

‘iSeminary’: Christian theological and leadership development in the online environment. A Practical Theological study

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Thesis submitted for the degree *Doctor of Philosophy* in Pastoral Studies at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University

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It all starts here TM

Declaration

This is to declare that I,
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**'iSeminary': Christian theological and leadership development in the
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ABSTRACT:

In this thesis, 'iSeminary': Christian theological and leadership development in the online environment. A Practical Theological study, Rev. Meekins seeks to focus on the issue of leadership development within the method of online learning and teaching. , He focused specifically on how mentoring may occur within such environments. The study explores how various institutions have attempted to address online learning and teaching as well as looking into the history of mentoring as a concept within church history and how this related to the issue he focused on. Meekins suggests a pathway that could possibly help to bridge the gap for those who are resistant to the idea of true mentoring taking place within a disembodied context. The study also makes a valuable and relevant contribution towards the field of Trinitarian ontology in the context of the online training of church leaders and pastors.

KEYWORDS :

Mentoring, Biblical, Discipleship, Leadership, Theological Education, , Christian, Seminary, Online, Seminary,

SLEUTELWOORDE:

Leierskap, kweekskool, voorbereiding, aanlyn, opleiding, teologiese onderrug

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND SUBSTANTIATION

1.1 Background

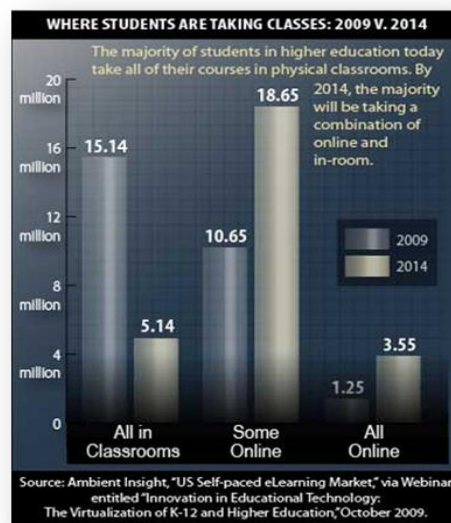
It may be said that the education movement has been altered forever in the Internet age. In 2010, with the arrival of the iPad and the fact that tablet technology became easily accessible, that change was accelerated even more. As their slogan suggests – ‘everything changes, again!’ Now, educational institutions - sacred and secular; primary and tertiary are starting to embrace this new environment (Sharma, 2013:56-58; Kolowich, 2013:04). E-Learning (electronic) and M-Learning (mobile) are becoming more popular in South Africa as well (Mwanza, 2014). Students are more mobile, connected and remote than ever before and this presents some unique challenges to the traditional institution. In fact, Harden (2013) suggests that half of the Universities in the USA, around 4500, will have ceased to exist in the not too distant future.

He goes on to explain why he thinks this will happen:

Because recent history shows us that the Internet is a great destroyer of any traditional business that relies on the sale of information. The Internet destroyed the livelihoods of traditional stock brokers and bonds salesmen by throwing open to everyone access to the proprietary information they used to sell...Well, get ready to see the same thing happen to a university near you, and not for entirely dissimilar reasons (Harden, 2013:n.p.).

Nagel (2013) has suggested something similar by pointing to a marked increase in online students in the US from 2009 to a projected intake in 2014. This increase is represented in the diagram below (see also **Annexure E**).

Online class growth in the USA from 2009 to 2014. See also Annexure E



Online education brings a broad disruption to the education industry in much the same way that Amazon and Kindle disrupted the traditional bookstore. As Harden (2013) suggests above, when paradigms of delivery change (such as from a paper book to a digital e-reader), the expectations shift from the person consuming the 'product'. What they want may be the same (a good book), but how they expect to receive it, where they receive it, the speed at which it is received and other value added propositions have been fundamentally

changed. To label this a disruption is not to say that this reality is to be resisted or feared. The challenge is to adapt in the face of this kind of disruption and consider the new advantages they may give us that were not there in the previous paradigm. This challenge is felt not only in the broad educational world in general but, which is the focus of this study, within Christian leadership development in the online learning space in particular. Leadership development within theological education has often been achieved through the process of 'discipleship' (following 'patterns' seen in such passages as Mt 28:19-20; 2 Tim 2:2 and so on). Termed slightly more broadly it would be phrased as 'mentoring' (Selzer, 2008:25; Moore, 2007:155-157). It is perhaps not overstated to suggest that mentoring is seen as the key (Selzer, 2008:25) to developing leaders in traditional theological education. Some, like Gortner (2009:120) have emphasised the fact that the 'church' as a whole has not always developed leaders as well as they ought to have. Notwithstanding the fact that formal educational programmes will never be a 'catch-all' for leadership development, the academy should at least have strategies for achieving these mentoring aims (Gortner, 2009:120-127).

Kay & Wallace (2010:01) make mention of how mentoring relationships are often the key to developing competent leaders to ensure future organisational health. Thus, while the 'other' components of education – teaching content, crafting creative lessons, creating assessments, programme development, etc. – are possible within the traditional and online classrooms, the question that will be discussed under the broader topic of leadership development here will be: *can the same be said of mentoring?* If mentoring is critical within education and online education has begun to change the traditional paradigm of delivery, then answering this question, especially for Christian leadership development, becomes all the more vital.

To understand fully how to approach this topic one must engage in a robust discussion of what 'mentoring' is. How mentoring has been understood from a Biblical, historical and societal perspective is very important. Moreover, the more relevant question for those involved in online Christian leadership development becomes: *How do we mentor effectively*

in online spaces? Is it even possible? The challenges posed to those in Christian leadership development are even more pronounced because the ‘classroom’ has been treasured as the place of spiritual formation, discipleship and mentoring. Even though the latter is common practice in many other disciplines as well, it is often seen as critical to the development of future Christian leaders as stated above (Biehl, 1996:1-21; Gortner, 2009:119). If the reality is that online Christian education is a growing reality and mentoring is an essential aspect within leadership development, then it follows that these questions simply need to have answers.

These questions and others like it will be discussed at length and in various nuances throughout this study. Furthermore, for theologians, these questions also need to be informed by a Biblical/ theological understanding. In this study in particular the specific doctrine of the Trinity as a ‘bedrock’ theological foundation and its application to this field will be discussed. More detail as to the rationale of why a Trinitarian perspective is important for this study is briefly given under 1.3 below and in greater detail as an ‘Afterword’ at the conclusion of Chapter 4.

1.2 The importance of mentoring in leadership development

Stetzer (2010:16) indicates in his research of the US church that up to 93% of US pastors see leadership development as critical for the church. However, they are less convinced of their ability to help in developing such leaders – only 52% strongly agreed that the church was doing well in this area. Osei-Mensah (1990:08) points out that there is a need for pastors to be ‘omnicompetent’ in today’s world. How these pastors receive their training and indeed what they are trained to know and do will greatly influence their ability to be omnicompetent (Meekins, 2011). There appears to be an increasing uncertainty within the realm of Christian education as to what paradigm of education would be most effective in the twenty-first century. Banks (1999:04) states that theological education as a whole is ‘...in part...going through culture shock and in part is undergoing a painful transition’ (Banks, 1999:04). Part of this transition is that institutions are wrestling with the ongoing

debate of balance between *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxy* in their curricula. But this issue becomes even more convoluted when trying to define (and mentor) orthopraxy in a virtual environment.

Therefore of critical concern is how the technological advancements that we are now experiencing will affect the development of leaders for the church of tomorrow and those institutions that would develop them. Thompson *et al.* (2010:305) have suggested that ‘E-mentoring’ or even other terms such as ‘telementoring,’ or ‘cybermentoring,’ will soon be commonplace and state that these processes may even be preferential (Thompson *et al.*, 2010: 306), an idea expressed by Boyle *et al.* (2010:116-117) as well. In this study I will explore the idea of Christian leadership development with an emphasis on mentoring as a discipline informed by the notion of a Trinitarian ontology and the impact the concept of Trinitarian community might have upon effective mentorship within a digital age. To examine the complex topic of mentorship further, the historical perspective on these matters will need to be examined, with special attention to some Christian historical understandings mentorship and the Trinitarian ontological undergirding needed with respect to mentorship.

1.3 What is leadership mentoring with a ‘Trinitarian Perspective’?

It is hoped that with a grid of a ‘*Trinitarian perspective*’ in mind, a contribution can be made with respect to Christian leadership development in the online reality. As Cunningham (2004) has asserted: ‘if the doctrine of the Trinity is as central to the Christian faith as theologians have often declared it to be, it should have an impact on every element of Christian life and thought’ (Cunningham, 2004:250). If that is true, then how we think about Christian leadership development in the online realm should be duly ‘impacted’ as well. With this perspective in place, it should be expected that our methods and processes should bear a ‘Trinitarian’ character. Because the Trinitarian understanding is additionally a mysterious as well as magnificent reality, one must guard against becoming overly pragmatic in its application to a particular field as if it was simply a formula to be applied.

Therefore this study attempts to show throughout how a Trinitarian understanding is helpful when applied to various nuances within online education without attempting to become overly prescriptive. In essence, it is about framing our questions to think about *how* this is Trinitarian rather than debating whether it should be. Mentorship within Christian leadership development becomes far more than passing on a body of knowledge (experiential or otherwise), but is about partnership with God together – in community, an essential quality of the Triune Godhead.

What is this “Trinitarian” community? As the Father, Son and Spirit work together in Trinitarian synergy, so we ought to model the same in our communities of faith. This ‘synergy’ can for example be seen in creation (Gen 1:2 – ‘let us make..’); in the start of Jesus’ earthly mission (Mt 3:16ff) and in the commission of His disciples (Mt 28:19-20) as a few examples. In the NT, Paul’s use of the plural ‘you’ in his letters especially in Phil. 3:17 and 2 Thess. 3:9. In 1 Thess. 1:7 is most enlightening. His reference to the church as a whole (‘and so you have become a model...’ 1 Thess 1:7 – emphasis mine) as participating in the work that God is doing is important when discussing the role and responsibility of leaders. The particular emphasis that Paul places on the noun *τύπος* (tupos) as ‘example’, ‘model’ or ‘pattern’ (Kittel *et al.* 2006), expanding its use from simply an ‘impression’ (Jn 20:25) is not to be missed.

Consider the following passage as well, where Paul states:

You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. ⁷ And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia (1 Thess 1:6-7).

The idea being that as the community modelled (“imitators”, from the GK *μιμέομαι*) themselves after Paul and God, so they too became models for others. Leadership must exemplify and model (*τύπος*) community and interdependency, not individualism and independency. The Trinitarian perspective needs to undergird our efforts in demonstrating

the true spirit of '*communitas*', perhaps even more now than ever, as we enter a digital age of mentorship.

Exactly how one might foster Christian leadership with the Trinitarian perspective in mind, whilst maintaining excellence in distance programmatic output becomes the conundrum. As we will see throughout the study, it is not a new issue. In the early days of online education there was this critique of the form itself – that it would be convenience at the expense of excellence. It was perceived that online education was a 'lessor' form of education and thus leadership development would be hindered in this process if this form was used. Hess (2006:02) summarises and refutes this succinctly in her excellent work when she rather refers to the challenge faced as an "adaptive" (Hess, 2006:02) one for the user (educator and learner alike) rather than the form of education being the issue. She essentially changes the posture from lament to engagement and solution-oriented approaches to the challenges that face us in Christian leadership development. In addition, others (Thompson *et al.*, 2010:306) have been quick also to argue for the benefits of this mode, especially for the millennial generation of today (Evans, s.a. :397). Those early naysayers¹ who predicted an early demise of online learning as a legitimate platform have been proven wrong as it continues to grow worldwide.

Additionally, the brief development of the Trinitarian perspective and infusion of its broad implications in this study are not without foundation. Various others (Grenz, 1994; Erickson, 1998; McVay, 2006:285-315) have also sought to offer a critique of the individualistic and largely 'Western' paradigms that exist for Christian ontology and praxis. The very fact that God is Triune, means we, as beings created in His image ought to understand this reality and realise the implications – in all areas of life - of such an understanding. This perspective is of course vast and as has been stated above, it is not the emphasis of the study, but rather a 'bedrock' doctrinal understanding which is nuanced within this study. It is postulated that the Trinitarian perspective has something to say to notions of best practice in online education and in particular what Lehman and Conceição refer to as 'presence'

¹ naysayer. "a person who habitually expresses negative or pessimistic views": Dictionary.com. Dictionary.com Unabridged. Random House, Inc. <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/naysayer> (accessed: April 14, 2016)

(Lehman & Conceição, 2010:11). They argue for the importance of cognitive, social and instructor presence (Lehman & Conceição, 2010:11-12) as critical to the development of students in the online space. Their research strongly addresses the design of humanity as a social being and the Trinitarian perspective would further add the dimension of the '*Imago Dei*' (Image of God) as being critical in the online theological learning space. Learning is best facilitated when it meets the design of who we are - social beings- and this is because God is a Triunity of three Persons in one - a social entity.

It should be noted again though that the Trinitarian perspective is not the main emphasis of this study and in fact this author has made mention of the importance to research this more (Chapter 6). However, one will note throughout that this understanding is mentioned as a 'reminder' and most especially in Chapter 4 in dealing with Osmer's (2008) normative aspect of this study as a necessary part of the puzzle. The author does acknowledge however, that more robust study must be done in the development of this perspective and its application to this field before one can speak with more authority on its application to this field.

1.4 Summation:

Therefore, whilst traversing the unknown waters of how to mentor effectively in a digital age and acknowledging that it is a jumbled and at times, confusing, task, it is precisely because of the precariousness of it that those who currently are privileged to lead the way must do so with great skill and critical reflection.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTION

All the above leads to the following research question:

How should a contemporary theological academy fulfill the strategic task of leadership development in the online environment and reflect a

Trinitarian ontology, in order to move towards the goal of producing competent leaders?

The above question leads to the following individual questions that must be investigated in order to provide a strategic answer to the above:

- What can be learned from an empirical study of the present situation with regard to online theological education and mentoring?
- What can be learned from the human sciences through a relevant literature review of the present situation with regard to online theological education and mentoring?
- What insight can the Biblical and theological perspectives give regarding the definition /role of a mentor and the Trinitarian perspective?
- What sort of model may be developed from interplay between the empirical study, the human sciences and relevant literature as well as the Biblical/theological perspectives?

1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary aim of the study is to research how the theological academy of the future will continue one of its primary leadership development tasks of mentoring (function) in a online environment (form) with a possible model of how the theological academy might adapt with a view to producing leaders who are competent in this complex matrix. The following must therefore be accomplished:

- To conduct a qualitative empirical study on the current situation within a sample of theological institutions who offer a robust online education programme
- To research what the human sciences and related literature may contribute that will help to develop the understanding of Christian theological and leadership development
- To examine how a Biblical and theological perspective can inform the process of mentoring online within Christian theological and leadership development

- To propose a model that may assist in the Christian theological and leadership development

Based on the interplay between the exegetical bases, literature study and field research, effective strategies will be formulated and a model proposed for the task of developing leaders in the new reality.

1.7 CENTRAL THEORETICAL ARGUMENT:

The contemporary theological academy must fulfil the strategic task of leadership development in an online environment and reflect a Trinitarian ontology, in order to move towards the goal of producing competent leaders.

1.8 RESEARCH METHOD

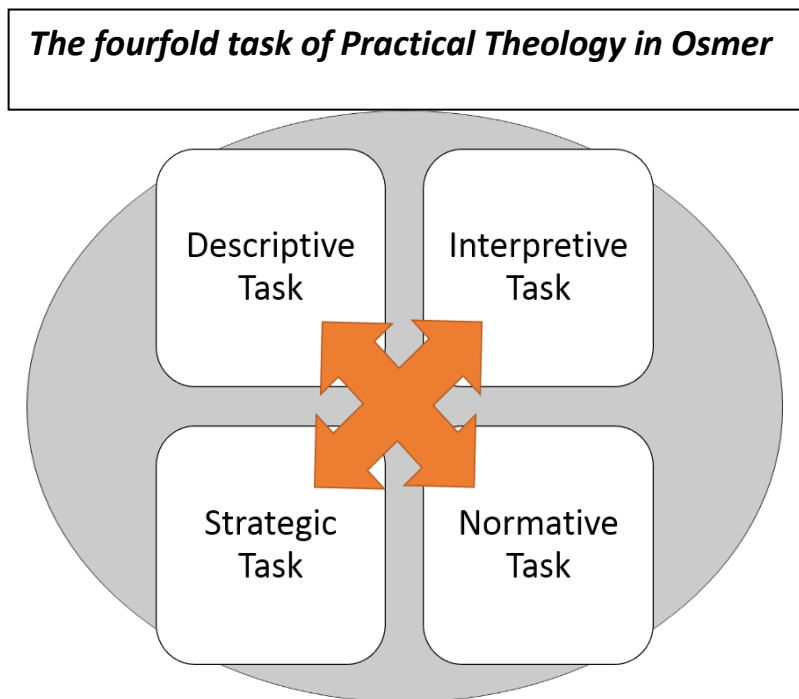
The challenge of Practical Theology is immense. One must be proficient in engaging several fields of study and yet also be able to produce a praxis-oriented solution that will be of benefit in real-world settings. This challenge however, is especially appealing to this author who is himself an online educator at present and sees the need to explore first-hand the issues of mentoring in the online space. Cowan utilises the term 'community of faith' in his description of Practical Theology. It is precisely this community-driven approach that undergirds my theological premise and hopefully my outcomes as well. Cowan (2002:02), states:

So this is what we mean by 'doing practical theology': discerning and articulating a current concern, attending carefully with our heads and hearts to the world as it is and to the world as our faith traditions teach us it should be, asking 'what must we do?' in the light of that attention, doing it, and then evaluating what we have done. This disciplined rhythm of reflection-action-reflection by members of a *community of faith* is practical theology. It is at the centre of the vocation to which members of communities of faith are called (Cowan, 2002:02 – italics mine).

Richard Osmer's volume is especially useful for the type of research that this study calls for. Osmer (2008:4-12) proposes a model of practical theological interpretation with four tasks:

1. The descriptive-empirical task asks, 'What is going on?'
2. The interpretive task asks, 'Why is it going on?'
3. The normative task asks, 'What ought to be going on?'
4. The strategic task asks, 'How might we respond?'

I will use Osmer's (2008:4-12) heuristic, with its descriptive, interpretive, normative and strategic elements. This methodology can be diagrammed as follows (Osmer 2010:7):



Osmer's model, as suggested in this diagram, sees the interpreter of the data in distinct yet connected tasks or 'spiral' that allows for each spiral to inform the other as we move towards pragmatism. In keeping with the paradigm suggested by Osmer in this diagram, this study has therefore taken the posture of study for each stage in the following manner:

Task	Descriptive	Interpretive	Normative	Strategic
Question	What is going on?	Why is it going on?	What ought to be going on?	How might we respond?
Function	Priestly listening	Sagely wisdom	Prophetic discernment	Servant leadership

1. *Descriptive-empirical*: What is going on? Gathering information to understand particular episodes, situations, or contexts better. (*Chapter 2 of this thesis – ‘The current gap in mentoring within the online theological education environment: An empirical study’*).

2. *Interpretive*: Why is this going on? Entering into a dialogue with the social sciences to interpret and explain why certain actions and patterns are taking place. (*Chapter 3 - Leadership by way of Mentoring: A cursory glance at the development of the field with special reference to Augustine and Kierkegaard*).

3. *Normative*: What ought to be going on? Raising normative questions from the perspectives of theology, ethics and other fields. (*Chapter 4 of this thesis – ‘Leader as enabling function: Towards a new paradigm for local church leadership in the 21st century A concept paper in honour of Prof. George Lotter²’ & ‘Afterword – An explanation of the Trinitarian perspective’*.)

4. *Pragmatic*: How might we respond? Forming an action plan and undertaking specific responses that seek to shape the episode, situation, or context in desirable directions. (*Chapter 5 of this thesis – ‘Christian theological and leadership development in the online environment’ & ‘Chapter 6 – Conclusion and areas for further research’*).

² Published in July 2015. See: Elkington, R., Meekins, D., Breen, J.M. & Martin, S.S., 2015, ‘Leadership as an enabling function: Towards a new paradigm for local church leadership in the 21st century’, In *die Skriflig* 49(3), Art. #1911, 14 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ids.v49i3.1911>

1.9 **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

- The ESV Bible is used for references, unless otherwise indicated.
- This study is done in accordance with the guidelines required by the Research Ethics Committee of the North-West University. All pertinent documentation will be kept by the author and is available upon request of the examiner.
- When reference is made to the male gender, the female gender will also be included and *vice versa*.
- My *modus operandi* in hermeneutical considerations is to exegete according to a literal/historical/cultural/grammatical hermeneutic that is normally branded as 'literal' hermeneutics (Virkler, 2007:79). I also acknowledge that my background in ministry and education is from a historically Baptist perspective and whilst I endeavor to maintain objectivity as much as possible I also have to allow for my own presuppositional blind spots in the study. It is hoped that through the various readings analysed, Biblical foundations uncovered and objective opinions sought the findings of this study will show how it would be broadly useful to the Kingdom.

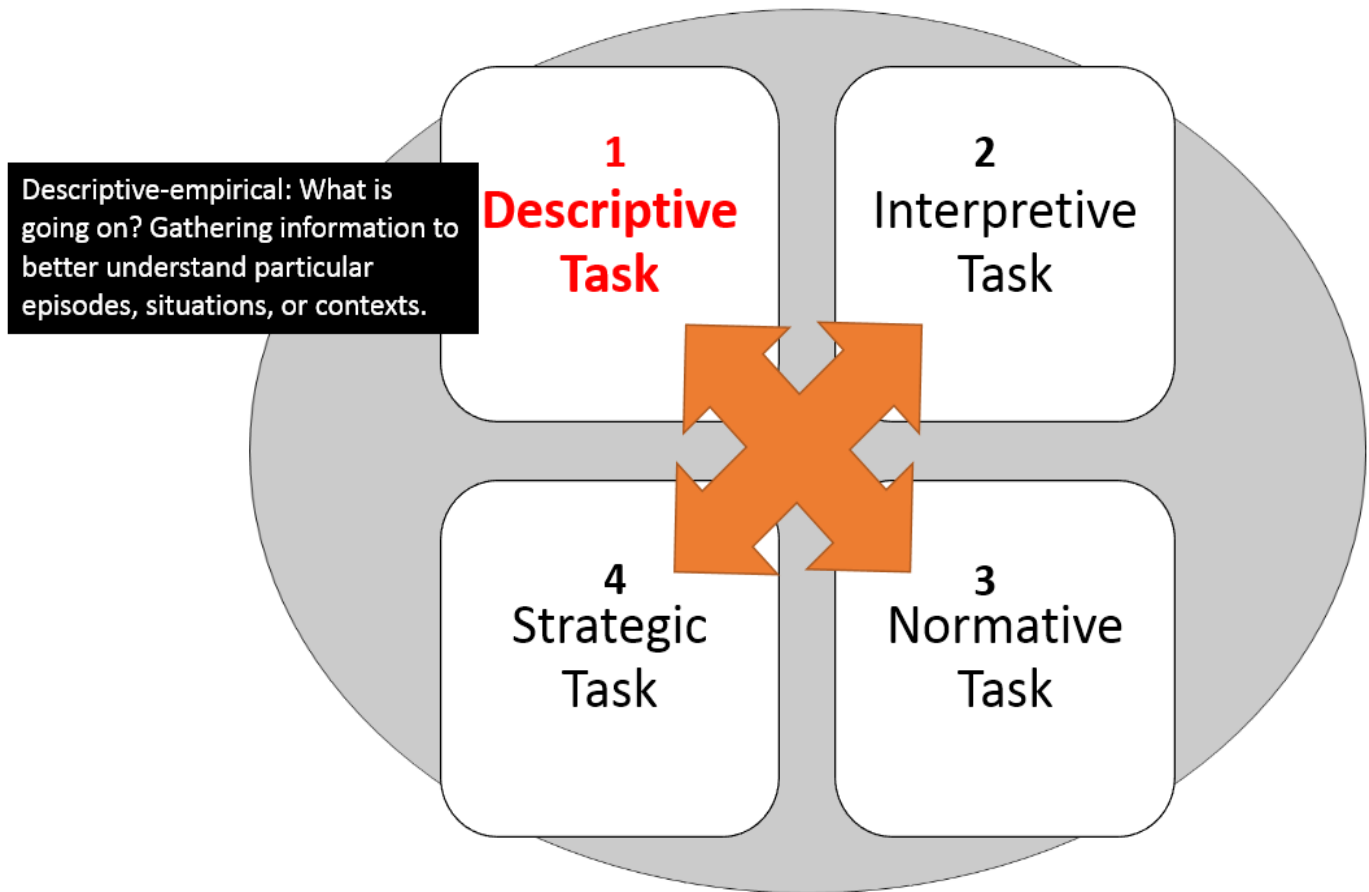
'iSeminary': Christian theological and leadership development in the online environment. A Practical Theological study

Chapter 2

The current gap in mentoring within the online theological education environment: An empirical study.

