious commitment or "mature faith" (Lytch 2004:59). As Wright and Creasy Dean (2004:157) note, such experience provides a connection with "transcendent reality." Such experience is integral to the distinction that William James (2009:153-154) has drawn between what he described as first-hand and second-hand religion; while second-hand religion is that which has been passed along by one's forebears or through institutional forms, first-hand religion is direct, immediate, and truly the individual's own. Elkind (1984:42-43) suggests that the adolescent years constitute a particularly significant period for the individual in

distinguishing between institutional religion, which generally goes unquestioned during childhood, and personal religion.

Lytch (2004:62) suggests that “[h]aving an intense, personal encounter with God is a normative expectation of the Christian tradition. It transforms the ‘acquired faith’ that is socialized into the ‘experienced faith’ that is personally appropriated by the individual.” Truly, the goal of the formative process is the person “in the power of the Spirit” (Wright & Creasy Dean 2004:178). This aim entails “a liberated identity grounded in Christ’s passionate enfolding of it,” rather than one “being divided by unconverted and domesticated passions managed by socialization, or conquered by uncontrolled passions in rebellion against socialization” (:165). However, this is more than simply a matter of human faith, doctrinal formulae, rituals, or patterns of moral behaviour. It issues from one’s experience of the presence and work of God, and is thus “a trinitarian achievement.”

Far from this being exclusively a matter of *personal* experience, religious institutions are meant to provide an important context for the mediation of such religious experiences. Notes White (1988:134), the “accidental and planned happenings/incidents/events” that occur “in the context of the community of believers, have a threefold effect for the person: They establish a *perceptive system* in relation to a worldview, form a *conscience* according to a value system, and create a *self-identification* out of personal relations within a social group.” Thus, the impact of socialization and religious experience essentially functions in a circular fashion. As Lytch (2004:62) notes, “Socialization in the religious tradition conditions persons to have religious experiences because they have readily available the symbols and models to use for interpreting experiences as religious. Those having a religious experience will seek to be more deeply involved in their religious community as a result.”

This interrelationship between belonging and experience highlights the necessity of the church being an intergenerational community. Summarizing the insights of numerous authors who have contributed to an understanding of this issue, Allen (2005:321) notes the importance of children, teenagers, and adults of all ages sharing together in intergenerational religious experiences; she suggests that the generations

"can participate actively in prayer and worship, and, in some settings, share spiritual insights, read Scripture, and minister to one another." These experiences have the potential to benefit the faith formation of all participants (Harkness 1998:431-447; Allen 2005:331). However, this interaction is particularly important for the newest members of the community. As Allen (2005:328) suggests, in an intergenerational setting, children and new believers participate with and learn from "more experienced members of the culture," and, as a result of "doing 'Christian' things" with those of more advanced maturity, come to identify more fully with the Christian community. Thus, intergenerational religious experience, she argues, promotes "optimal spiritual growth and development" (:320). Along the way, individuals may be afforded opportunity to express "where they stand in relation to the group" through "rites of incorporation" and "rites of consolidation," which "regularly reinforce the feeling of group solidarity" (Kraft 2005:259).

2.6.2.3 The Generations as Shapers of Faith Tradition

Third, Leith (1994:35) indicates that the process of traditioning is "generational" in nature. As he explains, "In the decision of faith we decide for a generational history, a faith community with a common ethos, a history that continues to enrich our faith and the community of faith. The generations of faith play a significant role in biblical history and they, as well as succeeding generations, shape our lives today." In making such observations, Leith (:37) means in part to remind us that the faith tradition is itself "the tested wisdom of generations." However, he also highlights the reality that the faith tradition cannot be perpetuated apart from the readiness of the next generation to carry it forward. Thus, the faith community is reminded of its continued responsibility to pass its tradition to each succeeding generation (Everist & Nessan 2008:77). As Nel (2000:55) asserts through his loose translation of Dijk, the church has a direct duty "towards young people...so that young people do not drop out of the line of generations, but live by the gospel." This requires at least two things of the congregation: 1) that it rise to the challenge of expressing its witness in a manner that communicates and connects effectively with the individuals embedded within the cultural particularities of each rising generation; 2) that it be prepared to allow the rising generation the opportunity to make its own mark upon the shape of the faith tradition that it is asked to carry forward.