In this chapter the researcher will discuss the initial descriptive question that Osmer (2008:04) asks: 'What is going on?' This has to do with gathering information that helps us distinguish patterns and dynamics in particular episodes, situations, or contexts (Osmer, 2008:4). Thus the descriptive-empirical task of practical theological interpretation is grounded in a spirituality of presence. It is a matter of attending to what is going on in the lives of individuals, families and communities. This then provides the framework for subsequent chapters to deal with the interpretive question (Why is this going on?); the normative question (What ought to be going on?) and the strategic question (How might we respond?). The diagram below shows where this chapter fits in with relation to the study as a whole:

WHERE WE ARE IN THE STUDY:



In order to accomplish the descriptive empirical task of this chapter, the researcher has set out the chapter in the following manner:

1. Introduction and brief analysis of the terms that need to be understood within the context of online education today.
2. A brief history from a prior empirical study that the researcher was involved in that serves as a motivation for the current study.
3. Explanation of methodology employed for the current empirical component that was done in accordance with NWU Ethics procedures³.

³ <http://www.nwu.ac.za/content/research-support-research-ethics>

4. Empirical component comprising of a qualitative interview analysis of online theological educational programmes within the author's delineated parameters. Meta-themes will be formulated and discussed.
5. Summation

2.1 Introduction:

Technology has without doubt changed the way we live our lives (Borgmann, 1984:03) and education is no different. According to Mwanza (2014), tablet computer usage in South Africa increased by at least 100% from April 2012 to April 2013 which exemplifies the fact that tablet technology is not only in the realm of the elite. Technology such as the tablet and smartphone experience more organic growth in developing nations who have less hardwire infrastructure that can inhibit new technologies seeking to change the way people interact and work. Online education is not as recent as some may think and there are those who have been doing it for some time now. For example, Schlosser *et al.* (2009:10) state that, 'both credit and non-credit courses have been offered over computer networks since the mid-1980's, but it has evolved significantly over the last ten years and has gone from being a fringe concept to a mainline offering at many Universities'.

In its early development, e-learning was seen as a 'lesser' form of education and that the 'traditional' classroom could never be replaced. Some still hold to this. However, the components as well as the technology involved in e-learning have developed to such a degree that the quality of the programme is rarely challenged anymore (discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.5). Those who would still prefer to hold to the traditional classroom modality are doing so for other reasons. Briefly, those reasons include primarily a preference of face to face interaction and the ability to know a student's character and not just their 'avatar'⁴ as well as concerns over true 'community' building in a virtual space. Theological educators have not been caught unawares amidst this maelstrom in educational modality in

⁴ Avatar: "a graphical image that represents a person, as on the Internet". Dictionary.com Unabridged. Random House, Inc. 14 Apr. 2016. Dictionary.com <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/avatar>.

Christian leadership development. Indeed, Liberty University in Virginia (USA) claims to have 100 000 students in their over 230 online programmes which, they claim, make it the largest 'Christian University in the world' (Liberty, 2015).

Therefore, times have changed and technology has been at the forefront of that change. The question that remains now is how best to utilise this technology to further the aims for which the programmes exist. Before that question is addressed however, one needs to understand the various terms that are used when discussing non-brick and mortar classroom based education today. This is important because, as we will see, they are not always defined the same way around the world. It can become confusing to talk about these issues without a clear definition of what we are talking about and what not. Thus, what follows is a brief discussion on these various terms and how they are understood generally in the field and specifically in the South African context.

2.2. E-Terminology

It has been this author's experience within Higher Education circles in South Africa that although there is an awareness of 'the online learning world' there is equally much confusion about what constitutes true 'E- Learning'. Thus it is important to specify exactly what is meant by these terms.

2.2.1 Distance learning

According to Schlosser *et al.* (2009:01), distance learning is 'institution-based formal education, where the learning group is separated and where interactive tele-communicative systems are used to connect learners, resources and instructors'. In South Africa the Department of Higher Education and Training (DoHET) have defined distance education as:

A set of teaching and learning strategies (or educational methods) that can be used to overcome spatial and/or temporal separation between educators and students. However, it is not a single mode of delivery. It is a collection of methods for the provision of structured learning. It avoids the need for students to discover the curriculum by attending classes frequently and for long periods. Rather, it aims to create a quality learning environment using an appropriate combination of different media, tutorial

support, peer group discussion, and practical sessions (Van Staden 2012:04).

Moore and Kearsley (2012:01) simply define it as ‘teachers and students (who) are in different places for all or most of the time that they teach and learn’. What is important to note in these definitions is that distance learning requires a separation between the ‘learner’ and the ‘teacher’. This spacial separation is overcome by utilising various tele communicative systems to communicate the information needed. The word tele communitive may imply various e-technologies to some, but the word itself does not imply this. In fact, tele communitive instruments can be anything that allows communication to happen at a distance, so this includes the postal service, telephone and other such systems. Although not specifically stated, distance learning implies asynchronous learning due in part to the modalities used. Schlosser *et al.* (2009:03) make the point that distance learning is connected to a particular institution and that learners engage in this form of education because they ‘are physically separated from the institution that sponsors the instruction’.

Distance learning as a concept is not new at all (might it be suggested that the Apostle Paul was among the first to make use of ‘distance education’ in his letters to various churches and individuals?). In reality, the earliest known examples of formal distance education come from the late 1800’s with Colleges like Skerry’s College in Edinburgh (1878) and Illinois Wesleyan being the earliest examples. Both of these institutions and many others like them in subsequent years were correspondence institutions which relied upon the postal service to service their needs. Many in South Africa will know that UNISA utilised this same infrastructure for many years, especially before computers became readily accessible to most students. In theological education circles, Moody Bible Institute first began their correspondence programme in 1901 and it still continues today. As time progressed and technologies evolved, so did the modalities used in educational institutions. By the 1920’s – the radio had become a ‘new’ way to administer education and by 1957 New York University (NYU) had begun their ‘Sunrise Semester’ television show (Schlosser *et al.*, 2009:09). So, it should come as no real surprise to those involved in education that now the Internet and all that it offers will again force a paradigm shift in the way things are done. Perhaps the chief difference between all the prior modalities (paper, radio and television) and ‘e-learning’ is that

the latter puts the educational control in the hands of the learner and thus changes the way people think about education and is not merely adapting to a new form. In the light of this therefore, there are some new terminologies that we need to consider and understand. Learner-driven education will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter.

2.2.2. Open and Blended Learning:

The DoHET defines blended learning as: ‘structured learning opportunities provided using a combination of contact, distance, and/or e-learning opportunities to suit different purposes, audiences, and contexts’ (Van Staden, 2012:05). Blended learning has sometimes erroneously been referred to as ‘mixed-mode’ which is not official nomenclature to the DoHET (Van Staden, 2012) or indeed around the world (Moore *et al.*, 2012:02). To be clear the main difference between ‘blended learning’ and ‘e-learning’ *per se* is that the former encourages and makes use of computer technology whereas the latter is dependent on it. For example – many Universities today encourage students to make use of internet resources for their assignments (such as Google Scholar or EBSCO etc.) but the student is not necessarily required to do so. They could simply go down to their Library and find paper sources and journals should they desire to do so. True e-learning however, requires that students must utilise online sources and a LMS (learning management system like Moodle, Blackboard, etc.) or otherwise they will not be able to complete the work they need to do. It is online resource-dependent. This is an important distinction to make when we consider that education is moving towards a true ‘e-learning’ approach. From the instructional and institutional side, this move necessitates that the faculty not only is aware but consists of practitioners within the online learning world that require a new set of meta-skills not previously required. (This fact was mentioned by several in the empirical interviews and is discussed later in this chapter under heading 2.4.4).

Open learning is a relatively new term on the lexical horizon. Again, the DoHET defines it thus:

An approach which combines the principles of learner-centredness, lifelong learning, flexibility of learning provision, the removal of barriers to access learning, the recognition for credit of prior learning experience, the

provision of learner support, the construction of learning programmes in the expectation that learners can succeed, and the maintenance of rigorous quality assurance over the design of learning materials and support systems (Van Staden, 2012:05).

This is a rather cumbersome definition and in some ways moves it away from the way it has been understood elsewhere (Schlosser *et al.*, 2009:06) although the main thrust of ‘learner-centredness’ is at the heart of the open learning paradigm. To try and put it simply, open learning is a move away from a ‘mass market’ approach to education that distance education seeks to provide. Open learning is ‘open’ in the sense that it is oriented towards the specific needs of the learner and is acutely aware of contextual realities. By way of example – a course that is offered in ‘Christian Leadership’ by a traditional distance institution would be a package of notes, discussions and assignments that would be the same whether the student was from Afghanistan or Zimbabwe. However, in an open learning environment there would be a desire to custom design the materials to best service the need of the student. Perhaps it is best summarised in the phrase: ‘any time, any place, any path, any pace’ (Schlosser *et al.*, 2009:01).

2.2.3 E- and M-learning:

E-Learning is the word that is used to describe the use of a variety of internet-based tools to facilitate the learning process. Elsewhere in the world this is also commonly referred to as ‘online learning’ (Moore *et al.*, 2012:02). E- and M-learning (Electronic and Mobile) are essentially one and the same; the only difference is the mobility of the devices used in the process. M-learning most commonly refers to Tablet computers and smartphones. The rise of M-learning (Mwanza, 2014) is important, however, as students are more mobile, connected and remote than ever before and this presents some unique challenges to the traditional institution. Tools that are used in E-Learning include: video, text-based sources, websites, discussion forums, live Skype lectures, virtual ‘office’ hours and tutorial sessions and various other synchronous and asynchronous modalities. To the extent that a user can access these and other elements on mobile devices, these are also tools used in M-learning as well. Although the issue is not quite as simple as one may think, as there are still ‘grey areas’ in

terms of defining, the one constitutes ‘contact’ versus ‘distance’ as Van Staden (2012:07) observes:

Online asynchronous discussion forums, for example, reflect an instance where the spatial separation between educator and learners is removed by the ‘virtual’ space of the Internet, but where there remains temporal separation. However, as a discussion forum allows sustained, ongoing communication between academics and students, it is clearly a form of ‘contact’ not a form of independent study. Thus, there may be cause to introduce a new descriptor for educational methods of direct educator-student contact that are not face-to-face, but are mediated through new communications technologies (Van Staden, 2012:07).

One of the questions that one may ask is: *‘How does e-learning differ from distance learning? Can one not use these tools in distance programmes as well?’* This is a good and often asked question. The answer is simple enough. Whereas distance programmes may include such tools in the learning process; E-learning is dependent on such tools. In other words – if you don’t understand or cannot access the required technology you simply cannot enter the programme.

This is partly the reason why so many theological institutions are struggling with this paradigm shift. They either do not have access to (many Christian leadership development sites remain poorly resourced) or do not understand the technology required to make the shift and thus face redundancy. In addition to the terms listed above, there are many other terms and words that those involved in online leadership development will simply have to become familiar with. Words like: Avatars, Blog, Crowdsourcing, Kindle, Flash, Listserv, Mashup, Podcast, Really Simple Syndication (RSS), TED talks, etc. are commonplace in this new reality and this new “language” must be learned and understood by faculty in order to be effective. Some online learning textbooks (Prensky, 2010) have dictionaries that allow people to learn these terms and many others that can be useful tools in the online classroom.

It is also important to note that the purpose thus far in this chapter is to provide some clarity into the definitions and terms that are used in the conversation on this topic. It is not intended to be exhaustive or overly detailed. It is acknowledged that further discussion could be

entered into as to what terms like ‘media’; ‘technology’; ‘teaching and learning’ can be taken to mean. However, I believe that the material covered thus far is sufficient for my purposes in this study. If this study were more pedagogical in nature, dissection of these terms would be important.

It is fitting to end this section on definitions and terms by looking at the advantages of this new reality in which we find ourselves as educators. Schlosser *et al.* (2009:15) provide a useful list of ten reasons why this new reality is beneficial to the educational process and the institution as whole. I will not repeat this list here but give a sampling of three of their insights:

1. The institution can function anytime and in any place where there are students or even one student.
2. It preserves and enhances opportunities for individual adaption and advancement.
3. It allows students to stop, start and learn at their own pace.

One must also be aware of the dangers, however, of simply embracing all that is online in the name of being ‘contemporary’ or ‘relevant’. The key function of education – namely creating modules that provide for the educational needs of the student is still paramount and must not be overlooked. Hess (2006:39) confirms this when she so profoundly indicates, ‘digital technologies can certainly be extraordinarily useful in expanding access to our learning programmes, but only if we implement them in ways that follow from our goals, not that drive them’.

2.3 Background to this study with brief example

This researcher began to consider seriously the topic of mentoring in Christian leadership development when tasked with leading a small Bible College in KwaZulu-Natal in the late 2000's. This institution had historically placed a high premium in OJT (on the job training) and ‘mentoring’ of students was often presented as one of the selling points of this institution. Wiggins and McTighe (2004:01) state that ‘to begin with the end in mind, means to start with a clear idea of your destination.’ It seemed that whilst the Bible College was clear on its destination – well mentored students, for me as the new Principal, concern emerged about

our effectiveness in this area. Were we mentoring students effectively as we had proposed in our mandate? This caused me to embark on an earlier study for an M.Th thesis entitled: *'Towards the paradigm of 'socio-spiritual synergy' in the development of effective leaders through theological education with special reference to the Independent Baptist church in Durban'* (Meekins, 2011). The empirical component of this primarily literature study consisted of two main parts: A closed-qualitative survey, and a set of focus groups. These components were deemed to be ideal by this author's research supervisor to glean the information needed for the study. It was consistent with best practice methods for similar research conducted in other fields as well (Dawson, 2002:25).

The purpose of the closed-qualitative survey, was to gather information from the participants concerning their perception of the value of their experience at the institution for the ten-year period 2001-2011. The type of survey chosen is best described as a 'closed-qualitative' survey (Dawson, 2002:25). It is qualitative in the sense that the survey attempts to explore 'attitudes, behavior and experiences' (Dawson, 2002:25). As such, fewer people were asked to participate in the survey, but there was more contact with the participant.

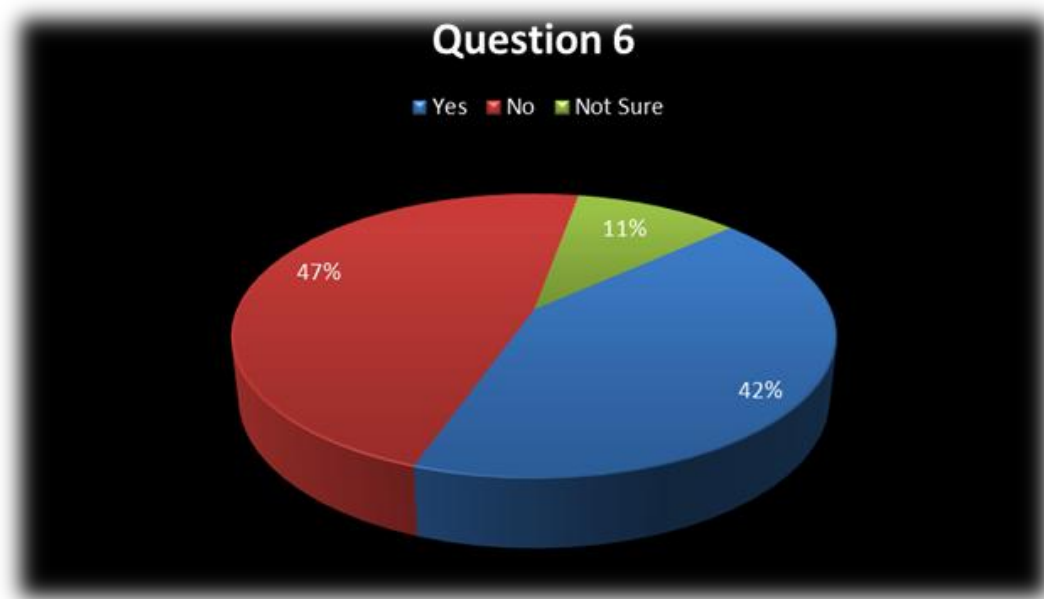
The purpose of the focus groups, as defined by Dawson (2002:87) is to gather 'a number of people (who) are asked to come together in order to discuss a certain issue for the purpose of research'. A focus group has a moderator who guides a purposeful discussion in an attempt to gain insight into the topic at hand.

The content of the entire questionnaire that was used is not relevant to the current study, so only the pertinent question has been included here. However, the original list of questions and the rationale used for asking each question is included at the end of this study under **Annexure B**.

The question in the survey and focus group that has particular reference to this study was question 6 which asks:

'Do you feel that there was a sufficient 'mentoring' process attached to your programme? (A mentor is defined as a person who coaches you in the ability to take classroom knowledge and make it practical in ministry).'

These are the results from the original questionnaire and subsequent study group:



71% of the focus group answered 'no' to this question. There was agreement that the mentoring process programme currently in place at the institution was flawed. Some expressed deep regret that they were not mentored as they have seen the negative effects in their current ministry setting.

One respondent said:

'We must remember that not every pastor is a mentor...some... just can't do it!'

Another said:

'I was told to just do what I need to do and get on with it!'

This finding was no doubt a big concern for an institution that thought that mentoring was a strength! The data seemed to indicate otherwise. This points to a profound reality that mentoring is, at times, a misunderstood concept. This is due, in part, to the various terms that are attached to the process and various definitions given to these terms, but also because the dynamics of the process are not always understood. Regardless, what was clear is that

58% of respondents were either not sure they were mentored well or were sure they were not mentored in a satisfactory manner. This was an important finding in the study as this institution not only espoused the idea of OJT and mentoring as a value, it *also* had a policy that was in place to ensure that students and their mentors had a clear idea of the expectations for each party. However, notwithstanding this fairly rigorous process the vast majority of students had not felt the benefits of this. This idea was further explored in the follow-up focus group, which had the following insights to add:

- Mentoring as a process is not always easy to define and yet it is imperative that the parties and institutions concerned have a working definition that they adhere to in order to avoid confusion and disappointment. A useful document in thinking through this is Lotter (2008:1-4) who defines the terms well especially as they relate to the online context.
- Simply having policies in place and an ethos that espouses mentoring is not enough. Unless carefully integrated, monitored and evaluated, the mentoring process can be short-circuited or even circumvented altogether. This concept will be dealt with again later in the chapter under heading 3.5. as it may be argued that even more attention needs to be paid to this aspect in the online environment.
- Being an effective ‘mentor’ is not easy. The inference from this study is that simply possessing a position of authority (whether pastor or lecturer/leader etc.) does not mean a person can adequately mentor another.

With this background in mind the following empirical research was undertaken with six theological and ministry training institutions. The research was conducted to investigate how institutions in my geographic area are dealing with the process of mentoring within the leadership development process using the online learning space. Is it happening? What steps are being taken to ensure the character and skills development needed is indeed being learned? Even though these institutions were located in the North-East region of the USA, it

is believed that many of the inferences made and conclusions one can draw would be true of online education in general. In Chapter 5 of this study, it is shown that institutions in South Africa are also thinking through these issues and online education is indeed a growing global phenomenon. The researcher was based in the USA during the time of the study and felt that a higher quality of research would be conducted using the method described in the next section.

What are the real issues institutions face in this new, online reality? It is to the outcomes of that research that we now turn our attention.

2.3.1 *Research method for the empirical study of the six training institutions.*

As stated by Myers (2009:121), 'Interviews are one of the most important data-gathering techniques for...researchers...' and is used extensively in qualitative research. For this component I employed a method of face-to-face survey that would be considered 'low risk' according to NWU guidelines and that could best be described as a 'semi-structured interview' under the matrix offered by Myers (2009:124). The NWU ethics committee guidelines⁵ were followed for this study and the permissions document is attached at the end of this chapter as **Annexure C**. This semi-structured interview utilised pre-formulated questions but allowed for new, natural questions to emerge in the process of the discussion. The rationale for following the semi-structured route of questioning is that it affords one the 'best of both worlds' approach, namely the consistency of answers across interviewees as well as freedom for new and important data to emerge (Myers, 2009:125).

King and Horrocks (2010:42) have identified several key components that make for a successful interview process. Following their paradigm, I identified how I conducted these interviews:

- i. Setting – important in this piece is providing a space that the interviewee finds comfortable so that there will be minimal distraction for them during the interview. It is

⁵ <http://www.nwu.ac.za/content/research-support-research-ethics>

with this in mind that I travelled to the location of the interviewee and met with them in their office space, face-to-face in a place of familiarity and comfort.

- ii. Time frame – I asked for an hour session with each interviewee of which I expect forty-five minutes of interview time. This is similar to the designated time suggestions of King and Horrocks (2010:43). This allowed for extra time and a chance to build some rapport before embarking on the interview proper.
- iii. Data capture – As has been stated by others (King & Horrocks, 2010:43; Myers 2009:122), having a method of data capture is vital with interviews. An MP4 device was used to record the entire interview process, having obtained signed consent from the interviewee beforehand. Then, the information was transcribed and then coded using an online coding platform known as Dedoose. As its website indicates, Dedoose: ‘allows users or teams to effectively analyze qualitative and mixed methods research data from various research approaches when conducting surveys and interviews...’ (Dedoose, 2014) and therefore allowed me to compile the data into useful paradigms and inferences that will be used later in the study. Additionally, this researcher took basic hand-written notes of important data.
- iv. Questions – following the semi-structured approach, this researcher had a list of questions that were used as the base from which to conduct the interview. The Interviewees (or co-researchers) were all afforded a complete list of the questions ahead of the interview. Below is the list of questions that were used as the basis of the interview process:
 - a. Please explain your personal background in online theological education – how long have you been involved? What level of involvement have you had?
 - b. How many programmes does your institution offer online? How long does a student typically take to complete a programme (in comparison to on campus programmes)? Approximately how many students have completed these programmes during the last five years?
 - c. What are your observations on how online theological education has evolved during the time of your involvement?
 - d. What delivery system do you use and why?
 - e. Does your institution provide specific training to online instructors/faculty? If so, what?

- f. In your opinion, what is the primary motivating factor to engage in online theological education for:
 - i. Students
 - ii. Faculty
 - iii. The Institution
- g. What, if any, theological basis informed your pedagogical choices? Do you believe there is a theological basis for the type of education you are developing?
- h. How does your institution address character development that traditionally occurs through coaching/mentorship?
- i. How does online delivery of theological education inhibit or enhance the mentoring/character building of the student?
- j. If you had to change one thing about your current approach to online theological education, what would it be and why?
- k. In your opinion, what is the future of online theological education and how can it be improved for the theological academy?

V. Ending – my aim was to approach the co-researchers that would have great personal interest in the outcomes of this study. Part of the discussion process will be to allow them access to the data in its final form. This was a natural and fitting conclusion to the interview process.

The criteria that were used to determine who to interview were carefully planned. The institution with which I was teaching at the time - which is positioned within a certain theological, social and geographical context – is of a similar context as the other institutions that I engaged with. It was important to try and conduct the interviews in settings that had a familiar context to them and that were open and accessible to the researcher. Thus, in determining who to approach for this study, the following matrix was used:

- Geography – within a reasonable driving distance of the researcher for practical purposes of obtaining the interview.
- Theology – similar theological and denominational backgrounds to avoid problems on differences.
- Socio/Economic and demographic similarities – to avoid confusing the data.

- Personal relationship – to allow freedom of access and a more ‘open’, friendly interview process.⁶

These interviews were conducted between September and October 2014.

The institutions that participated in the research are listed below in alphabetical order and full biographical data on the institution can be found in **Annexure D**. At each institution, the person who was interviewed was the head of department for online learning or the director of online education/technology. This person not only oversaw all the online education at the institution (faculty and students) but in most cases, they were also experienced in teaching online themselves.

1. Appalachian Bible College, WV.
2. Cairn University, PA.
3. Davis College, NY.
4. Lancaster Bible College, PA.
5. Nyack College, NY.
6. Summit University, PA.

2.4 Meta-themes emerging from the interviews

The initial questions posed in the interview were to establish some base-line data on each institution. Initial questions revolved around the duration of the interviewee’s tenure in their current position, size of the online student body, throughput of students and methods of delivery that have been used. These answers proved useful in establishing the degree of continuity between the institutions and to a large degree, the similarity in how things were done. Please note that the term *Online Theological Education* will often be abbreviated as

⁶ *I have chosen institutions that I or a colleague would have the ability to access the necessary personnel so as to conduct the interviews. This is an important criterion when considering the degree of openness that is inferred in the interview questions themselves. The interviewee was free to decline and there was no coercion involved in joining the study. The interviewees readily agreed and signed the needed documents without hesitation.*

OTE. Some of the observations made as a result of these questions can be summarised thus:

- The various programme directors have various levels of experience in the field. The longest tenure is ten years and the shortest is two years.
- Some directors are involved in OTE specifically as a passion; others have assumed the duties as needed.
- Most of the online directors in this sample are involved in teaching online as well as directing the programme.
- The smallest sample of students in a programme was around ten (10) graduates per year. The largest was around four hundred (400) per year across multiple programmes.
- Some institutions appear to make a concerted effort to engage with online students to ensure progress and throughput, whereas others seem to lose touch with even how many students have progressed in and through their programmes. This is perhaps reflective of their overall emphasis or lack thereof on OTE.
- In 33% of the institutions in the sample, students were able to finish as quickly if not more quickly than regular on-campus students. For one (1) other the time was the same or longer and the rest did not have accurate data. Most institutions appeared to have far more part-time online students than full time ones. This may help explain some of the dropout rate.
- In 33% of the institutions they had a concentrated 'cohort' model for online students in an effort to increase throughput through peer motivation.
- 66% of responders indicated that Moodle was their preferred choice of LMS (Learning Management System). This was due in part to the constructivist nature of the system Moodle uses and also for economic reasons.
- The remaining responders used other systems that are more expensive to run than Moodle.
- Overall, the LMS was not selected primarily because it served a pedagogical or philosophical purpose for any of the responders. The primary factors were cost, convenience and familiarity with the product.

The above summations are useful, they are not however, 'meta-themes' and are thus not included with any degree of specificity in this study⁷. The meta-themes that did emerge, however, are discussed in the next section followed by a graphical summation of these themes.

These then are the meta-themes that have emerged from this study:

- Meta-theme 1: *OTE has evolved technologically in the last decade and continues to do so.*
- Meta-theme 2: *The interest and numbers of students involved in OTE are increasing.*
- Meta-theme 3: *OTE is projected to grow even more in the next decade.*
- Meta-theme 4: *The faculty is not sufficiently equipped for this new reality.*
- Meta-theme 5: *OTE programmes are run much the same way as non-OTE programmes.*
- Meta-theme 6: *The waters are muddied as to whether true mentoring (or even good learning) can occur online.*

The above themes are discussed in more detail in the following section. The code applications regarding the interviews are submitted under **Annexure D.**

2.4.1) Meta-theme 1: OTE has evolved technologically in the last decade and continues to do so.

A later chapter (3) will mention the growth in the technology and opportunities that this affords OTE, and in Chapter 5 a paradigm will be offered. Chapter 5 will specifically inform the strategic task that Osmer (2008) speaks of in his question 'How Might We Respond?' However, at this point, the purpose is to indicate what the interviewees *perceive* to be going on. Overall, this idea came through twelve times in the coding of the six interviews. The fact

⁷ All full transcripts of the interviews and the recordings are available upon request from the examiner

that technology overall has advanced so quickly and continues to advance, has certainly impacted the education industry. As one respondent states:

‘When I took courses, I would say—I began in 2003, 2004, in there—and I used to have to order boxes of video tapes. And there were video tapes for each week with a professor. You put it in your VCR, you watch the professor, you take notes, and then you go online and take the quizzes. There are no more video tapes, all the modules are set up, it's all online lessons and activities, all that's completely, completely changed from when I started online to now’.

The technological changes have not only meant that the systems used have advanced but also the reach of the institution. Through technology, institutions now have a global reach – as indicated by remarks like these:

‘... you could have a student from Taiwan, or South Africa or wherever, and you are in real time communicating and interacting with them, whether it be a Google Hangout, or through some other tool like Skype or so on, but it's in real time. Those borders are broken down.’

Additionally, the acceptance of online learning as a legitimate learning space has grown exponentially over the last decade. Whereas once there was much skepticism regarding the rigor and effectiveness of such programming, it has now become widely accepted. Not only accepted, but perhaps even preferable (see also 3.5.1 in Chapter three):

‘I know that the studies have shown that online education is effective. I passionately believe that it is effective. I think the Department of Education, the most recent one they put out, they ranked all other things being equal, they ranked a blended course, a fully online course, and a face-to-face course, in that order.’

So the meta-theme here has three primary components that technology has afforded – better tools for educational purposes, global reach and enhanced pedagogical reputation. The tools are there, but is the mentoring happening? How is it being helped by the technology? These questions still remain.

2.4.2) Meta-theme 2: The interest and numbers of students involved in OTE are increasing

Allen and Seaman have produced an annual report of the trends in online education in the USA since 2009. When one compares the 2010 study to the results of the 2015 edition of this study, one finds some interesting trends that are emerging – at least in the US context. Similarly to the results found in question three (3) of this survey, Allen and Seaman (2010:05) asked about the numbers and impact of online learning. In 2009 alone, the number of students studying online had increased 17% over the previous year with every indication of that trend continuing and indeed that has proven true (see **Annexure F** for 2014 stats). Indeed, Allen and Seaman indicate that (in the USA) ‘the most recent data show(s) that 71% of all active, degree-granting institutions...have some distance offerings’ (Allen & Seaman, 2015:13). This study revealed thirty unique statements in the coding that deal with the expansion and growth of programmes and student numbers across the various institutions. One institution was able to give specific figures for the last three years of their own growth: ‘as you can see the first year was 76, 2013 was 172 registrations, and Fall 2014 was 203’. So a definite growth pattern was emerging in this instance. Other general comments on growth patterns also emerged such as in the number of classes offered:

‘what we did was we started offering classes online. Just a few. Started out with three or four the first year, added four or five the next year, every year we added about four or five classes, mostly Bible...’

and

‘I would say that the programme has definitely grown in the last five years and right now a little over, the last number that I heard, was that a little over half of our student body is online. So, like four hundred and some students are online’.

That online education is growing seems not to be in dispute. What is more interesting perhaps is why. Some of those interviewed saw it quite simply as: ‘Time and money’ or ‘I think again it's a dollars and cents issue’. Others, tried to supply more reasoning such as: ‘I think that it's the cost, I think is the reason why. I mean people who can't afford to come to

Bible college find out we have an online education...they're excited about it' and, perhaps more 'practically':

'I think the reason that they are choosing distance learning is for the convenience factor. They don't have to move, they can keep their job, they don't have to uproot their family'.

What this last factor points to, is the demographic that online learning seems to be reaching – the non-traditional age University student. One respondent put it this way: 'I don't know the exact percentage but a high percentage of our students are adult learners and a high percentage is even over the age of thirty five'. At the other end of the scale, there may be a trend emerging as well. This researcher has taught a cohort of twenty students in an online class and four of the students are still in high school. This is in part due to the 'dual enrolled' system in the US that allows for high school students to earn University credit by taking select courses in their senior year. This was not always possible in the past, but now it is much easier through online education and thus creates an interesting classroom where students could be as young as sixteen and as old as sixty (or more) in the same class. In emerging contexts like South Africa, one could see how OTE could meet a very real need for those who have not always had access to the 'traditional' educational opportunities. However, it does also create a challenge for mentoring across various generational contexts within a single classroom. It highlights the need to have a robust praxiological framework for mentoring that is applied to the Christian leadership development context especially.

So, a meta-theme in this study is the rapid expansion of the OTE motif and the diversification of the student who accesses such education.

2.4.3) Meta-theme 3: OTE is projected to grow even more in the next decade

Twenty-nine code applications were used in the excerpts describing the future of the online learning environment in this study. Is OTE a 'bubble' waiting to burst, or will it dramatically alter the brick and mortar learning environment forever? Again to refer to Allan and Seaman (2015:15), the strategic question they asked was quite similar. Simply put, they asked: 'Is Online Learning Strategic?' Their summation is clear : 'the proportion of schools (institutions) saying that online education is critical for their institution's long-term strategy reached an all-

time high of 70.8% in 2014' (Allan & Seaman, 2015:15). This trend seemed to continue into this study, with remarks like:

'... you're going to see a lot more online and not a lot on campus because of the money... think that online is going to give that time and money factor to students, and I think a lot more people will be getting an education because of online learning. People who can never obtain an education can do that. They can simply log in on the computer' and ' But I would guess on the present trajectory, at least 30% of United States higher education will be online' as well as 'I see it continuing to grow and the traditional classroom continuing to shrink and particularly with theological education I see that happening...'

Yet others in the study indicated that there might always be a place for the on-campus environment, although perhaps not for educational reasons alone:

'Online does not get you a college experience, it gets you a degree. It doesn't get you the college experience, the eighteen to twenty-one year old experience that everyone who didn't get it wants to go back and get it. It doesn't give that'.

What *is* clear from the interviews is that no-one thought that OTE was a bubble waiting to burst. While some may be concerned about the ongoing quality of the offerings, the answer was not to do less but to do better. Much of the latter comes down to the quality of the instructors in the OTE environment. Allen and Seaman (2010:07) indicate that, since 2002, the faculty has been fairly slow to accept this new reality and while this sentiment was expressed in some on the interviews conducted in this study, the overall trend was towards a greater "buy in" to the idea. This was indicated by statements like:

...the buy-in has been moving forward, or the faculty buy-in from the beginning until now, where we have made great progress, that is one major change compared to three, four years ago'.

and

'...there was only one professor still grading papers made out of paper. So I think we're using Moodle for our ordinary classes, I think that's what

you're talking about, so there's not what there was ten years ago, the philosophical 'what is the cyber world?' We're all using Moodle.'

However, as the following meta-theme seems to indicate, there does not seem to be a well-developed training mechanism for OTE instructors. This researcher offers an attempt at a model in Chapter 5 that is hoped may be helpful particularly in this area.

In conclusion of the above, it seems clear that OTE and online learning in general is evolving, becoming more robust and academically validated and is seen as an important strategic component for the future. It is against this data that the following meta-themes emerge that would offer validity as to why studies like the present one are becoming all-important.

2.4.4) Meta-theme 4: Faculty is not equipped sufficiently for this new reality

Delamarter (2004:135) notes the challenges of online learning particular to theological education. He notes that traditionally, theological educators operated with an assumed model, one he calls the 'classic paradigm of theological education' (Delamarter, 2004:135). He goes on to note that: 'As is well known, theological education is not populated with faculty members with extensive backgrounds in educational methodology; most arrive in the classroom to teach without ever having had any formal training in pedagogy' (Delamarter, 2004:137). While this may be becoming more of a dated notion as time goes by, nevertheless, the process of the training seems muddled. Allan and Seaman also note that:

there is no single approach being taken by institutions in providing training for their teaching faculty. Most institutions use a combination of mentoring and training options. Only 19 percent of institutions with online offerings report that they have no training or mentoring programmes for their online teaching faculty. The most common training approaches for online faculty are internally run training courses (65 percent) and informal mentoring (59 percent) (Allan & Seaman 2010:07).

This is very close to the findings in this survey in which respondents' answers also varied significantly, with sentiments like:

'...I provide training online as well as face to face and so the face to face training sessions are with our residential instructors who teach online as well'.

‘...the professor is handed a fully-designed course already, and we say ‘here, you will teach this.’ We also provide a six-week online training programme to teach a professor how to teach in an online course.’

‘...we have a process in place where the instructor gets personal consultation. I meet with them in person about what’s involved in the delivery of the course, the planning of the course, the development of the course, all that type of thing. Plus we have the instructor take an online orientation.’

‘...we have faculty meetings every other week, so for online faculty we meet once a semester.’

In some cases, it did not appear as though the training programmes that were offered were much more than helping faculty members understand the technology rather than the philosophy and pedagogy of OTE. It may be said that the training is more robust outside of theological circles (Pruett & Pollard, 2013:61) than inside. This would be an area of concern and is perhaps indicative of the idea that getting programmes and courses off and running as quickly as possible becomes more important than doing them well. As mentioned earlier, the demand for online education has increased significantly, even in the last ten (10) years (Allan & Seaman, 2010:05; Maddox, 2010:113; Ulrich 2010:18) and so, especially at the undergraduate level, (Allan & Seaman, 2010:05) there has been a significant push to meet the new demands. All of the respondents in this survey indicated as much when asked about the reasons why a theological institution would engage in the online education market. For many, it is also important that it is done well and it serves a greater educational purpose, but it can be fairly stated that if OTE was not highly profitable, it would not be as big a consideration as it is now.

2.4.5) Meta-theme 5: OTE programmes are run much the same way as non-OTE programmes

Delamarter (2004:137) asks the right questions of spiritual formation but unfortunately does not arrive at a satisfactory answer. Questions of community and its formation in the online space from a theological viewpoint need to be addressed. This researcher postulates an understanding of a Trinitarian perspective, the idea that our understanding of the Trinity – the

community of the Godhead – ought to be paramount in our dealings with people that we may not ever meet in a face to face capacity. More will be discussed as to how theology and the Bible inform the subject of mentoring and the importance of a ‘perspective’ in Chapter 4. In that chapter an explanation is also given as an ‘afterword’ as to what this perspective entails and why it is important to have a theological framework when engaging in OTE. The Trinitarian framework informs *why* we mentor but also *how* we mentor in the broadest sense. It follows from the identity we have as being formed in the *Imago Dei* (Image of God). The Trinitarian perspective is one effort to provide a lucid framework for the challenging task of mentoring in theological education online. One simply must consider how such a perspective would affect the pedagogical and philosophical choices made by institutions on the design of their course offerings. In this research sample, beyond the general mission statements of the various institutions, there does not appear to be a theological philosophy that undergirds these choices. The following sentiments appear to support this statement:

‘...I don’t think that really has a tie, a direct tie back to a theological basis. So, the little bit that we have in writing is probably more theoretical and I would say that as a whole, there is not really a strong tie’.

‘...No, I would say there isn’t an emphasis on anything in particular.’

‘...The agenda would be our college mission statement, which is to educate students to think and live a biblical worldview, and serve Christ in their church and society. So that's the broad one.’

This is not altogether surprising and indeed OTE like the rest of online education has simply been adapting its best practice methods for some years now. For many in OTE, the format of delivery is very similar to what Ulrich (2010:19) describes below. The whole argument, while lengthy, is included here because it describes well the process of which we speak:

Students are expected to log in to a course website several times per week and visit discussion forums that the instructor has established, whether for the whole class or for smaller groups. When visiting a forum, students typically read the new messages they find there and reply to some of them. The website automatically highlights unread messages, and it organises replies beneath previous messages on the same topic in a visual pattern known as a ‘thread.’ In addition to continuing a thread by

posting replies, students may also introduce new topics in new threads. Although students are free to post messages at any time, instructors typically establish deadlines and minimum levels of participation in order to encourage all students to contribute to discussions in a timely manner. Instructors also need to monitor discussions and respond to students' posts in ways that encourage further exploration and reflection. Much like a classroom-based seminar, this type of online course encourages extensive interaction between students, the instructor, and the subject matter. (Ulrich 2010:19)

What is happening more and more is that experts in online education (De Waard & Koutropoulos *et al.*, 2012; Maddox, 2010; Williams, Simpson & Cunningham, 2010; Matzat, 2010) are now starting to question the traditional paradigm and asking better questions about methodology. For those engaged in OTE and who have a deep concern for spiritual formation *as well* as content delivery and assimilation, this question takes on greater significance. Hege (2011) for example, does well in identifying the need for a 'vibrant virtual community' (2011:13), but does not demonstrate a theological construct for his approach. Therefore it is more of a best practice method than a method informed by theological praxis. In Chapter 5 of this study this researcher will state the case that our thinking around methodology for OTE ought to be informed by a Trinitarian ontology, one that seeks to reflect the communal nature of God in our online communities and establish a model that reflects this perspective. If we seek to reflect that communal mindedness and we know that OTE student numbers are only going to increase in the future, then perhaps it is an important time to refine or at least define our methods?

2.4.6) Meta-theme 6: The waters are muddied as to whether true mentoring (or even good learning) can occur online

How does one mentor a student that you never see in person? Is this even possible? Many are sceptical, and for good reason. Even among those in this survey, some of that scepticism was evident, with statements like:

'...I try to interact with students as much as I can online, but I always leave the course feeling like I don't know them like I know my in-person students.'

‘...to try to develop community in, say, an online discussion forum, is very hard to do. The students get to know each other to a certain degree, but it's not the same as sitting down face to face and having a conversation looking into someone's eyes.’

For those who have been involved in OTE for some time, sentiments like these are readily understood and agreed with. However, this idea is being taken more seriously in OTE now that it has become more established and in some cases, where the majority of an institution's students come from. Institutions want to be sure that they are producing competent students who are able to do more than regurgitate academic knowledge and are able to function effectively in complex adaptive environments like the church (see Chapter 4). The problems that are a result of poor theological training are many and varied and in some sense there for all to see in society today. Maddox (2010:12) takes the initial question here even further when he states:

Common questions continue to be asked: ‘How can formation take place through computer-mediated forms in a disembodied context?’ ‘Is it possible for computer-mediated courses to provide a virtual presence that is commensurate of bodily presence?’ ‘To what extent are people formed in Christlikeness in a disembodied context?’ (Maddox 2010:12).

He attempts an answer when he postulates:

The Apostle Paul says that *koinonia* (community) cannot be restricted to physical presence since we enjoy the fellowship with Christ now (I Cor. 1:9). He insists that when the church celebrates ‘communion’ we experience a *koinonia* with Christ even though he is not physically present (I Cor. 10:16). Physical, face-to-face community is not required since the Spirit is active in forming and shaping us into Christlikeness. Even if we hold that community can take place when people are not physically present, the online learning community cannot fully replace all human interaction (Maddox, 2010:13).

This is a similar sentiment to what was expressed in the interviews, and particularly by this statement:

‘...Spiritual formation can happen, of course, because that's a work of God's Spirit and he can take the Bible and work through it in whatever

format. I think we've all been changed spiritually in however a small way through listening to a tape, or a CD, or reading a book. So many times I've read a book and it's been a powerful spiritual experience. There's no question it can happen'.

In the interviews, the respondents had suggested various ways in which they have tried to foster community and achieve a semblance of the mentoring piece through means such as:

- Phone calls
- Personal messaging
- Skype/FaceTime/Google Hangout 'live' discussions
- Recruiting spiritual mentors on site
- E-mail updates
- Cohort-based system

While not all institutions use all of these, all institutions use some of them with various degrees of success. In the general world of online education, more emphasis is being placed on the instructor's proficiency at using adaptive technology (Dannecker & Lechner, 2007:151; Donguk, 2010:870; Duncan-Howell, 2010:324-340) which may well result in the creation of an 'Online Instructor' versus the 'Campus Instructor' as separate faculty positions as they will become more specialised requiring another set of meta-skills beyond subject matter expertise.

What about the advantages? Can OTE provide better mentoring than the traditional classroom? This is further dealt with again in Chapter 5 under 5.3.2 but one must remember that it ought not to be presumed that a person is mentored because they attend a traditional classroom setting, as probably many a student who has sat in large lecture halls feeling like nothing more than a "number" might attest. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this researcher found out the dangers of this presumption the hard way as a young and naïve Bible College principal. Sometimes it is poor design of the module itself as Delamarter (2004:137) suggests: '...some of the courses that meet the traditional criteria are just downright awful' .

However, it often goes beyond class content as Maddox, again, makes the point well:

...An assumption behind this criticism is that classrooms and campuses are close-knit learning communities where students find deep levels of support as well as challenges to grow spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually. Advocates of online education may respond by questioning whether it is fair to use an ideal image of a classroom or campus community as the standard of comparison. Reality often falls short of our best experiences of learning in community (Maddox 2010:21).

So it must be remembered that while we acknowledge the limitations of OTE, we must also acknowledge the limitations of the traditional classroom as well!