First, if the tradition at work within the life of a congregation is truly to be sustained with vitality through time, the relevance of the church's mission and message must be rediscovered and re-appropriated in cultural forms that speak to the members of each new generation (Miller 1997:18; White 2001:177; Kraft 2005:224). As Kraft (2005:67) expresses, the faith embraced by each new generation "has to be faith as understood by and expressed in terms of their particular subculture." In other words, the interplay of socialization and experience outlined above must connect with the cultural reality of the rising generation. Thus, asserts Howard Merritt (2007:84), "As new generations gather in a church, vital congregations learn to adapt their customs while keeping their traditions." In light of what was articulated in sections 2.3 and 2.4 regarding generations and cultural change, this objective must be deemed particularly essential for those contexts in which significant cultural discontinuity has occurred among generational cohorts.

Bolinger (1999:105) insists that the biblical world-view is "transgenerational." To illustrate this point, he appropriates the testimony of Psalm 145: "no one can fully fathom the greatness of the Lord,...one generation can commend the Lord's works to another, speaking of his mighty acts." In other words, posits Bolinger, no one generation is able to achieve the full and final expression of the faith. This recognition enables us to join Guder (2000:61) in asserting that it is both possible and necessary for the message of scripture to be adapted faithfully to the cultural situation of each new generation:

> What is true of the original witnesses, preserved in the canonical record, continues true of witness thereafter from generation to generation. God's people are called to carry forward this unique witness, to translate it into every new situation of history, so that the Word happened continues to be the Word witnessed, heard, responded to, and obeyed.

In essence, in contexts of rapid cultural change, such intergenerational situations can amount to the cross-cultural communication of the gospel.

In addition, if the congregation truly endeavours to preserve a vital tradition across time, it must be prepared not only to find fresh ways of expressing the gospel to each new generation, but also must be willing to empower rising generations with the freedom to make their mark upon the shape of that tradition (Everist & Nessan

2008:1). As Kraft (2005: 247) expresses, "it is crucial that each new generation and people experience the process of producing in its own cultural forms an appropriate church vehicle for the transmission of God's meaning." In essence, the ongoing process of "renegotiation" and "retraditioning" native to a living faith tradition must be seen as having an intergenerational trajectory (Carroll & Roof 2002:213). The "internal argument" that McIntyre (1984:222) identifies as being essential to the well-being of a *living* tradition must be one in which each succeeding generation is empowered to participate. Thus, concludes Thompson (2003:162) in reflecting upon this intergenerational challenge, if a congregation "intends to survive beyond the life span of its current members," and if "the members truly regard the Christian testimony of its congregation as of primary value, then they must be willing to set their own personal preferences about church aside enough to allow a new ethos to be born." In other words, notes Rendle (2008:60), the "tools" of bearing the faith tradition intergenerationally must be understood as both argument *and* accommodation.

2.6.3 Challenges to the Traditioning of the Faith

The picture of the church's intergenerational praxis being developed here, it must be acknowledged, is an ideal one. In reality, as the church endeavours to exist faithfully as an intergenerational community within the context of the praxis of society, this aim can be fraught with difficulty. This is particularly so in those cases in which the intergenerational dynamics of the broader society have come to be characterized by cultural distance and differentiation. In such contexts, the church may be impacted by the presence of intergroup dynamics and intergenerational tensions that compellingly illustrate the church's human solidarity with all other sociological groupings. Amid these realities, the attitude of the church toward the cultural expression of its faith tradition will impact its effectiveness in transmitting that tradition intergenerationally. Because the present project is intended to address purportedly such a scenario, it will be helpful to explore briefly the hindrances that can arise within the life of any church endeavouring to sustain its witness intergenerationally amid complex cultural changes.