In the interviews, the respondents listed several positives that can come from online learning such as:

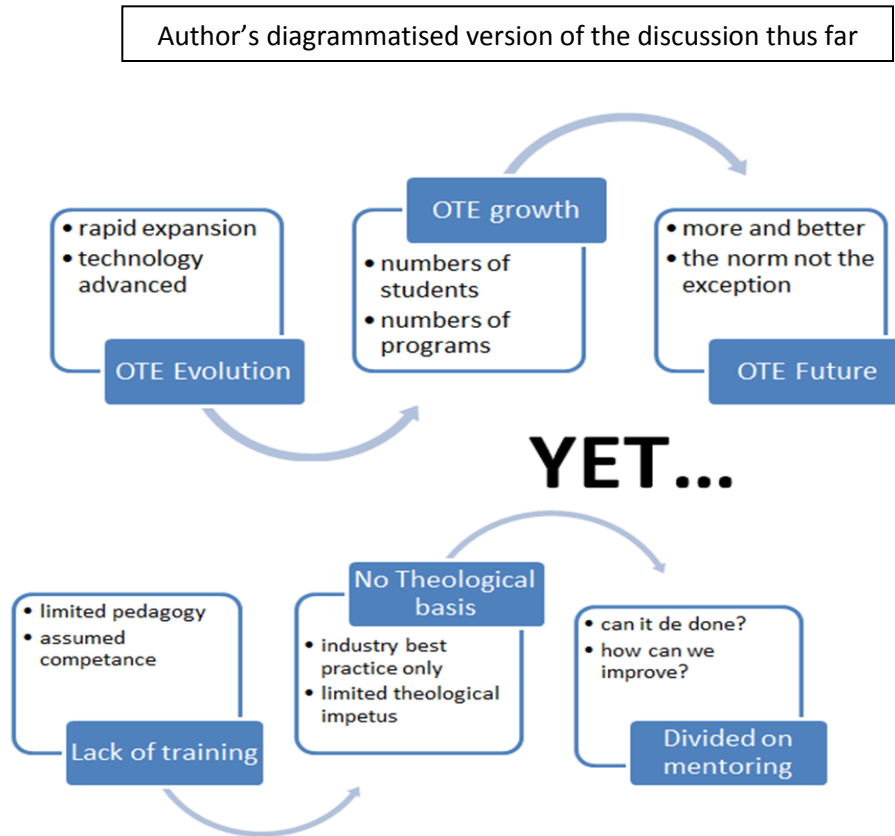
‘...I would get to know them and they would get to know me and the next thing I would know, I am Facebook friends with them then it just went from there. Then, I went to graduation and I actually got to meet them. Now, every now and then we will still exchange an e-mail’.

‘...Technology allows greater accountability. It’s not 100% guaranteed, but it’s greater than before’.

‘...In the online environment, as the student is interacting to a scenario or question or whatever, they’re going to rethink it before they post it to their peers. Therefore the interaction between that guy who always sits in the back and is quiet, online he might be shining because that’s his environment, his playground. It’s more advantageous’.

2.5 Summation

The discussion thus far may be summarised as follows:



If one were to diagrammatise the above discussed meta-themes, the pattern above emerges. The realities addressed in this simple diagram will be revisited and addressed later in this study. The issues of assumed competence seemingly point to a lack of mentoring in this capacity. The issues of no theological basis point to (amongst other things) a lack of a thought through theological undergirding of the process of online education. This is startling considering that such undergirding – regardless of Christian tradition - is very often paramount in on-campus offerings and startlingly absent online - even within the same institution!

The growth and importance of OTE is not in dispute. Yet, despite this OTE educators seem underprepared and sceptical of how OTE can be done effectively. Having the technology is one thing, using it effectively is another (Simpson, 2010:101). This is what is going on.

This brief, empirical study has helped clarify the issues that need to be addressed in the rest of the thesis. We have seen that, despite how online education is booming in the Christian University, there has been little effort to ensure that the skills and dispositions needed by the Christian leader of tomorrow are being imparted through mentoring.

The next chapter will deal extensively with the problems that occur when mentoring and development is not well thought through, but rather presumed. A historical study is needed to help understand what mentoring is and how it may be fostered. Having a good understanding of what mentoring is and how it ought to be done is paramount. As demonstrated by this author's own experience recounted earlier in the chapter, having a statement or even a policy that encourages mentoring is not enough. It can lead to confusion and frustration if not well thought through. Could it be that mentoring is simply not a priority, in online and face to face theological education worlds, and that is why this is going on?

iSeminary': Christian theological and leadership development in the online environment. A Practical Theological study.

Chapter 3

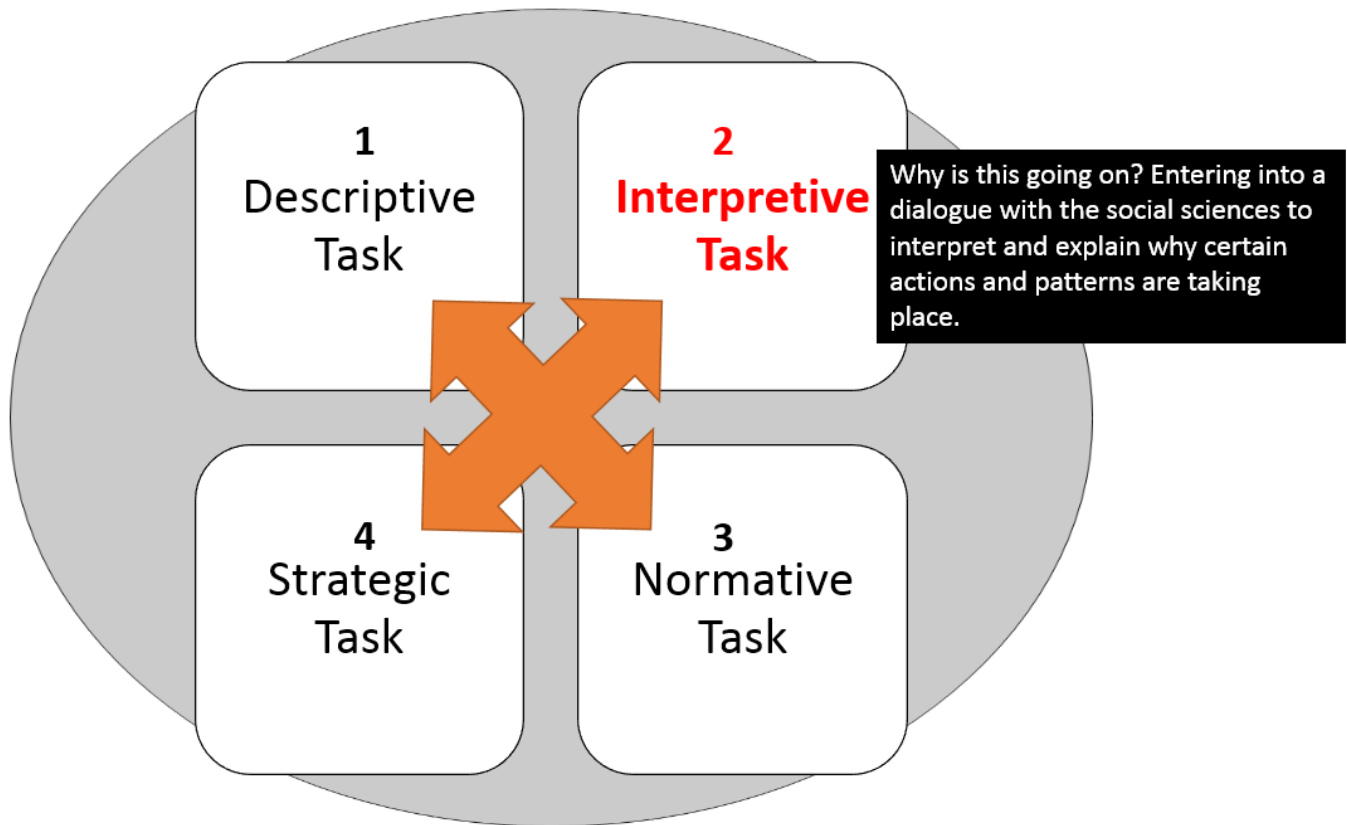
Leadership by way of mentoring: A cursory glance at the development of the field with special reference to Augustine and Kierkegaard

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on Osmer's (2008:4) interpretive task of practical theological interpretation by drawing on theories from the social sciences (history) and business management better to understand and explain what we mean by 'mentoring' specifically within the Christian understanding of the term. This will help to understand and explain certain features within the model proposed in Chapter 5. The theories as understood within certain periods of the church's history and in society in general are important but they are also critiqued since no theory is infallible and subject to future consideration. Secular and business perspectives alone on mentoring are inadequate for Christian ministry (Osmer 2008:83).

The diagram below represents where we are in the study within Osmer's (2008) heuristic:

WHERE WE ARE IN THE STUDY:



The method used in this chapter will primarily be that of a literature analysis. Especially useful to this process is Houston (2002:08) who provides a lucid historical background to this topic. This author has loosely followed his progression of thought of the historical development of mentoring within the church in the discussion below. It is important at the outset to know that the idea of 'mentoring' has indeed evolved over the years. The author believes that a misunderstanding of what mentoring is, or should be, is one of the issues that have led to some of the issues surrounding online mentoring (or lack thereof) as discovered in Chapter 2 (see in particular heading 2.4.5). This chapter adds some historical insight from two specific figures in Christian history as well as general concepts in the broader society today.

Thus we are primarily concerned with the development of the field in mentoring from a societal perspective (and from a Christian heritage perspective highlighted by Augustine and Kierkegaard) whilst maintaining an understanding of the Trinitarian perspective (see Chapter 4 for a more comprehensive summation of this idea). This perspective is an essential part of

this author's assumptions with respect to online leadership development, for it provides the necessary undergirding for mentoring relationships to occur. If the Trinity is truly such a key component of Christianity as it has been understood historically, then its truth should permeate every aspect of our lives, even mentoring in the online space. I hope to demonstrate how our understanding of the Triune nature of God ought to influence how the theological academy goes about the task of mentoring in the online reality in which we live.

3.2 Meta-ethical systems introduction

Mentoring is a meta-ethical system. For leaders to emerge and develop, such systems are imperative. This becomes all the more important among leaders we do not actually meet 'face to face'. So a detailed and clear idea of mentoring in this context becomes all important. A mentor can be defined as:

an experienced, successful and knowledgeable professional who willingly accepts the responsibility of facilitating professional growth and support of a colleague through a mutually beneficial relationship (Sinclair, 2003:79).

Mentoring can be said to be an important component of developing the whole self to state it broadly. In the marketplace of today the importance of mentoring is being discovered anew (Sinclair 2003:79). It is seen as an important component of leadership development and whilst, at least in Western contexts, the emphasis on individual attainment remains paramount, the move away from this thinking has become more commonplace. Woodard (2012), writing from a purely historical perspective, weaves this idea of a religious and cultural superiority that has developed in and spread from North America over the last few centuries throughout his volume. This notion of 'superiority' is labelled as 'ethnocentric' by Bosch (1991:291) or an 'epistemological privilege' by Whiteman (2015).

This had led to the process of mentoring becoming more transactional, that is, the process is simply an instrument used to procure a desired outcome. The outcome is defined and terminal and so is the relationship. Mentors used in this capacity are simply to 'pass on' anecdotes, 'life lessons' and discrete content - 'pieces' that would aid a new worker in that environment (Sinclair, 2003:80). If replication is the goal, this is the method by which to

achieve this outcome. Throughout this study, this author is attempting to provide an alternative framework from which to think about the mentoring process. In Chapter 2.2, an example is discussed from an institution whose administration believed mentoring was occurring in the institution but many students felt it was not – despite clear ‘mentoring’ policies being in place. Perhaps it was indicative of a more ‘transactional’ model so that this would need to be addressed and an alternative offered. In the online mentoring world, the challenges are equally prevalent if not more so (see Chapter 2.4.4). It is clearly not a question of need. That there is a need for Christian mentoring is not as much a debate (Barna, 2010:12; Blackaby, 2001:20; Clinton 2012:14) as the method one uses (Resick *et al.*, 2006:346; Terry, 1993).

Terry (1993:3-5) writing on ‘authentic’ leadership development indicates that it is important that communities develop their own definition and philosophy of leadership that is relevant within their context. Terry (1993:3-5) also introduces what is known as the ‘Zone Model’ of leadership. This is a fluid way of determining the type of leader an organisation or group is looking for. The basic and somewhat logical proposition in this model is that leadership is not created (mentored) in a vacuum but rather the type of leader one looks for is in direct relationship with the perceived needs of a group or organisation. This would seem to be in sync with what others, like Mintzberg (2010:07) speak of when they talk of leadership ‘fostering’. That is, leadership cannot be defined in society by a generic one-size-fits-all approach and must be developed through robust mentoring.

Is it dangerous to assume that mentoring is a natural process within Christian leadership development? It would seem so. For, even if one believes that a person is effectively mentored by appropriating a set of principles to be memorised and recorded, how can you be sure that you have the right principles for every setting? This author’s experience in leading a formal theological institution in his tradition has taught that mentoring is indeed a complex matter. The unfortunate assumption is easily made that because a person holds a degree in theology, they are able to mentor or even lead ‘theologically’. This is problematic, a finding seemingly suggested by Elkington elsewhere (Elkington, 2014). It is also a question that is addressed in Chapter 2.1. Remember also that Stetzer (2010:16) indicated in his research

that up to 93% of US pastors see mentoring as critical for the church. However, they are less convinced of their ability to help in developing such leaders – only 52% strongly agreed that the church was doing well in this area. Likewise, Osei-Mensah (1990:08) has stated that there is a need for pastors to be ‘omnicompetent’ in today’s world. How these pastors receive their training and indeed what they are trained to know and do will greatly influence their ability to be omnicompetent (Meekins, 2011; Seltzer , 2008). I have already mentioned Elkington’s (2014) study and he further comments on the need for an ‘interdependent’ mind-set in the task of educating leaders of tomorrow (Elkington, 2014:1-14). Furthermore, this ‘interdependency’ that is part of ‘omnicompetence’ should also be informed by a Trinitarian perspective (see Chapter 4). The Trinitarian perspective is one that espouses the Augustinian and Kierkegaardian (as we will see) ideals of humility and ‘other-ness’ as well as a being-oriented disposition that is rooted in the community of the Triune God and His people made in his image.

Melander (2004) indicates that since at least the 1980’s the term ‘coach’ or ‘life coach’ has been attached to the idea of mentor (Melander, 2004:30). In fact, mentoring and coaching have almost become interchangeable terms (Burley & Pomphrey, 2011), although this is still being debated (Lotter, 2010). In any event, ‘mentoring’ is therefore now a term that requires some clarification. As noted in the beginning of this chapter, to those that view mentoring as merely a transactional affair the ‘coach’ is there merely to impart some kind of ‘skill’. Once the skill has been learned, the relationship ends. However, when done well, the mentoring relationship has a long-lasting and deep impact on both parties. These relationships are often marked by mutual respect and even admiration. Some (Johnson, 2001:122) have used terms like: guide, sponsor, advisor, confidant, talent-developer and role-model synonymously with ‘mentor’ in their definitions. When the roles progress beyond the level of expectation, exemplary mentor-mentee relationships tend to become lifelong friendships – nurtured by many experiences both good and bad that have helped develop the character of the individuals concerned. This is sometimes evidenced by people referring affectionately to a person who coached them in years gone by as ‘coach’ even though they no longer fulfil that role in an official capacity.

Remember, Mintzberg (2010:07) has suggested that leadership is not developed but ‘fostered’, through mentoring. This fostering would also look different in various settings. Ott (2001) spends a considerable amount of time discussing the need for contextualisation in a global climate in his useful volume. He speaks of a shrinking global environment, that some today have coined as ‘Glocalization’ (Roberts, 2007:42). By merging the words ‘local’ and ‘global’ this new nomenclature describes how, through technology, the world is indeed a smaller place. So, mentoring across cultures or even within the ‘virtual’ culture is a new skill set needed by the faculty and mentors of tomorrow in Online Theological Education (OTE). Roberts has also recognised the shift in Christianity that has occurred over the last fifty years or so. The centre of Christianity has moved from the West to the South and East, and Africa, in particular has experienced much growth. Ott (2001:05) stated that ‘more cross-cultural missionaries will be sent from or within the Two-Thirds world countries than from the West by the first decade of the twenty-first century’. As Dean (2009) suggests:

Christian leadership thus is not a particular style—perhaps imported by the missionary—but can be any culturally appropriate leadership style that is guided and transformed by biblical principles such as servanthood (Dean, 2009:38).

In Africa, the idea of ‘Ubuntu leadership’ which is a term used by Van Den Heuvel, *et al.* (2006:12) could be that ‘culturally appropriate leadership style’ Dean (2009) refers to. Indeed, it is a useful term to use when discussing mentoring because the concept of Ubuntu is more relationship-oriented than procedural (a person needs persons to become a person). There is therefore great value in Ubuntu-centered thinking in Online theological Education. As Elkington (2010) suggests, ‘Ubuntu shifts our focus from the autonomous individual to the communal individual’ which is traditionally at odds with a more Western ideal of leadership. When leadership mentors expect replication in style and technique in their mentees, then their vision of leadership is extremely myopic. In certain instances the derogatory term ‘coconut’ (white on the inside and black on the outside) has been used to describe some who have graduated from this cloning-type methodology (Mutubazi, 2003:204; Derr, *et al.*, 2002:208) from white mentors intent on replicating themselves in their protégés. It is of critical concern as to how one mentors across cultural, racial and gender lines.

In the face to face environment, a fulfilling mentoring experience has been met with limited success. Ward (2003) has articulated that this is a reality not to be underestimated or ignored. Mentoring (or 'supervision' as she calls it) is a necessary step in ensuring the survival of a tradition. However, she notes several areas where a misunderstanding or ignorance of cultural differences can lead to frustration and loss in the process. Dorner (2012:157-158) has demonstrated in her research on computer-supported learning environments, that racial and gender differences are to a degree diminished on the level playing fields of the online world. This can be seen as a definite advantage of the form. The onus rests on the supervisor to ensure he/she has due knowledge of the background and cultural pre-understandings of the person they aim to mentor.

The above discussion essentially suggests that successful mentors do recognise the 'communal' benefits to the process. It would seem as though this perspective not only leads to a more acceptable outcome, but for Christian leadership development, it is deeply consistent with the worldview espoused herein. More specifically, it is entrenched within the Trinitarian perspective (see Chapter 4). The idea of community is one of the key concepts to understanding the Triune God and also to understanding Biblical mentoring as well. Sorcinelli and Yun (2007) give some credence to this notion when they note new models of mentoring that are emerging in the workplace. They reflect that:

In this model, early-career faculty build robust networks by engaging multiple 'mentoring partners' in nonhierarchical, collaborative, cross-cultural partnerships to address specific areas of faculty activity, such as research, teaching, working towards tenure, and striking a balance between work and life. These reciprocal partnerships benefit not only the person traditionally known as the 'protégé' but also the person traditionally known as the 'mentor,' since all members of an academic community have something to teach and learn from each other (Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007:58).

Thus mentorship within theological education becomes far more than passing on a body of knowledge (experiential or otherwise), but is about partnership together with God – in community. As the Father, Son and Spirit work together in Trinitarian synergy, so we ought to model the same in our communities of faith.

In the Bible, and as mentioned in Chapter 1.3, the Apostle Paul's use of the plural 'you' in his letters (note especially in Phil. 3:17 and 2 Thess. 3:9. In 1 Thess. 1:7) is most enlightening. His reference to the church as a whole as participating in the work that God is doing is important when discussing the role and responsibility of leaders. The particular use that Paul places on the noun *τύπος* as 'example', 'model' or 'pattern' (Kittel *et al.*, 2006), expanding its use from simply an 'impression' (Jn 20:25) is not to be missed.

The idea Paul presents in 1 Thessalonians 1:6-7 as mentioned earlier in chapter one is, as the community modelled ('imitators', from the Koine Greek - *μιμέομαι*) themselves after Paul and God, so they too became models for others – all of which is done in love (joy) with each other and for each other. It is my contention that good mentorship is done with the above theological understanding in mind. Isolated, top-down, instruction-laden approaches (Jones, 2009) that characterise at least some mentoring programmes today is not true to the Biblical motif. To take the focus off the 'autonomous individual' and instead think 'collectively' presupposes a level of care and concern for a person that mirrors our concern for self. It is to 'love your neighbour as you love yourself' (Mt 22:39) and it is profoundly Trinitarian.

Mentorship must exemplify and model (*τύπος*) community and interdependency, not individualism and independency. The idea of Trinitarian-centred mentoring is similarly expressed through the Germanic term '*individualität*' which 'implies that individual realisation is only possible in relation to a social whole' (Houston, 2002:118). This high level of social and ethical awareness that is being called for here is in a sense describing the 'being' of a leader and not the 'doing', which is at times all that is emphasized. In South Africa, there are some who would go as far as to say that the concept of Ubuntu applied as an ideological tool could be instrumental in changing the very fabric of a society (Van den Heuvel, *et al.*, 2006:14). In a similar vein April *et al.* (2008:102) speaking from a South African perspective discuss a communal or citizenship aspect to true leadership. The idea is that a leader does not divorce himself from the present reality of the people he is guiding or mentoring, a top-down approach that mimics a monarchy or a dictatorship. Rather, it is a desire to 'care for the well-being of the larger institution...this requires accountability' (April *et al.*, 2008:103). These

ideas seem to fly in face of some conventional (Western) leadership ideologies, but it appears distinctly more African and perhaps even more Biblical.

Any organisation that is serious about development must also value the role of a well-organised mentoring programme. On the Job Training (OJT) (Frazis & Loewenstein, 2006:02) in a field like Christian leadership development is essential. This is because students deal with *highly theoretical ideas* in the classroom (hermeneutics and source criticism as an example) but are forced to deal with *highly practical realities* in the real world (helping a new Christian learn how to study the Bible and apply it in an everyday situation). It is the practical reality facing students in the real world, the praxis of what they learn that is critical. This is when mentoring becomes both an incubator or a 'flight simulator' as well as an examination of a person's real-world readiness. West (2004:74) from the University of KZN addresses this very issue when he states 'we believe that facilitating ongoing contact between students and local communities so that they can work with ordinary Bible readers is a key component of our Biblical Studies pedagogy'. This facilitation takes great skill best learned from an experienced and learned mentor.

Perhaps, we need to return to some of the philosophy of mentoring that we have seen in some key figures in church history. This author believes that if we can regain some of their thinking in this area, we may be able to address the issue of mentoring anew today. To that end this researcher has chosen the following two key figures in church history because:

- a) They represent very different church eras yet valued the importance of the mentoring process (as will be demonstrated).
- b) They espoused differing theological beliefs yet valued the importance of the mentoring process (in other words one's theological disposition ought not to effect one's view of the importance of mentoring).
- c) Their ideas and writings continue to have relevance and influence up to today (as will be discussed).

3.3 Mentoring in the era of St. Augustine

It should come as no surprise that the notion of coaching and mentoring within (post-biblical) ecclesiastical circles is not a recent phenomenon. Smithier (2008) has noted well throughout his excellent work, that mentoring was a common phenomenon in the early church era. He articulately and systematically sheds light on the practices of the time with particular attention to Augustine of Hippo, an African, who had a profound effect on thinkers like Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274); Luther (1483-1540) and Calvin (1509-1564) to name a few (Smithier, 2008:256). What is of particular interest in Smithier's work is the various facets that Augustine displayed in his 'mentoring' and the remarkable symmetry that exists with it and many of the processes employed in development today. As we think of mentoring from a Trinitarian perspective, it is interesting to note that Augustine's construction of the monastic lifestyle was, in part, born out of his view of the Trinity. In his later writings, Augustine used the term '*caritas*' which means a 'love for God and neighbour as modelled by the Trinity' (Smithier, 2008:220). It would appear that Augustine's view of people was informed by this notion which is also not dissimilar from the Greek word '*φιλέω*'. According to Louw *et al.* (1989:115) :

The original sense of the verb *φιλέω* is 'to regard and treat somebody as one of one's own people.' It thus denotes natural attraction to those who belong, love for close relatives. The word is thus used for the love of parents for children, of spouses for one another...

Augustine believed that when living out this '*caritas*', one would be unified with each other and with God resulting in a blessed outcome for all concerned. Augustine was no doubt influenced by the likes of Basil of Caesaria and Ambrose of Milan who functioned as a mentor of sorts to a young Augustine. Basil was a strong believer in group mentoring, had a commitment to lifelong learning and actively sought out a mentor himself (Smithier, 2008: 64-67). These are all characteristics that were later to be found in Augustine. Ambrose was said to be firm but incredibly humble as evidenced in him seeking council from his former students (which included Augustine) and was a believer in personal holiness (Smithier, 2008:82-85). It was this commitment to modelling the example that was to make an indelible impact on a young Augustine.

Later, Augustine said of Ambrose:

This man of God welcomed me with fatherly kindness and showed the charitable concern for my pilgrimage that befitted a bishop. I began to feel affection for him, not at first as a teacher of truth...but simply as a man who was kind to me (Scott, 1900:23)

This statement would indicate that sometimes a good mentor touches the heart first and then the mind. This was certainly the case here.

Augustine himself had a multiplicity of mentors. Aside from Ambrose, he was also mentored by his own mother and by several intellectual sparring partners, with whom he would exhibit a 'peer to peer' mentoring system that, ironically, has been reinvented or at least rejuvenated today (Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007:58). Incidentally, this sort of mentoring is very helpful within the online environment where conversations are held *en masse*. Augustine's confirmation into ministry came about in unusual circumstances. He was chosen by Valerius, whose church he was a part of, and was appointed by him to take up the priesthood.

Later, Augustine reflected on this phenomenon and although he did not follow the unusual practice of 'forced ordination', he did realize the value of a mentor in seeing potential in a person that perhaps they did not see in themselves (Smithier, 2008:115) or to use an earlier definition, this may be seen as 'facilitating professional growth' (Sinclair, 2003:79). During his many years of mentoring others in subsequent years, Augustine would choose people for special attention because of this valuing of potential. Identifying and developing talent is often a core component of a senior executive or a senior clergy member today.

It would seem, to use this author's nomenclature, Augustine believed in and was informed by a Trinitarian perspective as he mentored others. In addition to what has been stated earlier about the use of the word '*caritas*', Augustine modelled a way of teaching and leadership development that was quite extraordinary for its time. It was informed by his belief in community which was in turn informed by his understanding of a Triune God who Himself is a community. He believed that Christian friendship is necessary for growth and unlike many of his contemporaries, he did not view the monastic lifestyle as one of separation from the other but of community with the other (he referred to the monastery as the 'common life') (Smithier,

2008:216). This was further reflected in his teaching style which was dialogical and would often lead group discussions rather than lecture as an authority figure. Augustine was passionate about ensuring his students developed intellectually and engage with those with whom they disagreed on a variety of issues. Indeed, even one of Augustine's former students – Jerome - became one such opponent in later years. Instead of criticising him, he even sent new students to learn from him and engage with his ideas. Quite simply, he was more interested in teaching his students how to think rather than simply what to think. His mentoring philosophy was one that was thus more holistic in nature. He also demonstrated that the true value of community is not simply conformation but transformation.

Smithier (2008:225) concludes his discourse by stating that Augustine 'showed a lifelong commitment to growing as a disciple through demonstrating humility and transparency'. In more recent studies, humility has been identified as a key ingredient in those who would influence in society today (Dickson, 2011:19). Dickson's study on the topic of humility mentions Augustine as an important historical resource when thinking of this topic (Dickson, 2011:18). From a theological standpoint, humility (also sometimes known as 'meekness' - Num. 12:3) or 'gentleness' (Ps 18:35) is seen as an essential characteristic of the human leaders that God approves of flowing down from the character of the Triune God. In both the OT and NT, the stories abound that show God's favour on those who displayed humility (James 4:6) and his scorn on those who did not. As Elwell (1984:491) notes in the New Bible Dictionary:

Wherever the quality (*of humility* – researcher) is found in the OT it is praised (e.g. Pr. 15:33; 18:12) and God's blessing is frequently poured upon those who possess it. Moses is vindicated because of it (Nu. 12:3), while Belshazzar is reproved by Daniel (5:22) because he has not profited by the experience of Nebuchadnezzar before him, which might have brought him into an attitude of humility. 2 Ch. in particular makes it the criterion by which the rule of successive kings is to be judged.

The apostle Paul notes that those who try to simulate humility are in effect denying the nature of the one who they claim to represent (Col 2:18). It is against this Biblical backdrop that we will assert the call to be aware of this need for humility and the self-reflexive practices that this characteristic often espouses, within our mentoring frameworks in online leadership

development. Smithier concludes by saying that: 'Christian leaders ought to consider seriously Augustine's thoughts on mentoring in a Trinitarian community' (2008:258). Augustine is one of Christendom's most well-known leaders. He is known for his theological writings but less so for his mentoring qualities. However, Augustine's understanding of mentoring that was informed by his understanding of a particular view of the "Trinity" is an important resource for us today. This is one of the reasons Augustine has been included as an important character for this chapter. Perhaps we have moved away from a deep and true understanding of what 'mentoring' is supposed to be and that contributes to the reason as to why it seems to be lacking in the online environment today?

In dealing with Augustine one must not ignore many others during and after his era that also valued the importance of mentoring. This study does not permit detailing the many examples of mentorship down through history, names such as Origen, Luther, Calvin, Thomas Aquinas, Catherine of Avilla, and many others, all of whom had mentors and strongly believed in mentorship. We will however look at one more example from many years after Augustine next.

3.4. The mentoring heart of Søren Kierkegaard

I now leap forward without attempting to be too flippant with history, to a more contemporary character of whom Niebuhr once said that he was the 'profoundest interpreter of the psychology of the religious life since Augustine' (Hong & Hong, 1967:28) – Søren Aabye Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard, born in 1813, wrote extensively (mostly towards the latter part of his life) and even today his writings are often studied and (mis)understood. Kierkegaard was profoundly interested in the idea of the 'self' and the 'other' particularly in that 'other' being God, and as noted above, these ideas are especially pertinent in the area of mentoring online. His writings, have nevertheless left a profound mark in Christian discourse and even the psychological understanding of being. How the 'single individual' could engage with 'God' was an idea he revisited several times (Kierkegaard, Hong & Hong, 1993:121-122). His ideas and influence are pertinent here as he wrestled with how an individual can be a part of a community and to what extent that relationship relates to a God who is 'other'. He was thought to have had a profound influence on the modern psychological movement and in

particular, two of its earliest protagonists – Freud and Jung – and thus it is important for us to understand Kierkegaard's understanding of 'community' within our framework as he was a professing Christian. Living between the post-reformation time and the pre-modern times, Kierkegaard's approach to the Christian life and the role of the community of God is important to this discussion.

Kierkegaard wrote extensively on the idea of 'the self' (Kierkegaard, 1974). He would ask questions about self-identity and also about how the self relates to the 'other' and to God. One of his key outcomes was that 'the self finds its despair only completed rooted out and healed when the self rests transparently in God who created the "self" (Kierkegaard, 1974:30).

Continuing the theme from the Augustine discussion above, Kierkegaard also exhibited a great deal of humility in his contribution as a mentor in his writings. He too, took on a more maieutic role to facilitate the next level of understanding in those that he was influencing. He asked many questions rather than providing concrete answers and even wrote under pseudonyms so as not to elevate himself. He was especially careful not to descend into transplanting mere 'factual knowledge' (Houston, 2002:91) or 'ratiocinative' knowledge (Elkington, 2014:151) which he saw as a near-sighted approach to the Christian journey. He was quoted to have said, 'Near-sighted people do not believe that others some distance away can see them. Likewise, the near-sighted sinner does not believe that God sees his straying' (Kierkegaard, 1974:85).

Unlike Freud, Kierkegaard believed deeply in the Triune God (even though he was not ashamed to confess his crises of faith) and his belief that man was made in the image of God informed much of his struggle to relate to others and indeed himself. Yet, ultimately, Kierkegaard believed that the self is a relationship that needs to be seen in the contexts of other relationships – with the 'other' and with God. This informed how he dealt with those he led, from a position of equality not superiority, and how he viewed his role (humility) in light of who God is. This concept, albeit profound and difficult to reduce to a list of 'how-to's' is important. This author would suggest that a disposition of humility and equality become even

more critical for the online teacher as they are just one 'avatar' among many in the virtual classroom.

When we look back through a historical lens, one is able to see how the complex yet important relationships with others and the 'other' have been ongoing issues. Even though this study approaches a nuance of that relationship that Augustine and Kierkegaard would not have experienced (online mentoring), we can see that they did value the importance of relationships that, particularly in the case of Augustine, were of the kind that would develop others through meaningful interaction. In more modern times, the role and importance of such mentors has not changed, but the process is often debated. Smithier (2008) and Houston (2002) present in their work a connection, a thread if you will, between influential Christian leaders like Augustine and Kierkegaard and what Christian leadership development needs today and that thread is mentoring. The next section will attempt to explain how that thread continues to this day in Christian leadership development in the online learning space.

3.5 The present discussion of online mentoring within theological education

The purpose of this section is briefly to highlight some of the more recent thoughts from experts on the importance of and how to accomplish mentoring tasks within the online world.

Another useful definition of mentoring is: 'a helping relationship between two professionals at different stages in their careers who work together to nurture the junior professional's development' (Plummer & Nyang'au, 2009:812). These authors go on to suggest that in that vein, 'e-mentoring' must therefore be 'truly mutual, with both parties highly invested' (Plummer & Nyang'au, 2009: 812). Also, Sinclair suggests that:

Mentors should be committed to the mentoring role and believe in the potential of the mentee. Mentors should be also able to provide information and assistance, model appropriate practice and provide positive, sensitive feedback regarding mentee development and progress. Further, mentoring has been defined as 'a nurturing process' where mentoring functions are carried out within the context of an ongoing, caring relationship (Sinclair, 2003:89).

The above serves to emphasise yet again that mentoring is no easy task and perhaps in the online world, because it is a 'disembodied' (Maddox, 2010:12) world, the task becomes all the more challenging. As Rovai *et al.* (2008:14) infer, education 'is not simply about the transfer of data from a source to a recipient. People are not computers, or mere minds. We are minds in bodies' (Rovai *et al.*, 2008:14). So the concern is for the whole person '*cura personalis*' (Rovai *et al.*, 2008:4) not just the dissemination of knowledge (Rushkoff, 2015). It is not merely a transaction but a participation in a relationship.

How does one overcome the challenge of simply not being physically present to engage '*in situ*' with a student? Does it simply boil down largely to methodology and pedagogical choices that accentuate the strengths and minimise the weaknesses of the online mentoring space? It may be suggested that good mentors always find ways best to engage with their mentees and this should be no different in the online mentoring reality. Furthermore, this author believes that a 'personal touch' of some kind must simply be retained, as I will explain later in Chapter 5. Rovai *et al.* (2008) speak of the importance of creating a Christian community not just in the creation of a virtual class, but a virtual campus. This would mean seeking to find ways to replicate the on-site life in a virtual world, from first contact until graduation. Even token gestures like sending online students branded institutional merchandise or invites to special campus events can help foster a sense of community.

As far as pedagogy is concerned, Maddox (2010:11) suggests that online courses:

develop a strong learning community that provides effective learning and formation of students. At the heart of online courses is the development of online learning communities—places where people can engage in critical reflection and dialogue in a safe context (Maddox, 2010:11)

One must therefore maximize the *benefits* of the format, for example asynchronous discussion forums which, according to Castle & McGuire (2010:36) 'is inherently self-reflective and therefore more conducive to deep learning than the synchronous-type of discourse one would expect in a fully face-to-face setting'. This allows for mentoring to take place at a potentially 'deeper' level than a face-to-face setting. Others have reached similar conclusions from the use of tools like blogging and wiki's in the online classroom (Hwang &

Vrongistinos, 2012). At its core, mentoring is deeply personal, especially in Christian leadership development. Current practice would seem to suggest that, despite 'looking' a little differently than one may expect, it is certainly possible and perhaps even better.

However, despite the seemingly obvious nature of the need in this area relatively little has been done to present a paradigm for mentoring online within Christian leadership development circles. The empirical study in a prior chapter appeared to confirm this with none of the institutions interviewed confessing to following a specific paradigm in that regard. Perhaps it is a case of, as TS Eliot (1925) said in his classic poem 'Hollow Men' - 'Between the ideal and the reality falls the shadow'. The need is seen but the praxis is difficult.

Once again, exactly how one might mentor online with a Trinitarian perspective (or another grid) in mind, whilst maintaining excellence in (distance) programmatic output becomes the conundrum. As stated earlier, in the fledgling days of online education this was a critique of the form itself – that it would be convenience at the expense of excellence. Even though this is less a debate today than it was 10-15 years ago (Hess, 2006; Allen & Seaman 2015), there still are those who are sceptical about the form educationally, let alone for something as intrinsically practical as mentoring. This scepticism is not completely without foundation and there are certainly pitfalls that need to be avoided. As we have just seen, however, there are many (Thompson *et al.*, 2010:306) who have also argued for the benefits of this mode, especially for the millennial generation (Jones, 2010:365). We must remember, as the statistics reflect, online education in general is the new reality (Schlosser *et al.*, 2009). Its numbers are increasing exponentially every year (Moore & Kearsley, 2012; see also **Annexure F** for 2009 vs. 2014 numbers of online students in the USA) – it is here to stay.

Finally, our model of leadership training must be one that emphasises missionalisation. That is to say, leaders must lead with the '*Missio-Dei*' in mind. The '*Missio-Dei*⁸' or 'mission of God' is the heart of what theological educators armed with the Trinitarian perspective aim to

⁸ *Missio Dei* is a Latin theological term that can be translated as 'Mission of God'. It refers to the work of the church as being part of God's work. So the church's mission is a subset of a larger whole mission that is it is both part of God's mission to the world and not the entirety of God's work in the world - See more at: <http://www.wycliffe.net/resources/missiology/globalperspectives/tabid/97/Default.aspx?id=3960#sthash.abPi5iuK.dpuf>

produce: a generation that knows their God and understands what they ought to do in light of that (see also chapter 4).

Duraisingh (1992:38) says it well when he postulates:

In any new model, earlier emphases such as search for wisdom as a lifestyle/spiritual habit, rigorous and scientific analysis, development of personal skills, etc. must not be neglected. But what is called for is a radical alteration in the perspective and purpose of the educational process. The underlying perspective and organising principle in the new paradigm is missiological; that is, its very purpose is the preparation of persons who engage themselves and who enable others to be engaged in the 'missio Dei'.

That is a more holistic understanding of development. Banks (1999:225) uses analogous terminology in describing the formation of a 'missional' approach to theological education. He lists several helpful steps for institutes to bridge the gap between academics and practice. His suggestions range from statements in school brochures to teaching methods to the application process itself. In a similar fashion, Cunningham *et al.*, (2004:134) propose a curriculum formation that mirrors the Aristotelian paradigm of 'ethos, logos and pathos'. This too, is an attempt to make classroom education eminently practical and helpful in a non-academic environment. Thompson (2004:134) would describe this as '*phronesis*' and '*sophia*' – the two Koine Greek words used for wisdom - namely the wisdom of the practitioner and the wisdom of the scholar. In his conclusion on the discussion of the importance of these terms, he offers this conclusion:

I suspect I am not alone in my concern that the professionalization and privatization of academic theology has contributed to a loss of confidence in what such theology is both about and what it can deliver. Somehow, for all its intellectual interest and rigor, Christian academic theology's relationship to its host community, the Church, often appears quite tenuous (Thompson, 2004:143).

This author believes that the gap between practitioner and scholar can be bridged in the digital age, perhaps easier than before. The fact that a student is not bound to a campus for a three year period for example, allows them to have the freedom to go about their vocational work whilst not neglecting their academic growth. This leads us to the next section where we discuss the pros and cons of this modality.

3.5.1 Advantages and disadvantages of mentoring online as a modality

What does the latest research regarding online learning say about this modality? How does 'online education' change 'education'? Just as the 'traditional' classroom has its share of ups and downs, so too, the online world. Below is a summary of the most common ideas expressed in the literature studied for this chapter. The search was limited to resources found on EBSCHO and within the period 2002-2015.

Perhaps ironically, online learning is often said to be a great+(er) place to create community which is good news for mentoring. The online learning community is described as 'location independent' (De Waard *et al.*, 2012:1, Ulrich 2010:21). This community, Hege (2011:16-17) reminds us

provide(s) an opportunity for students to introduce themselves to the community if this was their first course or to reconnect with classmates if they were already established in the programme. It also provided an opportunity for me to introduce myself in a less formal way and to learn about the women and men with whom I would be interacting during the coming year.

Likewise, Delamarter (2004:137), writing seven years earlier suggested:

voices seldom heard in the live classroom – whether through disability, temperament, or perceived marginalization – are present online. Thus, they say it demands a higher percentage of student involvement than the live classroom.

These online communities can also function as a place of safety for pastors in ministry who, at times, feel isolated (Maddox, 2010:12). Tools like Facebook and Twitter allow for such community building and ongoing friendships, especially among the present generation. This allows the online educator to 'go beyond' surface level discussions and be thus in a position to demonstrate a 'spirit of guidance' (Lotter, 2010:03) to the student and allow for more thought through responses than one might receive in 'real-time' (Delamarter, 2004:137; Suk-Hwang & Vrongistinos, 2012:173).

Students who are 'native' to these platforms appreciate how they can seamlessly integrate their education with something they already use on a daily basis (Hege, 2011:17). In fact, in the MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses) format, social media is virtually a prerequisite (De Waard *et al.*, 2012:5). To a generation that has grown up in a Facebook era (today's first year students were nine years old when Facebook was launched) the importance of social media and indeed 'visualizing' (Castle & McGuire, 2010:38) course content is almost non-negotiable. Castle and McGuire (2010) attempt a raising of the bar by suggesting:

A truly premier e-learning course is one that will look attractive, feel vibrant, encourage participation, and incorporate activities that support the learning objectives and various learning styles of its participants. In addition, it will combine elements of synchronous and asynchronous learning in a way that maximizes student engagement while maintaining the core course objectives and goals. (Castle & McGuire, 2010:38).

Therefore, the online educator has both a mandate and an opportunity to craft course content that is not only pedagogically appealing but academically sound as well. It should be of no surprise then, that critics of the modality are often those who struggle to understand the importance of the above realities, or are simply not 'digital natives' to use Prensky's term in his book of the same title. (Prensky, 2010). If the e-mentor does not create a learning environment that is conducive for collaboration or responds in a simplistic manner to forum threads, engagement and enjoyment diminishes for all (Dorner, 2012:164-165). Dorner states: 'a teacher (mentor) has to be skilled in computer usage: self-confident in operating the tools and also some knowledge about software is needed. We cannot afford running after the technician and cannot always rely on the learners' help' (Dorner, 2012:165).

We must also address the downside to this approach. One simply cannot get away from the fact that online learning is, as previously stated, a disembodied experience even though the use of 'Skype' and other tools does help mitigate this (Hege, 2011:18). As such, non-verbal communication, which is often a huge aspect of communication across cultures (nods, smiles etc.) is all but lost. It may even lead to antisocial behavior (Rovai *et al.*, 2008:14) where students (and mentors) feel emboldened to speak in a manner that they would likely not do

when in person. Much is 'lost in translation' as it were, and misunderstandings are much more commonplace.

Friesen and Lowe (2011:191-192) reference this in their writings and refer to this aspect through the idea of 'conviviality':

'Convivial' is a term whose meaning and etymology suggest a celebration of togetherness as would happen at a social event. When practicing social networking within a platform based on conviviality, expressions of reservation, nuance and qualification are made difficult if not impossible; and negativity, in both its everyday and dialectical senses, is avoided. There are few, if any, invitations to express dislike or disinclination to the items appearing on one's homepage and there are even fewer ways to note that which is 'not' (to register an absence, to observe an omission, or to be faced with exclusion in general.)

Part of the 'lamentation' among educators at times is the loss of the human element of the teaching process. The extemporaneous 'teaching moments' (Kelly, 2015:10) are no longer present in a world of rehearsed video lectures that have been trimmed and edited. Rushkoff (2015) calls this 'animatronics' not teaching. It has also been suggested that even though social media provides the means for significant connection, this can also sometimes erode the 'natural' distinction between learner and teacher (Friesen & Lowe, 2011:184). The natural authority of a teacher in the front of the room is displaced by an avatar on the screen and this may prove counterproductive at times.

Anecdotally speaking this author has similarly experienced how students who do not 'know' the lecturer personally tend to address questions, critique and general communication much less formally than they would in a face to face classroom. This may not altogether be a bad thing, but one does feel as though some of the respect of the office may be becoming a thing of the past. This would also no doubt affect the ability to mentor effectively. This is an ongoing debate however and one that must be investigated further.

With the emphasis on finding and using the latest technology, some may suggest that this in turn leads to a more entertainment-driven approach to instruction. Delamarter (2004:136)

observes: 'We used to have smart faculty members; now we have smart classrooms - a descent into entertainment is a poor substitute for theological education'.

Perhaps though, one must simply accept that there will be gains and losses? Rovai *et al.*'s (2008:15) lengthy summation is worth quoting in this instance as a summation of the discussion thus far:

The first option is simply to accept the difference as a consequence of teaching online and chalking it up as a logical tradeoff—online learning extends access to students who would otherwise not be able to take classes on-campus, but they necessarily give up the larger social experiences that they would receive online. This is not an unreasonable solution; after all, millions of students are voluntarily accepting such a tradeoff and enrolling in online courses. It's more problematic for an institution committed to a philosophy of Christian education, but still not entirely unreasonable, since the school is reaching out to the (geographically) disadvantaged by offering them an online option. Perhaps Voltaire's declaration that 'the better is the enemy of the good' would rightly apply in this case (Rovai *et al.*, 2008:15).

Is online education for everyone? Undoubtedly there are many studies still to be conducted on this topic, especially in developing countries like South Africa where robust online education is still in a relatively fledgling stage. However, early indications here are that the online modality can indeed help address some of the cultural and gender issues that sometimes plague the traditional classroom. For all the potential disadvantages of a mentor being an 'avatar' as noted above, the other side of this reality is that it can minimise tension created around race and gender in a traditional classroom. Perhaps in a country like South Africa, this may be particularly helpful in overcoming some of the enculturated stereotypes that exist in students and faculty alike, sadly, even within Christian leadership development circles. Students and teachers alike in the online world tend to shed more of their preconceived notions online and focus strictly on output.

As Sinclair (2003) has suggested: 'as a pedagogy, online learning is considered more egalitarian and democratic, with students being more comfortable in their own homes 'conversing' with other students over the Internet rather than feeling intimidated in the

classroom. Students present their views anonymously or independently, do not have to struggle for a turn to speak in class, and can be sure their voices are heard by everyone' (Sinclair, 2003:80). Online education has allowed for students of various nationalities to participate in classes much easier than before (Castle & McGuire, 2010:36) which has great benefit in a globalized world. Nevertheless, one must be just as cautious in e-mentoring as with face to face about creating a 'colonizing behavior' in faculty (Plummer & Nyang'au, 2009:813). E-mentoring also has great potential across gender lines and can especially help women who work in a 'male-dominated job or career' (Lotter, 2010:4).