Above, we explored the importance of a *lived* tradition to the traditioning process. Sadly, it is all too possible for the vitality of the tradition borne by the church to wane. Pelikan (1984:65) illustrates this point by drawing a distinction between *tradition* and *traditionalism*. The former, he argues, is "the living faith of the dead", while the latter is "the dead faith of the living." In other words, when tradition becomes a statically fixed matter, it is destined to lose its vitality. Pelikan (:55) further draws a distinction between tradition as "icon", a perspective he endorses, and tradition as "idol", a notion against which he cautions. In referring to tradition as icon, he suggests that the matrix of symbols, practices, and institutions of which a religious tradition is composed are meant to point to a reality beyond the things themselves. They are merely representational in nature. However, there always exists the potential for a tradition to become an idol, an end unto itself, rather than a means for pointing toward a transcendent reality. As Carroll and Roof (2002:213) suggest, churches are faced with the ever present temptation to allow "tradition" to become "Tradition".

Rendle (2002:2) suggests that it is not uncommon for this tendency to be evident when the life of the church is viewed from an intergenerational perspective. Drawing upon the work of several influential sociologists, he notes that religion is by nature "highly resistant to change." Thus, as was explored above, as churches pass their traditions from generation to generation, "rituals, ceremonies, and religious texts represent a tie to the past, a connection to a transcendent history." This being the case, efforts to respond in an innovative manner to generationally-borne changes in the church's cultural context are understood to "put at risk the 'plausibility' that confers upon them the legitimacy in the eyes of adherents." Many times, as Kraft (2005:258, 259) observes, the "pillars" of the church are suspicious of attempts to alter the status quo because they are "satisfied with certain symbolic gestures which identify the in-group." In part, this is due to the fact that certain customs "are important because relationships blossomed around those tasks" (Howard Merrit 2007:2). Furthermore, long-time members tend to identify the church's values and experiences closely, almost unconsciously, with their own. As a result, notes Thompson (2003:161-162), "Change appears as a threat to the 'old guard'—it feels like something into which the old guard is being talked or forced." In many cases, members genuinely view the plausibility of their religious organization as being

inextricably tied to its ability to embody faithfully what they believe to be an "ancient" tradition.

In fact, it often is precisely a concern for faithfulness to the gospel that provides the very reason that some churches adopt and appropriate an errant understanding of the concept of tradition. This is evident in the exploration by Guder (2000:100) of the historic tendency toward *reductionism* within the church. Guder explains that, as the gospel is introduced within a given culture, over time the faith communities formed within that culture tend to *reduce* their understanding of the gospel to that which has resulted from the particular contextual interface of gospel and culture in that context. Guder (:100) suggests that this is "a necessary aspect of our humanness," and "thus not necessarily a problem for biblical faithfulness." Riddell (1998:37, 67) similarly posits that the tendency of "the community formed by the Spirit" to gathers around itself "certain religious and institutional accretions" is "probably unavoidable."

The impact of this tendency changes, however, when "the sinful human desire to control begins to do its work" (Guder 2000:100). Explains Guder (:100), "We are constantly tempted to assert that our way of understanding the Christian faith is a final version of Christian truth," and thereby "enshrine one cultural articulation of the gospel as the normative statement for all cultures." Guder (1998:229) equates this with a desire to "control God;" that is to say, the voices of authority within the church strive to exercise control in the name of preserving or protecting a particular institutional expression of the Christian tradition. This tendency often is motivated by noble intentions, such as a desire to be faithful guardians and stewards of what they understand to be the essence of their respective faith tradition. Nonetheless, this formula of reduction and control, which Guder (:230-231) describes as *reductionism*, poses great risk to the integrity of the church's true calling.

In section 2.6.1.2 above, we emphasized the need for the church to sustain a sense of its identity as a witness to God's reign through time. However, when the church becomes bound by a reductionistic understanding of its tradition, its missionary impulse can be compromised. Notes Shenk (1995:48), "The church is most at risk where it has been present in a culture for a long period of time so that it no longer conceives its relation to culture in terms of missionary encounter. The church remains

socially and salvifically relevant only so long as it is in redemptive tension with culture." Essentially, when reductionism occurs, a concern for living within the tension of faithfulness and relevance becomes abdicated in favour of a "settled" expression of the church's calling. Snyder (1996:136) explains that, when the church becomes "wedded and embedded in its particular culture" in this way, "the culturally determined nature of much of its life and structure is overlooked." The church thus becomes culture-bound.