Ricoeur as stated by Houston (2002:15) suggests that our personhood cannot be fully realised without the acknowledgement of the presence of the 'other'. Throughout time, the search for the 'other' that will guide us into a deeper intimacy of our own self-knowledge and for the Christian, knowledge of who I am as I relate to God, has led to our desire for mentors. Earlier in this chapter, we saw how Kierkegaard explored this idea as well. How this looks has evolved considerably over time and again we face a new paradigm shift into the online reality. Houston (2002:16-17) has inferred that the alienation that often occurs in the modern (especially online?) age has led to our search for people who can 'fix' us. But, have we become more concerned with the information we can gain from a mentor rather than the relationship we can have with them? Our dealings tend to be more transactional and perhaps more akin to what we might call 'therapy' rather than 'friendship'. In this paradigm the relationship is a professional one that is driven by content rather than an amateur (or love) relationship that is maieutic (indirect) in nature. This creates an isolation that is the antithesis of the idea of community reflected within the Trinitarian view of mentoring. As Houston (2002:22) states:

Individuals do not create communities, only persons. This...is a theological rather than anthropological category. Persons, not merely individuals, mentored to be open to the Other, are receiving a new identity in the Triune God of Grace.

3.6 Conclusion

In review, the idea of mentoring and associated ideas has been discussed by a thorough analysis of recent literature on mentoring and mentoring online specifically. Furthermore, we took a brief look at two important figures in the ecclesiastical world namely Augustine of Hippo and Soren Kierkegaard who both lived in very different times yet showed an understanding and appreciation of mentoring. The mutual points of intersection in their mentoring theory and praxis were discussed and emphasised. The definition, importance and need for mentoring within a larger societal framework has been mentioned and discussed in accordance with the interpretive task of Osmer (2008:04).

In sum, our understanding of mentoring needs to be informed by the social and cultural strata in a given context. Additionally, leadership development is more relationally driven than content-driven and those values are best understood in the light of a Trinitarian perspective - values such as communal-mindedness, loving relationships, seeking unity, collaborative learning and humility. Thus, character and the development thereof is an essential concern for those who wish to be a mentor. It is imperative that an organisation recognises the needs, values and goals they have so that they can recognise the sort of leadership that is needed – and how to develop it.

We have already discussed the need to examine the paradigms we use for leadership development and mentoring, specifically in online theological training (Chapter 2) and in this chapter we have discussed the historical and contemporary imperatives to assist in developing a better understanding of why there seems to be a lack of mentoring in the Online Theological Education (OTE) environment. The next chapter will start to move the focus onto the next aspect of Osmer (2008) which is ‘what ought to be happening’?

iSeminary': Christian theological and leadership development in the online environment. A Practical Theological study

Chapter 4

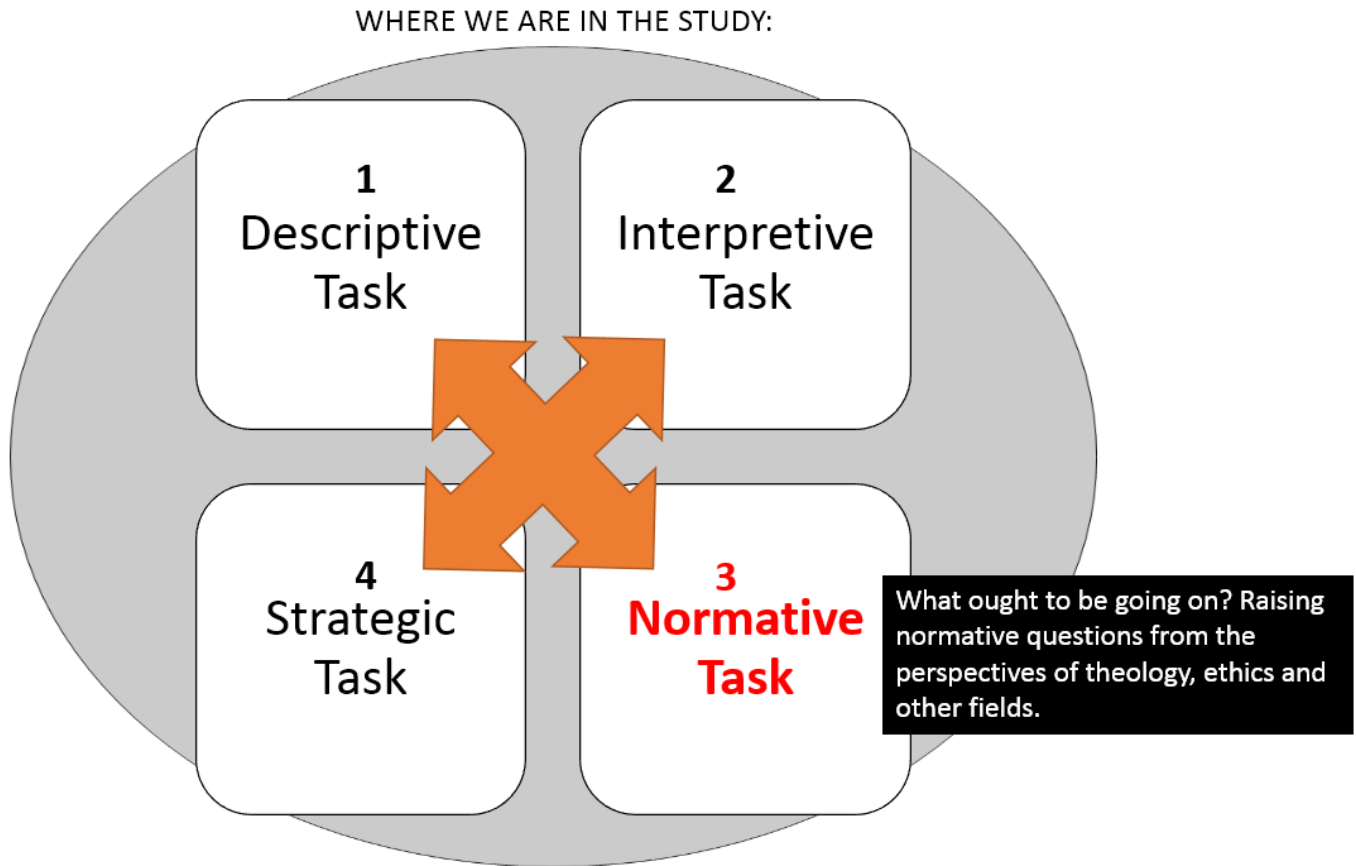
‘Leader as enabling function: Towards a new paradigm for local church leadership in the 21st century. A concept paper in honour of Prof. George Lotter⁹’ & ‘Afterword – An explanation of the Trinitarian Ontological Perspective’

This chapter examines the **normative task** of practical theological interpretation. This means using theological concepts to interpret particular episodes, situations or contexts, constructing ethical norms to guide our responses, and learning from ‘good practice’ (Osmer, 2008:4). Answering the question, what *ought to be going on* is focusing on the normative task of practical theological interpretation by examining what the Scriptures say with regard to mentoring and leadership development that is needed for a complex adaptive system like the church. This normative perspective would not tell leaders or administration how to accomplish contextual challenges or goals (the strategic task), however it will show what they ought to try to accomplish, the use of ethical norms to reflect on and guide practice (Osmer, 2008: 131-2).

This chapter was originally published as part of a *Festschrift* for my promoter, Prof. George Lotter, given our mutual interest in the topic of mentoring. The article, whilst published for

⁹ Published in July 2015. See: Elkington, R., Meekins, D., Breen, J.M. & Martin, S.S., 2015, ‘Leadership as an enabling function: Towards a new paradigm for local church leadership in the 21st century’, *In die Skriflig* 49(3), Art. #1911, 14 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ids.v49i3.1911>

other purposes fits well into the normative question for this study as seen below in the diagram:



The article addresses both the need and the philosophy of development and mentoring that has been raised throughout the study. While it is important to note that, for the purposes of the article, the Osmer paradigm was fully articulated in all four ‘tasks’ here, this author places it within the normative part of this thesis. The broad reasons for this are:

- a) The article re-emphasises the need for mentoring within the Christian/theological training motif
- b) The article attempts to provide an attempt at furthering the conversation on the needs of the Christian leadership training community by postulating a model in line with the normative task.
- c) The Biblical and theological exegesis, explanation and rationale (thereby the ‘perspectives of theology’) are dealt with in the context

below and thus have a natural home in this chapter more than any other.

Additionally, and as an afterword to this article but needed within the context of the study as a whole, is a further discussion of the Trinitarian perspective which this author has referenced throughout thus far. Again, this perspective is simply an articulation of the theological basis for the need in online theological education to recognise the ‘social’ aspect of online teaching and learning. The human identity being defined as ‘Imago Dei’ (*Image of God*) along with the concept of the Triune nature of God are critical ideas that cannot be ignored in this argument. If we are to understand and relate to God in this ‘Triune-ness’ and humankind is made in His image, then these realities must be incorporated into our ongoing discussion of mentoring and leadership development in the online space. This explanation fits best under the normative aspect of Osmer, (2008) as it represents part of this author’s postulation of *what ought to be going on*.

4.1 Introduction

Ministry leadership presents unanticipated challenges to those seeking to serve the church. Whilst formal theological programmes provide essential education in Christianity and ministry, they do not equip new ministry leaders to navigate the complex adaptive system that is ‘The church’. Upon completion of a formal educational programme, new church leaders are expected to be *leaders* without having the benefit of ongoing support for their leadership development process. To address this gap, and with the use of Osmer’s heuristic, this article presents a framework of leadership development that draws primarily on the business literature and can be adapted to ministry. Given the rough terrain inherent in the 21st century church, the authors of this article hope that this work provides a framework that will increase leadership effectiveness, prolong leadership tenure, and empower church leaders to foster the Christian worldview both within and outside their flock. Firstly, this article introduces a new framework for leadership development in the 21st century church. Next, we articulate the model and directly apply it to church leadership. We discuss not only issues that currently exist in the church, but also propose interventions that could improve the functionality and

effectiveness of the church. We conclude with a list of theory-based activities that, if undertaken, will equip church leaders to utilise the framework proposed in this article.

Perhaps it was this seeming deficit in leadership preparation and the challenges faced in a leadership position that moved Prof. Lotter to focus in more recent times upon mentorship and leadership development through e-mentorship (Koch & Van Brakel, 2010; Lotter 2008). Leadership theory and the function of leadership within the church have always been critical to the health and resilience of the church. As far back as 1912 Roland Allen (2006) published his watershed, *Missionary methods: St. Paul's or ours*. This work is significant because in it Allen suggests that there is something 'organismic' and living about the church; that it is a living system capable of spontaneous growth and health. This idea was revolutionary at the time because Allen suggested that Christian churches, imbued with the Holy Spirit, inherently possessed the capacity to thrive, without the continuing ongoing paternalistic oversight of the western missionary. Allen (2006) used the Apostle Paul and his missionary work in the four provinces of Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia and Asia as his paradigm. He states:

Before 47 A.D. there were no churches in these provinces; in 57 A.D. St. Paul could speak as if his work there was done, and could plan extensive tours into the far West without anxiety lest the Churches which he had founded might perish in his absence for want of guidance and support. (Allen, 2006:03).

It is important to understand the historical context of Allen's words at the height of British missionary triumphalism and the belief within mission circles that the world needed not only the Gospel that the West was sharing, but also the culture of the West. Thus missionaries felt that whilst peoples in foreign lands were accepting the Gospel, acculturating them was a far bigger and long-term undertaking. To quote Allen (2006):

We have long accustomed ourselves to accept it as an axiom of missionary work that converts in a new country must be submitted to a very long probation and training, extending over generations, before they can be expected to stand alone. (Allen, 2006:04).

We cite Allen here because we believe it is possible that the church in the West may have inadvertently reverted once again to an acculturation model of church life and Gospel preaching in which the leadership of the church may lose sight of the organismic nature of the body of Christ and the power with which Christians are imbued to accomplish the mission of God, the *missio Dei* (see Chapter 1 also). The 21st century church in the West is no longer the mainstream. Christendom is crumbling (Frost, 2006) and the church is now exiled to the margins as a people on mission in a strange and foreign land. In this article the authors suggest a new model of church leadership that we believe is anchored in the principles of Allen's landmark work, and behind that, the New Testament conception of church leadership. We wonder if it is possible that the notion of leadership within Christendom has bottlenecked within the office of pastor much like church plants in Allen's day bottlenecked in the leadership of the missionary. It may be possible that if the church is on mission the same conditions for church planting, church health, and thus church leadership, prevail as much today as they did in the time of Allen and in the time of Paul the apostle.

4.2 Methodology for this article: Osmer's heuristic

This article seeks to unpack the question of church leadership by presenting a model in which the church leadership is seen as the 'enabling function' (Booyesen, 2014) within the church. To accomplish this task, we employ Osmer's heuristic as our methodology. We used Osmer because we now face a new context of 'intellectual pluralism, the reality of multiple and, often competing paradigms within a single field' (Osmer, 2010:2). In the face of this intellectual pluralism, contemporary practical theology researchers have employed a paradigm that emerged from the advent of modernity – a paradigm that Osmer (2010:4) labels 'reflective practice'. Osmer (2008:4) expands upon the nature and process of this 'reflective practice' in his book, *Practical theology: An introduction*, in which he sees the core of this reflective practice in four questions. In Osmer (2010) these questions are formulated as follows:

Descriptive-empirical: What is happening? Gathering information better to understand particular episodes, situations or contexts.

Interpretive: Why is this happening? Entering into dialogue with the social sciences to interpret and explain why certain actions and patterns are taking place.

Normative: What Should Be Happening? Raising normative questions from the perspectives of theology, ethics, and other fields.

Pragmatic: How do we get there? Forming an action plan and undertaking specific responses that seek to shape the episode, situation, or context in desirable directions.

As Osmer (2010:3) points out, his description of these four tasks is not original. Perhaps what is original is the way in which Osmer has structured these four elements together and then weighted these four tasks with the notion of 'reflective equilibrium' (Osmer 2010:7). This 'reflective equilibrium' is valuable because it assumes that practical theology, like other fields today, is highly pluralistic, and yet, within this pluralism there are tasks or elements that are held in common, even if they are carried out in different ways. Osmer's heuristic is extremely helpful to the four authors who crafted this article, since all arrived with their own individual research background, and approach to research, within the postmodern context of practical theological reflection. Osmer's approach facilitates great diversity of approach within his broader framework. We begin by probing the question of church leadership within the 21st century under Osmer's (2008:4) lens of: 'Descriptive empirical: What is going on?'

4.3 What is happening? We live in a challenging context where leadership development and mentoring paradigms are needed to support missional leadership as an enabling function

Shepherds of Christ's flock are to lead his flock (Prime & Begg, 2004:217). Stetzer and Bird (2010:16) indicate that in the US church up to 93% of pastors see leadership development as

critical to the church. However, they are less convinced of their ability to help in developing such leaders – only 52% strongly agreed that the church is doing well in this area. The question, though, is what this leadership profile in ministry constitutes and how it is developed (Engstrom, 1976:121) within the life of the leader. The preeminent question of whether leaders are born or made affects the notion of leadership within the local church too. If leaders are not in fact born, but made, then the question is what processes, context, and practices facilitate this type of leadership development in the 21st century church in such a way to empower leaders to view themselves as a piece of the whole and yet also dependent upon the whole. Sanders (1984:27) suggests that leadership is *influence*; something that great leadership scholars like Northouse (2013:7) affirm. The new context of the 21st century affects leadership development because an awareness of the desired outcome of the process is essential in order effectively to design the leadership development process to accomplish missional leadership as an enabling function within the local church.

Whilst it appears that business organisations are committed to expending resources on leadership and talent development within their ranks, can the same be said for theological training institutions and churches? This question is germane at this juncture in history due to two key factors, namely that the church in the West is in decline (Elkington, 2011) and that pastors are leaving the vocational ministry at an alarming rate (Elkington & Lotter, 2013). The traditional modality of preparing people for vocational ministry seems to have fallen foul of the 21st century's rapid pace of change. Osei-Mensah (1990:08) points out that there is a need for pastors to be 'omnicompetent' in today's world. Yet how pastors receive their training, and indeed, what they are trained to know and do will greatly influence their ability to be omnicompetent. There appears to be an increasing uncertainty within the realm of theological education as to what paradigm is the most effective in the 21st century. Banks (1999:04) suggests that theological education is '... in part ... going through culture shock and, in part, is undergoing a painful transition'. Part of this transition is that institutions are wrestling with the ongoing debate concerning the balance between orthodoxy and orthopraxy in their curricula. It would seem that, more than ever before, not only should people in vocational ministry be theologically adept, they also need to have incredible leadership capacity to

navigate the complexity of a globalised world, a context in which leaders require both a skillset and mindset to navigate successfully what has come to be known as *vu jádè*, the opposite of *dèjá vu* (Day & Harrison, 2007). In *vu jádè*, leaders realise, 'I've never been here before, I have no idea where I am, and I have no idea who can help me.' In a post-Christendom era a different type of leadership is called for, a leadership that is not seen as a type of autocratic top-down CEO, but as a servant, leader, shepherd who serves to equip the body to accomplish the work of the ministry, the *missio Dei*. In recent social history, the so-called 'high powered' executive was the model most sought after in leadership (Rood *et al.* 2009:290). However, this had mixed results and the trend seems to be shifting away from this line of thinking. Rood *et al.* (2009:294) use the term 'toxic leadership' to describe this prototype of so-called leader who was stereotypically domineering, intimidating and usually male. In contradistinction to this, gaining increasing prominence, is a distributed leadership profile, in which leadership resides in the processes of the many, rather than the personal capital of any particular key individual (Day & Harrison, 2007) resulting in a more integrative approach.

In specifically Christian contexts, as well as other contexts, this distributed leadership concept is sometimes called 'servant leadership' (Williams, 1994:4) and 'leader-follower' (April, Macdonald & Vriesendorp, 2008:27). Additionally, leadership styles vary across cultures (Plueddemann, 2009:25), which adds to the challenge of a leadership development programme in a multicultural setting. It is important to train pastors to critique their own cultures so that they may determine what they should attempt to lead people to and from (Van der Walt, 2006:12). But even more than this, they should be able to critique those elements within the culturally accepted mores of leadership philosophy that work against a robust biblical view of leadership as enabling function rather than an autocratic CEO. 'True leadership requires development' (Williams & McKibben, 1994:161) is a bold statement. What exactly is meant by 'development' is the key thought here. In his interesting discourse, Williams mentions how the enlightenment period and an emphasis on 'getting the job done' have robbed modern society of well-mentored leaders. We also have to be alert to the leadership philosophy of those who do take the time to mentor protégés. Mentors need to be

selected because they view leadership as missional and effective leadership as an ‘enabling function’, rather than a successful CEO (this article will later explore how Paul the apostle shows this in a biblical model). However, there does seem to be a pendulum shift from that type of thinking in both business and theological training in more recent times. Williams’ writing is from the mid-nineties and many of his observations appear outdated now. He (Williams & McKibben, 1994) is accurate, however, when he states:

Apprenticing was the original Christian model of leadership development. Christ instructed and developed his disciples according to that model. Paul worked with Timothy and Titus the same way. Apprenticing is a time-consuming and sometimes painful process, but usually a rewarding one for teacher and student alike. (Williams & McKibben, 1994:186).

In the new realm of *vu jádè*, ministry leaders need to learn how to participate collectively in leadership processes (Day & Harrison, 2007) since the complexity of a globalised arena might quickly overwhelm the lone heroic leader. Post-heroic missional leadership as an enabling function better fits the Ephesians 4:1–16 model and dovetails with the modern world of hypercomplexity in which the system is much stronger than the sum of the parts with each part simply functioning on its own.

4.4 Why is this happening? Is there a lack of mentorship and training due to philosophical differences or resource incapacity?

It is difficult to find any strong body of literature outlining a cogent leadership development practice for pastors, either pre-career training or mid-career development. One study (McKenna, Yost & Boyd 2007) attempts to understand the effect of adversity and life circumstances upon the in situ leadership learning of pastors. In commenting on the urgent need to develop Christian leadership, and to develop a reflexive and adaptive creative Christian leadership to function effectively in the 21st century milieu, Tilstra, Freed and Baumgartner (2011) state that ‘Christian leaders are faced with increasingly complex social contexts for which their training is not preparing them.’ It seems that there is a growing

awareness that whilst Ministry Training Institutes (MTIs) are training people for orthodox ministry, they are not equipping people for orthopraxy leadership in a highly complex environment. Is it possible that MTI's believe that if they train for orthodoxy, somehow orthopraxy naturally follows? Or is it simply that the MTI's have not had the capacity to develop a lively and robust leadership development track as a viable part of the training regimen? It is hard to grasp why it is that extensive leadership development is not occurring within MTI's and in situ in ministry contexts in an ongoing way. One of the strongest philosophical statements against formal leadership curricula within MTI's is voiced by Huizing (2011) when he suggests that the church not draw from the wide range of leadership research available, but rather develops a leadership philosophy that is more ecclesial in orientation and that is rooted in discipleship as the primary mechanism of leadership development. An example of this methodology is the work, *Leadership essentials* (Ogden & Meyer, 2007), in which in situ leadership development can occur as a discipleship process. Whilst we certainly do not disagree with Huizing or Ogden and Meyer, it is more a matter of degree and extent rather than philosophy. In other words, it seems essential that foundational leadership theory pedagogy be developed at the Ministry Training Institute level to inform ministry leaders in a prefatory fashion concerning the very real complexities, ambiguities and challenges they will face in the 'real' world. Most of all, MTI's and local churches need to help emerging leadership understand the range of leadership theory that exists. They also need to equip them with a clear understanding of what it means to be a missional leader, to serve as an enabling function for the spontaneous expansion of the church by freeing the system to accomplish the mission of God within the bounds of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. They also need to obtain a strong and grounded connection to the delimiters of administration, bureaucracy and necessary policy. It would appear, then, that the major reason this is happening, that is a lack of substantial leadership development at MTI's, is due to a philosophical belief that discipleship may be adequate to prepare leaders and that the church must use only Christian theories of leadership to develop Christian leaders.

4.4.1 A lack of training and mentorship

A primary focus of this article concerns the processes used when actually going about the task of raising leaders and equipping them for leadership. But, equally vexing is the societal assumption that persons are qualified to lead a ministry simply because they have completed a particular course of study. Notwithstanding certain biblical assertions of whom is qualified to be considered a leader, further study must be done as to what steps must be taken before this is recognised. If it can be demonstrated that completion of a course-based programme of study is insufficient or the courses themselves may be the wrong kind for the desired objective, then we are presented with a harmful reality. We must concede then that it is possible that several church and nonprofit leaders deemed to be qualified for the task may not be. If weak leadership is offered and substandard approaches adopted, the follow-on impact can lead to disaster and disillusionment. That would be a situation we can ill afford. And yet, that is the situation we seem to face now with three pastors a day leaving the ministry in North America (Elkington, 2013). Mentoring has often been seen (Bérard, 2013:118) as the key to helping develop leadership competencies that have real-world value, but how mentors are selected and what function they are expected to perform is a subject of debate. Veteran leaders are often automatically given mentor status by virtue of their experience. Yet some experienced folk seem able to inspire their protégés whilst others seem to do just the opposite. The other question that needs to be interjected here is what worldview these veteran mentors bring to the table? If they imbibe a Christendom acculturation model, then it is clear that this is the philosophy with which they will mentor their protégés. Where do we find missional, veteran, leaders who are willing to mentor emerging leadership? Added to this barrage of questions is yet another question of great importance: 'What exactly is a mentor and what is the person supposed to do?' How and why is this process important in theological education and leadership development? To qualify the last question, especially as it relates to the church on mission with God, the church as a complex adaptive system imbued with power by the Holy Spirit and able to accomplish the mission for which it is designed when released to do so.

Biehl (1996:19) offers a simple but compelling definition: 'mentoring is a lifelong relationship, in which a mentor helps a protégé develop his or her God-given potential'. Essentially it is a process where a person with experience, skills and training in a specific area offers to assist another (usually younger or less experienced) person in their development. Mentoring of some kind is a common practice in many for and not-for profit organisations and it is a time consuming process. Perhaps it is in the process of trying to put in practice the theory whilst managing the bottom line of the institute where many great intentions die (Naude, 2004:36). When this pressure is placed upon the leadership of a local church with an already overloaded calendar, it is easy to see why the process is short-circuited. If leadership were seen as missional and thus as an enabling function:

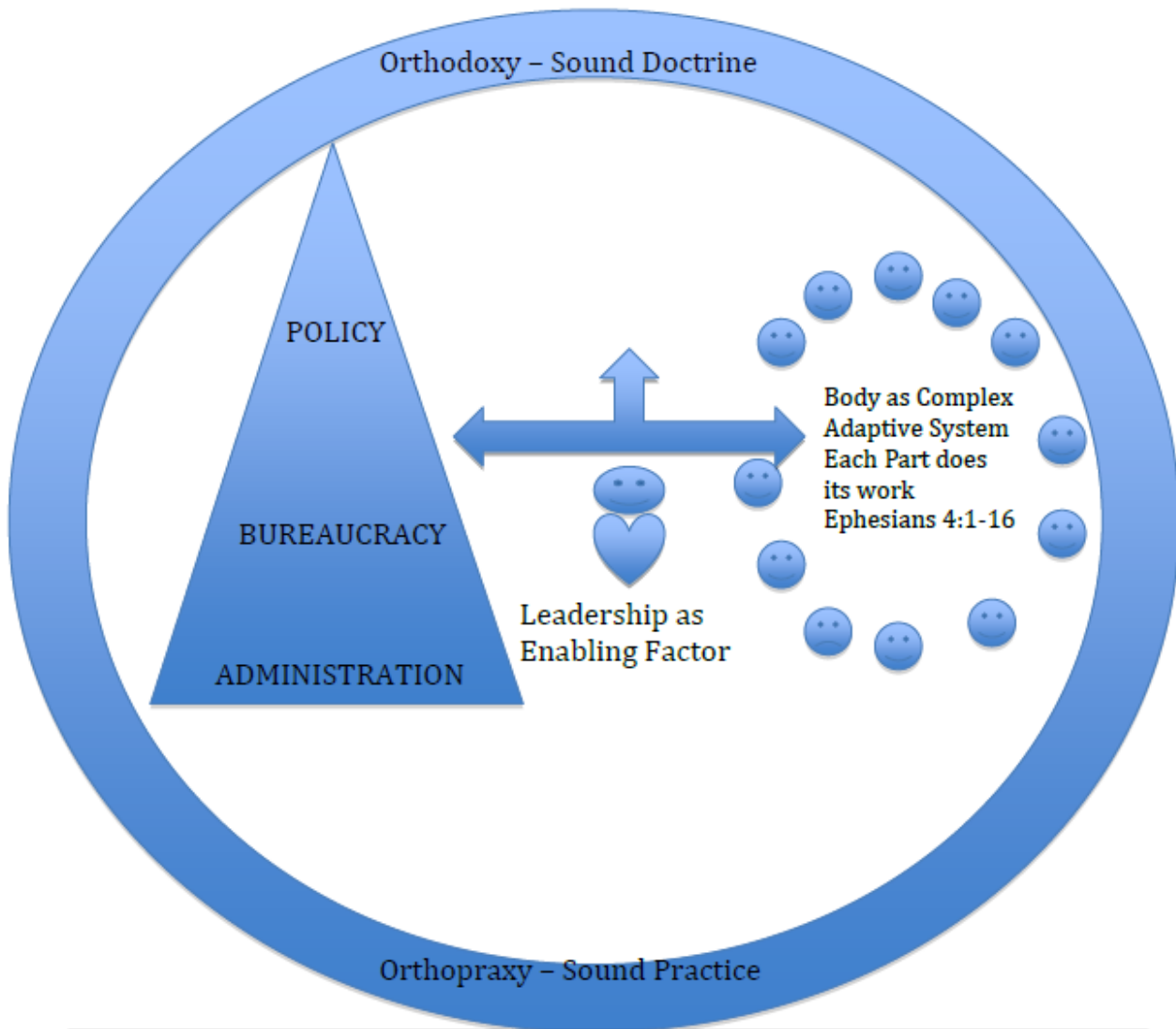
- Would the calendar seem overloaded if every part of the local church, the system, was doing its work as designed?
- Would mentorship of the protégé be that taxing if the focus of mentorship was to prepare that individual for the crucible moments of leadership with a humble realisation that their role as part of the leadership team and part of the whole system is to serve as the enabling function between complex adaptive system and administrative or policy processes?
- Would mentorship of an emerging leader be that difficult if the system was designed to see equipping for ministry (Eph 4) as the role of missional leadership, as the essence of an enabling function, as the *summum bonum* of leadership?

Whilst methods of theological education continue to morph to make it more accessible to students (Burton, 1998), this iteration of educational delivery may make this process even more complicated. It is quite a different prospect to mentor by extension using virtual modalities, although this is an increasing field of study (Lotter, 2008). Essentially one must have as a core value a desire to mentor the next generation of leadership. If it becomes a series of check lists and 'must do' meetings, then the goals will never be realised. If it is more organic and systemic in orientation, then many are responsible for the mentorship process

and mentorship is part of the system's self-generation. Fortunately, there is theoretical support for alternative methods of providing mentoring experiences that can be quite fruitful (Higgins, Chandler & Kram 2005:422-23). They suggest the use of e-mentoring. Through a thorough review of existing e-mentoring programmes, they cite evidence that protégés received benefits such as increased support, professional friendships, networks, personal development, confidence, inspiration, contact with role models, and ideas pertaining to work and life balance. Though these authors share caution in generalising the results of this research, it seems evident that the adoption of e-mentoring in the 21st century church could vastly accelerate the development of leaders and support them whilst they deploy leadership strategies within the local church. Not only can mentoring be offered through emerging technology by mentors and their protégés, it can also be utilised in a much broader form – through the development of mentoring networks (Higgins *et al.*, 2005). Drawn from social networking theory, mentoring networks allow emerging leaders to make meaningful connections across boundaries and over multiple contexts, thus enriching the learning experience. Leaders can tap knowledge at the local and network level, creating a knowledge sharing system, whereby not only protégés are receiving information, they are also offering it. Thus, mentoring networks tend to exist for longer periods of time, allowing for deeper and more meaningful interactions for all.

Why is mentoring in theological training so essential? As with other studies in the Humanities, students deal with highly theoretical ideas in the classroom (hermeneutics and source criticism, for example) but are forced to deal with highly practical realities in the real world (helping a new Christian learn how to study the Bible). West (2004), from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, speaks to this very issue when he states 'we believe that facilitating on-going contact between students and local communities so that they can work with ordinary Bible readers is a key component of our Biblical Studies pedagogy' (West, 2004:74). This facilitation takes great skill best learned from an experienced and learned mentor. A diagram of the model is presented as Figure 1: 'A model of church leadership as enabling function'.

Figure 1. A Model of Church Leadership as Enabling Function



This model is explained throughout this article by first discussing the missional community, and the missional leadership after which the article discusses the type of leadership training and mentorship rooted in a hermeneutic that accentuates the importance and practical relevance of the Trinitarian Godhead. This Trinitarian perspective (see 'Afterword'), is one that demonstrates the communal nature of our God and thus how this reality ought to inform

our dealings with the 'other'. Thus, an overall understanding of the biblical ideology that is seen within the Old and New Testaments might be required to produce leaders who view themselves as the enabling function within the organism known as the church. After the discussion of mentorship and leadership training, suggestions on how the model functions within a local church are presented to the reader. In the final section of this article, the authors present a range of areas for further research that arise from the concepts presented in this article.

4.5 What ought to be happening? A new focus in ministry leadership preparation

The question of leadership within the local church (Herrington, Bonem & Furr, 2000:1–15) is paramount to any shift of western evangelical churches. If we wish to move away from the Christendom paradigm, where the church is self-absorbed and driven to acculturate, toward the missional paradigm, where the church is Spirit-empowered and driven to transcend culture by fulfilling the *missio Dei*, dramatic changes are required in both the perception of leadership and the preparation of leadership. In order to facilitate this change towards a missional leadership paradigm, the leader will need to adopt a systems (Rendle, 2002: 49–75; Senge, 2006:341–403) perspective that sees the church as a living organism. The church is thus not perceived as a static entity that is unaffected by both the external environment and internal health mechanisms.

This systems or 'church as organism' perspective is vital to the 'enabling function' type leadership because the move from Christendom church to missional church (Hirsch, 2006:217–241) will move through liminality to greater cohesion in the form of *communitas* when the system is allowed to self-maintain and self-generate. When leadership functions, as pictured in Figure 1 ('A model of church leadership as enabling function'), to enable the system to fulfil its purpose, self-maintenance and the accomplishment of the *missio Dei* [mission of God] can occur. We might refer to this type of systems sensitive leadership as 'missional leadership' since it exists to accomplish the *missio Dei* by serving as the enabling

function between the administrative dimensions of church life and the systemic elements of the local church.

Perhaps one of the most helpful treatises on the nature of leadership required for this type of systems sensitive enabling leadership is MacIrvine's (2009) dissertation. In this dissertation, MacIrvine presents a clear thesis in which he states: 'I initially thought that senior leaders initiating missional change did it in a conventional way: set down a strategic plan, recruit leaders and cast vision.' (MacIrvine, 2009:5–6). On the contrary, the most important contributions in the literature suggested that missional change is quirky, nonlinear, and generally precipitated by a crisis. Whilst the 'crisis-might-lead-to-missional-change' theme usually shows up in missional texts, few authors seem to connect the dots that crisis is most likely the key that God uses to spark missional change. Frost (2006:217–241) has developed an extremely helpful overview of the crisis catalyst in missional momentum, which he terms 'liminality'. It seems (MacIrvine, 2009:6–9) that crisis, or liminality is both imperative and invaluable for the church leadership to move (Rendle, 2002:27–47) from a Christendom model of success-driven paradigms over to much more of an enabling function or missional paradigm. Of course, the metrics for success in this type of enabling function or missional paradigm are much different to the metrics of success in the Christendom model, and the church needs to be sensitised to, and made ready for this change in metrics. Health and strength of the system and its capacity to self-maintain and function as a community on mission could be a better indicator of successful leadership than the normal indicators of size and wealth. This type of enabling function leadership or missional leadership requires great humility on the part of the leader who must self-conceive as a part of the whole, with the role of support, service, and protection.

The transition from the Christendom model to the missional model will require a crucible event. MacIrvine, (2009:30–39) presents an excellent overview of the 'crucible' model of leadership. In this model, the leader is broken, shaped and prepared for leadership through the crucible of crisis. MacIrvine, (2009:29–32) shows how this crucible theory has become a major leadership theory amongst secular leadership theorists. He also gives Biblical

examples of the crucible model of leadership preparation and leadership function, as well as examples from church history. The shift from the Christendom model of pastoral leadership to the post-Christendom model of missional leadership is so radical, that for those ensnared in the former (Christendom) it will often take nothing short of some form of crisis (Kotter, 1996:30–66; MacIlvaine, 2009:39–48) to release the leader to change paradigms. The missional leadership paradigm is essential to the transition (Bridges, 2009:1–10) of the Evangelical church in North America and the West from its current Christendom model to the missional model. Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006:12) express the distinction between the Christendom leadership paradigm and the missional leadership paradigm in Table 1.1 ('Operating models of leadership').

Table 1:1 Operating Models of Leadership

Pastoral	Missional
<p>Expectation that an ordained pastor must be present at every meeting and event or else it is not validated or important.</p> <p>Ordained ministry staff functions to give attention to and take care of people in the church by being present for people as they are needed (if care and attention are given by people other than ordained clergy, it may be more appropriate and effective but is deemed “second class”).</p> <p>Time, energy, and focus shaped by people’s “need” and “pain” agendas.</p> <p>Pastor provides solutions.</p> <p>Preaching and teaching offer answers and tell people what is right and wrong.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Telling ➤ Didactic ➤ Reinforcing assumptions ➤ Principles for Living <p>“Professional” Christians</p> <p>Celebrity (must be a “home run hitter”)</p> <p>“Peacemaker”</p> <p>Conflict suppressor or “fixer”</p>	<p>Ministry staff operate as coaches and mentors within a system that is not dependent on them to validate the importance and function of every group by being present.</p> <p>Ordained clergy equip and release the multiple ministries of the people of God throughout the church.</p> <p>Pastor asks questions that cultivate an environment that engages the imagination, creativity, and gifts of God’s people in order to discern solutions.</p> <p>Preaching and teaching invite the people of God to engage the Scriptures as a living word that confronts them with questions and draws them into a distinctive world.</p> <p>“Pastoring” must be part of the mix, but not the sum total.</p> <p>Make tension OK.</p> <p>Conflict facilitator.</p>

Please note how much of the missional leadership paradigm takes on an ‘enabling function’ role as opposed to a directive and autocratic role. The leadership that embarks on accomplishing ‘mission with’ by enabling missional community, will apply all of the characteristics of the right hand side of Table 1:1. These ‘missional’ qualities reflect the leaders’ belief that the church is an organism, and thus a complex adaptive system (Jost, 2003:69–88; Lucas, 2004:1–4). Within a complex adaptive system, collaboration is most highly valued as opposed to cooperation (Bellinger, 2004). Cooperation will become self-defeating, whilst collaboration gives freedom of contribution to all parts of the organism that in turn contributes to the health of the organism; in this case, the church, as per Ephesians 4:1–13. Collaboration in this model is the essence of the ‘enabling function’ type of leadership presented in Figure 1 (‘A model of church leadership as enabling function’) earlier in this article.

Once the crucible moment in leadership is encountered and leaders begin to view themselves as part of the whole and intrinsically dependent upon the whole, the local church, these ‘missional leaders’ who understand that the missional community is a complex adaptive system, will naturally (Lichtenstein *et al.*, 2006:2–12) gravitate towards a servant leader or relational (Greenleaf, 2004:1–7) and non-hierarchical (Spears & Lawrence, 2004:9–24) approach to ministry leadership. Lundy’s (2002:1–232) work on servant leadership is also helpful when reflecting on missional leadership. Whilst there is a plethora of books and journal articles discussing a wide range of leadership paradigms and leadership styles, the missional leader is well served by an approach (Fleming, 2004:11–193) that supports and strengthens the notion of the missional community as a complex adaptive system. The missional leader can strengthen (Brady & Woodward, 2005:xi–xiv) personal leadership qualities by reading and absorbing the many diverse perspectives on leadership theory and leadership practice. However, the missional leader who is seeking to accomplish the *missio Dei* will look to leadership development with a view (Fleming, 2004:11–18) to how those enhanced leadership qualities strengthen the rest of the community in their call to accomplish the mission of God. The missional leader will thus develop leadership acuity with a view to humbly facilitating the effective function and freedom of the local church as a complex

adaptive system, bounded by orthodoxy and orthopraxy, and in effective relationship with the administrative, policy and bureaucratic requirements of the church as a living organism. In the following section Figure 1 ('A model of church leadership as an enabling function') will be discussed.

A brief explanation of the model

The reader will note some of the key aspects of the model presented in Figure 1, as follows. The leadership serves as enabling function by upholding the administrative, bureaucratic, and policy dimensions of church life. These dimensions ensure a healthy structure as well as ethical and legal compliance. This model also gives freedom to the members of the body to accomplish the mission of God and the ministry of the local church according to their giftedness, talents, and culture. This model is bounded by orthodoxy (sound doctrine) and orthopraxy (sound function). This means that within the core tenets of the faith and within acceptable and agreed upon church practice, there is a great deal of freedom for members of the church to be a church accomplishing the mission of God as a community of God. The leadership of the local church supports the ministry of the local church by serving to strengthen and support the health of each believer who is part of the complex adaptive system that forms that particular local church. In this model, the local church is seen as a complex adaptive system. 'A system is always taken to refer to a set of elements joined together to make a complex whole' (Chapman, 2002:29). Chapman (2002) suggests that within the systems thinking exists of three types or categories of systems:

- Natural systems. Studied by biologists and ecologists, amongst others. Examples include the human body, frogs, forests and catchment areas.
- Engineered or design systems. These are artifacts that are planned to exhibit some desirable emergent properties under a range of environmental conditions. Some examples of engineered or design systems include a motor vehicle, a computer and nuclear power stations.

- Purposeful or human activity systems. All institutions and organisations fall into this area. Some examples of purposeful or human activity systems include churches, schools, prisons, and hospitals (Chapman, 2002:29).

In the model presented above, the local church constitutes a complex adaptive system. When thinking of the local church, it is helpful to note that Bellinger (2004) defines a system as an entity where all facets are intertwined and rely upon each other in order for the entity to survive. The key emphasis here is one of mutual benefit in that something is occurring between the parts, over time, which maintains the system. For the analogy of the local church, something must be occurring between the different parts to ensure that the system is self-maintaining.

Leadership can either function to support this systems-wide self-maintenance and growth, or it can actually function in a way that inhibits self-maintenance and growth through a bottlenecking approach to leadership that concentrates power and impedes critical administrative and communication processes of the church body. This systemic, mutual interaction of the many different parts within the local church for the maintenance and strength of the system as well as the accomplishment of the mission for which the local church was designed, seems to be the point of many New Testament passages concerning the local church; passages such as Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 2:19–22; 4:1–16, Philippians 1:27–30, Colossians 1:18.

When the system is healthy and functioning well in maintaining itself, the *missio Dei* is accomplished. An example of mission emerging from a healthy system can be found in 1 Thessalonians 1:1–10; 3:6–412 (Kistemaker, 1996: 52–54). We propose that Paul's letters to the churches at Ephesus and Corinth (Eph 4 and 1 Cor 12) can provide a window into the kind of leadership needed to serve the church. It is critical to note that Paul writes to the whole church in each letter, not a 'leader' or even group of leaders. He addresses issues that we typically would consider 'leadership issues' including communication, conflict, roles and functions. As a living breathing organism, the early Church was emerging in homes and

diverse communities, adapting to an environment marked by constant challenge, change and uncertainty. One of Paul's primary concerns is the unity of the church.

In Ephesians 4:1–2 he describes a 'worthy life' as one that is 'eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit'. He exhorts them to 'make every effort to maintain this unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' (Eph 4:3). Continuing the theme of unity he writes in 4:4–6, 'There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God.' Paul provides instruction on how to stay together, instructing these local groups to live in unity within a context of diversity, in terms of gifts and roles. Paul insists on unity even though the old lines were blurring between Jews and Greeks, slave and free. He also affirms that every single member has been graced with gifts from the Spirit. The gifts are for the common good of the whole, not for self-promotion or leverage within the church. There is not a hierarchy of gifts, nor does there appear to be a hierarchy of leaders within the leadership process. Using the metaphor of the body, Paul instructs them to function *interdependently*, or towards the ultimate purpose (*πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν*) (Walvoord & Zuck, 1985:635) with each member participating in ministry, naming various roles including apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (Eph 4:11).

The different gifts work together to build up the whole body in Christ – the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and builds itself in love. This is one of the most powerful metaphors of unity and diversified leadership that we find in the Scripture and one that is discussed in more detail later. Suffice to say that ministry is a shared responsibility of all members not just a few or designated clergy. This explicit sharing of responsibility for the work of the church is a more complex, organisational construct for understanding and practicing leadership.

The approach that Paul presents differs from traditional leadership approaches, where exerting personal charisma or influence over the group is the primary approach to accomplish the leader's goal (Conger, 1989). This is a radical departure from the command and control paradigm of the Roman Empire, and it may be a radical departure from the modern

Christendom model for many pastors and other ministry professionals today. However, it seems clear that leadership of a complex adaptive system, like the church, is a multileveled process of collaboration and coordination of gifts and roles carrying out a shared mission, whilst integrating conflict in order to maintain unity. The leadership Paul desires in the church has parallels in current leadership theory including servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970; 1977; McGhee-Cooper & Trammel, 2002; Spears & Lawrence, 2002), transformational leadership (Avolio & Bass, 1994; Burns, 1978) and followership (Chaleff, 1995; Kellerman, 2008; Kelley, 1988).

These approaches use a systems lens, focus on the reciprocal interactions between leaders and followers, within the leadership process, and emphasise the methodological aspect of leadership rather than the sole-functioning leader. The ideas of Mary Parker Follett, dubbed the 'prophet of management' by Peter Drucker (1995:1), and her language usage reflects that of Paul in his letters to the churches at Ephesus and Corinth. As a writer and thinker in the 1920's, she was a contemporary of Allen (1912), whose pioneering work is cited in the introduction. Follett would have agreed with Allen on at least three points, namely 'paternalistic' oversight was limiting the church, organisations thrive when they are free to accomplish their designed purpose, and the power (Spirit) of that purpose can be trusted to shape and grow the church. Follett (1949:59) observes and writes about the presence of multiple leaders at all levels of an organisation. She emphasises the function of leadership as more important than the leader and position within an organisation. The function of leadership was to release 'creative energies' throughout the organisation. Follett (1949:58) seeks to debunk the myth that leaders were born, placing her amongst a group of 'post-heroic' leadership theorists, possibly the original. She believes that the idea of a single leader at the top of an organisation was losing its value because a single leader could not carry out all of the leadership functions.

Follett (1924:56) describes leadership as a reciprocal influence process between leaders, followers, and the context, what she named the total situation which was always evolving. Much like Paul, hers was an organisational level construct, a collective process that created

networks for communication and action. The power of leadership resided in the organisation's ability to integrate all of the demands, abilities and needs of the situation. Effective leadership created unity, coherence, individual freedom and efficacy, organisational growth, leaders out of followers and ultimately progress for society – a common good (Martin, 2008:312–316). 'Creating integrative unities' was the primary function of leadership and involved organising and coordinating all of the conflicting diverse forces or powers within an organisation. The leadership function located the 'unifying thread' within the competing ideas and demands. Leadership created a shared control and generated power for the entire organisation. Follett (1924:188–189) calls this 'power-with' distinguishing it from the more traditional 'power-over'. Leadership was about a 'we-power' (Martin, 2008:314), the power of the group together, diverse, conflicting yet integrating, generating new values, solutions and power for progress.