Furthermore, as a reductionistic expression of the Christian tradition comes to assume the status of *idol* within the life of a faith community, this can have a profoundly negative impact upon the experiential vitality of that tradition. As Kraft (2005:297) notes, "whenever and wherever the church has turned from being venturesome and retreated into static forms of expression it has lost its dynamic." Roof (1993:78-79) similarly cautions that, as institutional expressions of the faith become "fixed, objective entities…there is real danger that they will get cut off from the inner meanings and feelings that gave them life to begin with. Religion risks losing its subjective and experiential qualities, thus becoming ritually dry and unmoving." This loss of subjective dynamism, in turn, significantly hinders the ability of the church to touch the lives of people. "Rulebooks" become attached to every facet of church life (Howard Merritt 2007:82), and boundaries begin to define the congregation's culture (Van Gelder 2007:145). In turn, suggests Riddell (1998:37), the accumulation of religious "encrustations" can cause the work and love of God to be masked to such a degree as to be made "unattainable to either participants or outsiders."

Snyder (1996:136) notes that this reductionistic tendency is especially prone to create problems for the church "when cultures change or when cross-cultural witness is attempted." Thompson (2003:72) reflects upon this reality:

> [W]hen the macroculture changes, what happens to the organizational culture of the congregation? If there are no subcultures in that congregation with elements that are sympathetic to the macro-changes, the congregation will not respond. No contests will emerge in the congregation's own public arena, and the perceived threat that accompanies change will not appear. As a consequence, the congregation could lose an opportunity to adjust its Christian witness in a way that would speak freshly to a new situation.

A lack of awareness of the church's own cultural embeddeness threatens to be a hindrance in reaching neighbours who do not share its cultural perspective (Foster

1997:27). Clearly, in times of pronounced social change, that which was understood as a means of preserving the faith actually has the potential to precipitate its very demise.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this reductionistic tendency poses significant challenges to the integrity of the church's intergenerational praxis. As a result of this sort of mindset, Kraft (2005:224) notes, "Most often the forms of the group in power have simply been imposed upon any new receiving group (whether the children of the group in power or the members of a different society or subsociety)." He adds, "Faith alone is not enough for [the group in power]. It has to be faith as understood by and expressed in terms of their particular subculture" (:267). As we might expect, this prevents the members of the rising generation from responding to God directly "in terms of their own subcultural structures" (:265), a reality that fails to provide adequately for the experiential dimension of the traditioning process described above. Instead, members of the rising generation are expected to convert to a cultural form in which previous generations are comfortable.

This requires "a kind of 'horizontal' conversion" from one culture to another (Kraft 2005:266). While such an approach may result in a genuine faith commitment on the part of some members of the rising generation, it also threatens to produce nominalism among those who have embraced the cultural forms of the church without developing a vital "faith-allegiance" to "essential Christianity" (:266). Others may choose simply to abandon this expression of "domesticated" Christianity by leaving the church altogether (Wright & Creasy Dean 2004:158). Thus, cautions Ammerman (1998:119), even that which was "the strength in one generation may be barrier to adaptation in the next."

Furthermore, the presence of this reductionistic impulse is likely to make it difficult for the rising generation to be empowered to contribute meaningfully to the shape of the tradition. Change frequently produces discomfort and some level of conflict. However, when the interaction, sentiment, and values represented among the generations within the church reflect the complex, discontinuous trends evident within society at large, the intergroup dynamics that are likely to emerge amid such conditions have the potential to cause the escalation of conflict. As Carroll and Roof

(2002:10) suggest, when churches become "thick gatherings" in which the generational mix produces "cross-pressuring" expectations and a complex set of cultural undercurrents, "overlapping" generational expectations can cause the congregation to become a "staging ground for conflict." Butler Bass (2004:54) suggests that this should come as no surprise to us:

> Historians and sociologists have long noted that in the 'boundary areas' where rival traditions 'intermingle,' conflict is the likely result…When traditions are uprooted and remoored, tension and conflict between traditions and cross-generations are inevitable…Local traditions are being uprooted; younger generations are challenging old patterns and trying to remoor the congregation to different traditions. Communal and personal conflict are the result.

In this context, the desire of the younger members of the congregation to promote innovation is particularly likely to produce tension. At the same time, as McManus (2001:91) suggests, the notion that the older generations of the church can project their preferences onto others in an attempt to keep younger people in their "time-place" also has the potential to be a source of conflict (cf. Whitesel & Hunter 2000:85).

Butler Bass (2004:21) notes that, while competing generational factions can become fixated upon the conflict they are experiencing within the life of the church, they may fail to recognize that changes, conflicts, and tensions do not always arise solely from factors within religious communities themselves. Rather, these often are simply a small world manifestation of the struggle the church faces as it endeavours to respond to larger cultural trends. Thus, the fear and anxiety caused by large-scale social change often is embedded within these congregational conflicts (cf. Gibbs 2000a:19, 227). Parishioners, while tending to focus on what is at hand, forget the stress of these larger changes and direct blame at one another. As a result, however, differences between the generations become interpreted as problems to be solved rather than as opportunities to learn and to grow as a Christian community.

In the chapters that follow, it will become evident that precisely such a struggle is occurring in many churches today. As we examine the praxis of many established churches in relation to the praxis of society, we will find evidence of reductionistic tendencies. As will become evident, the particular interface of church and culture within the period of Modernity has caused these reductionistic tendencies to be

manifested in some very specific and identifiable ways. As will also become evident, this presently poses a significant risk for the capacity of many established churches to perpetuate their traditions intergenerationally.

2.3 Conclusion

In this study, we are advancing the assertion that, as American society journeys through the post-modern transition, many established churches are struggling to respond adequately to cultural change within a fragmented generational context. It further is being argued that the resulting ineffectiveness of many of these churches in transmitting the Christian tradition to Gen Xers, the first post-modern generation, threatens the ability of these churches to sustain their witness through this transitional period. In this chapter, we have provided a hermeneutical framework that will aid us in further exploring this problem statement in the chapters that follow. More specifically, we have sketched out the following theoretical framework:

1. Section 2.2 introduced the preservation and perpetuation of any cultural tradition, whether that of a society or any group within society, as entailing an intergenerational dynamic requiring the participation of successive generations. This was intended to provide a basis for exploring the intergenerational objectives and challenges that can arise both within society at large and within the church specifically.
2. In section 2.3, attention was given to the role of the generation within the praxis of society as we defined the “generation” as a socio-historical phenomenon. Consideration was given to a meaningful understanding of generational identity, as well as to the limitations and cautions that must inform such an understanding.
3. In second 2.4, this focus upon the praxis of society was developed further as we explored a theoretical understanding of the inherently *intergenerational* processes by which all generations are formed in relation to, and in distinction from, their cultural forebears. Particular attention was given to common causes of the intergenerational “problem” within societies experiencing significant cultural change.
4. Section 2.5 translated the implications of the intergenerational *problem* into the intergenerational praxis of *small world* settings.

5. Section 2.6 gave attention to the intergenerational implications of the church's praxis within society. We explored the responsibility of the church toward each rising generation and the individuals of which it is composed. In addition, we examined some of the challenges that churches may encounter as "small world" contexts as they seek to fulfil their intergenerational praxis within a changing society.

Having provided this theoretical foundation, we will devote chapters three through five to an exploration of the specific historical developments that have contributed to the intergenerational praxis of American society becoming characterized by complexity and fragmentation. In addition, we will chronicle those factors that have caused many established churches to experience a crisis in their intergenerational praxis. However, the purpose of this study is not merely to describe a problem and thereby fall prey to *analysis paralysis*. Indeed, if a real problem is being described here, we must grapple with the question of what help can be extended to churches in crisis. Is there any hope for such congregations? Chapters six through nine will be devoted to addressing this question.