The primary functions of the executive leader were to grow power and release the energies of the people and resources in the organisation so that they could carry out the common purpose. Although the word *empowerment* was rarely used in her day, Howard (1998:203) describes Follett as 'empowerment's most explicit ancestor' and her concepts of growing and releasing power amongst the people are at the core of the model's depiction of the pastor as an 'enabling function'. The final parallel between the kind of leadership that Paul calls for and the kind of leadership Follett wrote about is captured in Follett's unique construct of the invisible leader (Metcalf & Urwick, 1941:287).

Through this line of reasoning, the invisible leader was synonymous with the common purpose. She observed that it was the purpose that generated loyalty and power, not an external force nor the influence of a single leader. She asserted that the charisma generated from the common purpose was more magnetic and enduring than the charisma of a person. Leaders and followers were both following the invisible leader, the common purpose, creating a strong dynamic union. The invisible leader generated power and guided the efforts of the whole. This kind of pull, an invisible force that empowers and keeps the group together would be an apt description of the Spirit in Paul's writings. It is the Spirit that ultimately gifts,

empowers and holds the fledgling groups of believers together. All of the believers are in a partnership of following Christ, the invisible leader.

To tie back to complex adaptive systems, the invisible leader is very similar to the construct of the strange attractor of meaning (Burns, 2002; Regine & Lewin, 2000; Schneider & Somers, 2006; Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2001; Wheatley, 1998) in that it draws people to the group and at the same time generates power and loyalty necessary for prolonged action. The common purpose is what drives the leadership of the church, in particular, leadership that seeks to enable all members to be engaged in the mission.

In an attempt to answer Osei-Mensah's original question (How do we develop orthopraxic leaders?) the new kind of leadership training must be one that de-emphasises professionalism and emphasises mission. That is to say, leaders must lead with the *missio Dei* in mind as had been indicated earlier. Perhaps it is best to start with a cursory analysis of terms. One must be cautious when analysing biblical terminology that *eisegesis* [reading into the text] does not occur. To simply assume that words always mean what they always meant may be to commit an exegetical fallacy (Barrick, 2008). Being cognisant of that reality, we therefore tread carefully through a brief analysis of the biblical terms that are most often translated into the English text as *lead*, *leader*, *leadership*, et cetera.

There are a number of words used to describe the concept of leadership in the Old Testament (OT). However, it is important to note that many of these words describe the literal action of leading and do not give insight into the process and development thereof. For example the word יָדָה (*yad*) is the primary root word from which the other terms are derived. In addition to being translated as *leadership* in Numbers 33:1 it is also translated as (numbers in brackets indicate the number of times it is used in the OT): *direction* (10), *hand* (859), *hands* (303), *means* (3), *ordain* (4), *place* (4), *possession* (4) and *power* (44) (Thomas, 1998). There are also several nuanced words that are used to describe an action of some kind (Thomas 1998), such as 'leading up the mountain' or 'brought up from the wilderness'. Such words include עָלָה (*alah*) (Ex 33:15) and יָצָא (*yatsah*) (Is 40:26). However, the one Hebrew word that

gives us much insight into the ancient understanding of the idea is contained in the word נָהַג (*naga*). This word is primarily translated as *lead* or *guide* although it is used in other synonymous ways as well (Thomas, 1998). נָהַג is used the most in the book of Psalms, 21 times in all. Most of these references speak of God's leadership to humankind – especially in times of need. They speak of leadership as being essentially destination-oriented. A follower is led from where he/she is to where they need to be. In the Psalms, this includes being led to: still waters (23:2), paths of righteousness (23:3), truth (25:5), a level path (27:11), the Rock (61:2), the way everlasting (139:10). It is important to note that the Psalms are poetic literature and thus the meaning is often couched within metaphors. However, it is clear that the follower is seeking direction from the leader. The leader is one who helps them see perspective (139:10), find a better way (43:3; 60:9) and ultimately assists them in their life purpose (23:2–3).

As Williams and McKibben suggest (1994:247), the shepherd does not drive the sheep but leads them. The implication is that the process is directed at the wellbeing of the 'sheep' and not the shepherd. It is others-centred. Whilst this picture does not provide us with a complete analysis of the biblical imagery of leadership (or even the OT) it does provide a useful analogy for the leadership approach advocated by the authors.

As with the OT, the New Testament also has a number of words that are used to describe the process and action of leadership. The most common usage comes via the use of the prepositional phrase marker εἰς (*eis*) literally translated as *into*. This is often manifested as the phrase 'leading into' or 'leads to' describing the result of a certain action. Similar usage is found for words like εἰμί (*eimi*) and πρὸς (*pros*). Of the remaining words such as: πρῶτος (*protos*), ὁδηγέω (*odeigeo*) and ἀπάγω (*apago*), the usage denotes the position of leadership or the physical act. Interestingly, the word that speaks most to the direct result of leadership – thus giving insight as to how it was understood – is the word πλανάω (*planao*). This word is only used to describe a negative effect – that of a person being led in the wrong direction (Mt 24:1, 4, 5; Mk 13:5; Jn 7:12). Additionally, this word is used exclusively in the Gospels, and in all but one occurrence is used only by Jesus himself. As we saw with the OT usage

(especially in Psalms), *πλανάω* is destination-oriented. In this case, the follower needs to take care as to how he is being led and where he is being led to. Jesus cautions (see above) several times against being led ‘astray’. The phrase ‘lead you astray’ is the essence of *πλανάω*. This indicates the effects of negative leadership as well. It speaks to the responsibility and culpability of the leadership role. In a world where many aspire to be leaders – at least positionally – perhaps it would serve as a sobering reminder that when taken lightly, executed poorly or abused egotistically, such leaders can do unforgivable harm to their followers. This kind of *leadership* has been labelled as ‘coercive’ (Williams & McKibben, 1994:201) and is described as manipulative and controlling. The motivation in leading is power and the goal is control. This is neither biblical nor particularly helpful – but maybe all too common. Perhaps it is no surprise that the type of people most appraised by this term in the New Testament is the ‘false prophets’.

It would seem as though whilst leadership may be directive, it need not be coercive (Clinton, 2012:175-179) but rather participative. That is, the idea of community must be at the heart of mentoring methodology. The word *community* is perhaps over-used today, but is an apt description of the Trinity. Within the concept of the Trinity, one can begin to understand the posture of mentoring referred to in the Scriptures. Indeed, for the Christian, the truest form of community exists in the theological inference of the Trinity. It is an inference simply because the word *trinity* does not appear in the biblical text. The texts, however, are laden with the idea of a Trinitarian relationship when they describe the self-revelation of God. In fact, it may be argued that an intimate understanding of the Trinity (see more in the ‘Afterword’ at the end of this chapter), of God’s being as essentially one of being in community, is what allows human beings to more fully grasp the nature of God, as opposed to an often convoluted doctrinal treatise that one must appropriate in the name of orthodoxy. God’s nature is thus therefore best understood as a ‘community of persons’ (Cartledge, 2006:143; Grenz, 1994:60).

God’s being is a community of equal members working together in a seamless synergy accomplishing the will of the Three-in-one in perfect harmony. At times, this relationship has

been likened to a 'dance' (Baker-Trinity, 2012:12) loosely coming from the Greek *parichoresis* meaning to 'dance around' or to put it more obtusely 'interpenetration'. McLaren puts it this way: 'each person exists in dynamic social relationship with the others, and God is the relational unity in which they relate' (McLaren, 2012:56). This is not easily understood or appropriated, but once it is, it has profound effects on how we see the community of the church and by extension, its academies. God exists ontologically in Triune community, and the leaders of God's people ought thus to reflect such communal-mindedness in the way that they relate to one another and carry out the work of the kingdom. Hess (2006:07) refers to the idea of communal-mindedness or communal knowing as 'treasures in jars of clay'.

Building from the biblical metaphor and expanding the meaning into education, Hess (2006:07) indicates that as members of the community of God, we have latent capacity that ought to be recognised and that effective leaders desire to see fulfilled. If our leadership grid includes a healthy view of the Triune God and understands the practical ramifications of this doctrine as well, this may orient church leaders to be more effective in leading the complex adaptive system known as the *church*.

Some have indicated that Paul's conception of the church (1 Cor 12:12–27) was a 'body of interdependent believers, all of whom contributed to the functioning of the whole' (Grenz, 1994:544). The concept of an independent or self-sufficient Christian would have been preposterous to Paul. To illustrate, it was a very serious matter to expel a member from the community of faith, as Paul discusses in 1 Corinthians 5:13. In contrast, today members are often 'struck from the rolls' in certain instances for administrative accuracy and possibly to boost the percentage of active members. For Paul it seems clear that isolation from this community resulted in profound existential and relational consequences, and therefore, required a specific process. For Paul, the community requires unity which is in turn a characteristic of the Triune God. If the nature of the church is to reflect God's communal nature, then it stands to reason that training for leadership of the church would include serious consideration of what it means to lead a community. At the core, mentoring is a

communal relationship and would be a fitting method to train church leaders to lead within the context of a community of faith.

With mentorship added, theological education becomes more than passing on a body of knowledge (experiential or otherwise), to include learning how to be in partnership with God together, in community, and what this together-with- God type of communal leadership entails. Research suggests that mentor relationships often prove beneficial to all parties involved (Wilson & Johnson, 2001:122) and can often prove crucial to future success. Therefore the concern and theories posited in this article are of critical importance.

4.6 How do we get there? A new model of leadership and leadership training

As the Father, Son and Spirit work together in Trinitarian synergy, so we ought to model the same in our communities of faith. Note the apostle Paul's specific use of the plural *you* in his letters (especially in Phil 3:17 and 2 Thess 3:9). Indeed, 1 Thessalonians 1:7 is particularly enlightening. In this passage Paul refers to the church as a whole when he writes, 'and so **you** have become a model ...' In this passage Paul expands the meaning of the noun *τύπος* to *example, model* or *pattern* (Kittel *et al.*, 1964), rather than the weaker meaning of *impression* (Jn 20:25).

Paul writes:

'You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia' (1 Thess 1:6–7).

The idea here is, as the community modelled (*imitators* from the Koine Greek *μιμέομαι*) themselves after Paul and God, so they too became models for others – all of which is done in love (joy) with each other and for each other. It is our contention that good mentorship is

done with the above theological understanding in mind. Isolated, top-down, instruction-laden approaches that characterise at least some theological educational programmes today (as we have discussed above) contradict this biblical motif. To take the focus off the ‘autonomous individual’ and to shift to thinking ‘collectively’ presupposes a level of care and concern for a person that mirrors our concern for self. It is to ‘love your neighbour as you love yourself’ (Mt 22:39) and it is profoundly Trinitarian.

At the heart of it all is love, a point well made by Wright (2009):

For Christians it’s always a love game: God’s love for the world calling out an answering love from us, enabling us to discover that God not only happens to love us (as though this was simply one aspect of his character) but that he is love itself. (Wright, 2009: 118)

4.7 How do we get there?

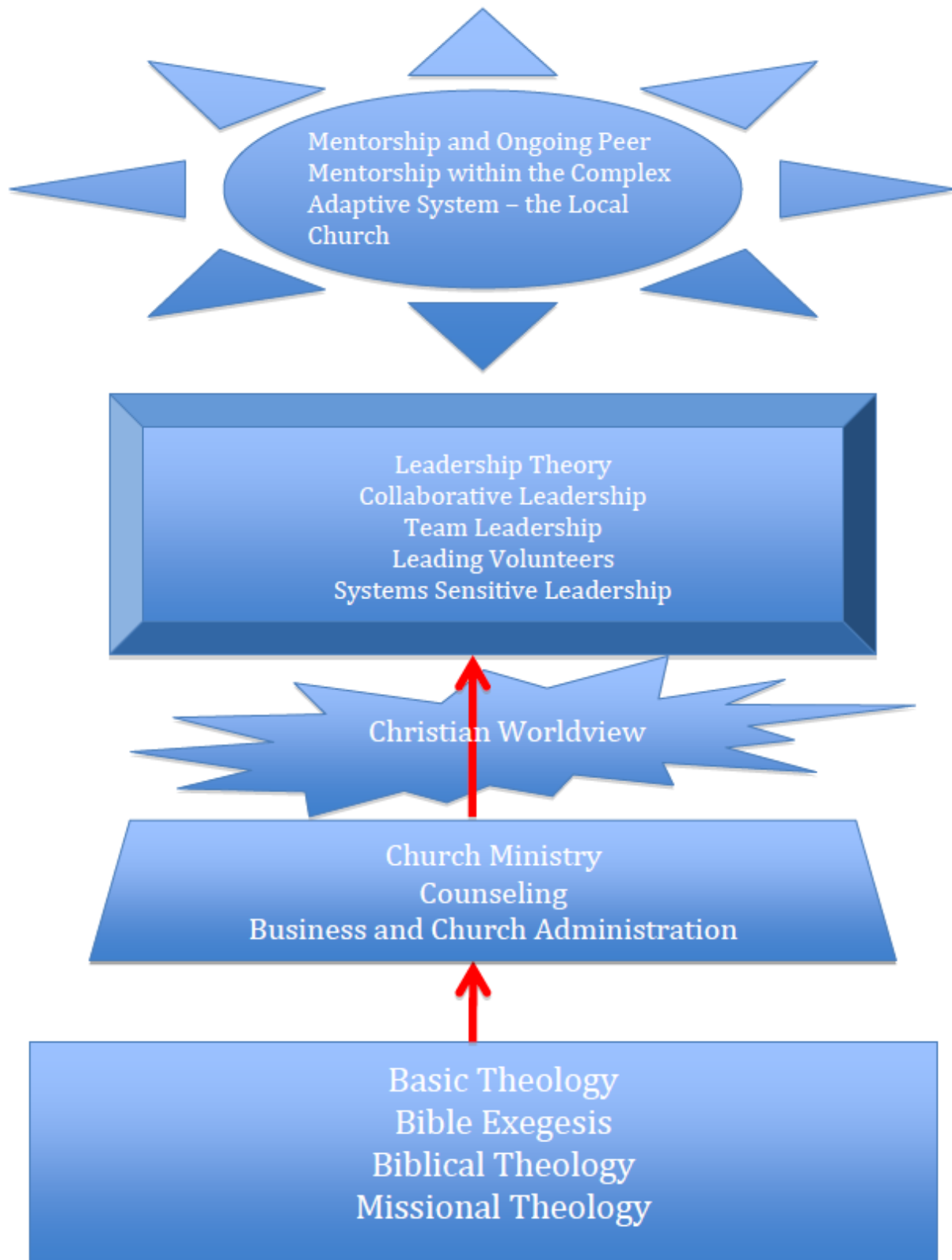
It is our assertion that mentorship must exemplify and model (*τύπος*) community and interdependency, not individualism and independency. In Sanders’ (1984) classic work on the subject of Paul as a mentor, the ‘community’ paradigm we mention above comes to the fore. Sanders (1984) states: ‘Paul’s method of preparing Timothy for his lifework was deeply instructive ... He poured his own personality and convictions into Timothy, and was prepared to spend much time with him’ (Sanders, 1984:179). During his protégé’s fledgling career Paul bestowed much useful advice on Timothy (1 Tim 6:13–15; 20–21; 4:1–2) but it was his posture towards Timothy that displayed the paradigm of which we speak. We quote Sanders (1984:180) again when he states: ‘Paul assigned Timothy tasks far above his conscious ability, but encouraged and fortified him in their execution ... a great deal of Timothy’s training was received on the job as he traveled with Paul – a unique privilege for so young a man’ (Sanders, 1984:180). Paul not only gave Timothy tasks to accomplish, but also allowed him to participate in their life together, and therewith to observe his mentor’s flaws and strengths.

Earlier in this article, we have alluded to the fact that this sort of community-driven (missional) mentorship is lacking in the church and is lacking in theological education paradigms as well.

We have seen that leadership is a biblical concept. We have seen that the concern of the leader as exemplified in the 'shepherd/sheep' motif of Psalm 23, is towards the wellbeing of the protégé. This is also seen in the example of the Trinitarian God, who as a perfect exemplar of community leads us on God's mission as a church (Wright, 2006:24).

Additionally, we see the life of the apostle Paul who exemplified the 'enabling factor' as described in Figure 1, earlier in this article, in his dealings with his own protégés as well as in his concept of the community of the church as a whole, best embodied in his imagery of 1 Corinthians 12. In the context of the *missio Dei*, Paul organically fostered the growth not only of churches as complex adaptive systems but also the leaders of those churches as complex adaptive leaders. This could not be accomplished by replicating himself, but through wise and careful mentoring, allowed the protégé to develop the skills needed for the task in situ. In the North American context prevailing MTI's, in partnership with local churches, might better prepare leaders through the addition of more leadership development courses and the addition of a mentoring process that continues long after the trainee leaves the MTI. This type of training process is represented in Figure 2 ('A proposed model of local church leadership training').

Figure 2. A Proposed Model of Local Church Leadership Training



4.8 Conclusion

This article seeks to develop a framework from which a new leadership development paradigm can emerge for church leadership. Given the rapid attrition of church leaders, it seems imperative that the church attempt to find new models to equip those who possess a Christian worldview effectively to navigate the challenges inherent in church leadership in the 21st century. The model presented in Figure 2 ('A proposed model of local church leadership training') illustrates the path through which an emerging church leader can develop into an empowered leader who can sustain in leadership roles within the church. This article proposes that new church leaders equip themselves as follows:

- Obtain a firm understanding of theology through formal educational outlets.
- Focus on their own development through internships and entry-level ministry work.
- Continue to enhance their Christian worldview as a dyadic learning process that incorporates both mission and professionalism.
- Pursue knowledge of current leadership and systems thinking literature.
- Embrace both formal and informal mentorship opportunities as they progress in their ministry career.

The leadership development framework presented in this article creates an opportunity for empirical testing and is supported by literature. By replicating previous research in the new context of church leadership, this model can be tested and adapted in a manner that allows for optimal leadership development for emerging church leaders.

4.9 AFTERWORD: MORE ON THE TRINITARIAN PERSPECTIVE

Throughout the above article and the study as a whole, reference is made to a perspective in Christian leadership development (and especially online theological education) referenced as a “Trinitarian” perspective. This perspective represents a mindset that the educator ought to have as they teach in the online environment (especially) as it helps to frame the understanding of who God is, how He relates to Himself and us and therefore how we can relate to the ‘other’ as we teach and mentor. This mindset is also helpful when examining the model of online mentoring that is proposed in Chapter 5.

The Trinitarian Perspective

Why is a study of the Trinity relevant in the broader context of online theological education? Firstly, it is important to understand that the goal set is not about trying to prove the notion of the Trinity from a Biblical (Barth, 2004), theological (Grenz, 1994) or systematic (Grudem, 2009) point of view. Secondly, the aim is not to produce an apologetic on the importance of the Trinity over against other (mono) theistic religions. Although the aforementioned tasks are appreciated and important, this study however, is concerned with the why rather than the what questions related to the Trinity.

While it is accepted among the greater church community that the ‘Trinity’ as a doctrine is of prime importance (Leith, 1982), the reasons as to why this is so (other than just being ‘orthodox’) is less certain. Is one to accept this doctrine as vital because since creedal Christianity, it has been seen as thus? Or perhaps this doctrine has been underappreciated in all its nuances simply because it has been so commonly accepted and therefore ‘left alone’ by most of its proponents. As Reeves (2012:43) astutely states:

The notion that the Trinity is an awkward and odd irrelevance, an unsightly wart on our knowledge of the true God. And so, when it comes to sharing our faith, we speak of God’s offer of salvation, we speak of God’s free grace, but we try not to let on that the God we are speaking of is a Trinity. We wax lyrical about the beauty of the Gospel, but not so much about the beauty of the God whose Gospel it is.

This author believes that the Trinitarian perspective is an important one in terms of ensuring we are true to the intentions of Scripture but also it is a vital undergirding to have when discussing Christian leadership development, especially in the virtual communities of today. It is a perspective based on the ontology or the nature of our being or existence. Thus, the nature of the Triune God and how this Divine Nature ought to inform our praxis is what we are discussing here.

Early disciples battled as they attempted to reconcile the understandings of monotheism, the Lordship of Christ and the belief in the presence of the Holy Spirit (Grenz, 1994:54) much as people do today. The phrase ‘one essence, three persons’ was the prevailing climax in an attempt to explain it. As Karkkainen (2007:16) points out, renewed interest in the Trinitarian ontology today has spawned new ideas in economics, gender issues, environmental concerns and others. It is hoped that with a grid of a ‘Trinitarian perspective’ in mind, a contribution can be made with respect to theological education in the online reality. Below is a list and explanation of the four main characteristics inherent within this perspective. Some of what is said below has been discussed already and will be discussed later, but it has been collated and added here for ease of reference.

4.9.1 Trinitarian characteristic # 1: Community

As has already been discussed in the chapter, the word ‘community’ is perhaps an over-used one these days. People use it to speak of nations, tribes, systems and of course, to describe various kinds of social media. The church too is a community. These communities of believers, like all communities, have certain boundaries that allow people to know who is ‘in’ or ‘out’. In many churches today, people undergo a process whereby they become ‘members’ of a particular church which can involve classes, assurance of salvation testimonies and baptism, etc. This formalised practice places much focus on the individual unlike the earliest forms seen in the Scriptures. Although the early church had a method to know who was in their community – ‘The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved’ (Acts 2:47 and see Acts 2:41 and 6:7) – there is not much detail about how they did it. Grenz (1994:544) indicates that Paul’s conception of the church (1 Cor 12:12-27) was as a ‘body of interdependent believers, all of whom contributed to the functioning of the whole’ (Grenz,

1994:544) and to him the idea of a self-sufficient Christian would have been preposterous. This is why, for example, it was such a serious matter to expel one from such a community as Paul advocated in 1 Corinthians 5:13. Unlike today, when people may simply be ‘struck off the rolls’, for Paul, isolation from this community had profound existential and salvific consequences. Thus, our understanding of what it means to be a part of this community is vital and for that we must turn our attention back to the Triune God. Consider how Paul may have understood the community in the Trinity when he penned these words:

May the grace of the *Lord Jesus Christ*, and the love of *God*, and the fellowship of the *Holy Spirit* be with you all (2 Cor 13:14 – italics mine).

Again, and to emphasize what has been stated throughout the chapter preceding, for Christians, surely the truest form of community exists in the Theological inference of the Trinity. It is an inference simply because the word ‘Trinity’ does not appear in the Biblical text. However, the text is laden with the idea whenever we see the self-revelation of God. In fact, it may be argued that an intimate understanding of the Trinity is what allows us to understand fully who God is, but not in the form of a mere convoluted doctrinal treatise that one must appropriate in the name of Orthodoxy, as already stated. As Wright (2009:140) suggests:

Once we glimpse the doctrine—or the fact!—of the Trinity, we dare not slide back into a generalized sense of a religion paying distant homage to a god who (though somewhat more complicated than we had previously realized) is merely a quasi-personal source of general benevolence.

Unlike Schleiermacher and later Kant, who proposed that ‘whether we worship three or ten persons in the Deity makes no difference’ (Kant, 1996:264), or Brunner (2002:206) who believed this doctrine to be theological but not Biblical, I stand with Zizioulas who instead suggests, ‘Trinitarian theology has profound existential consequences’ (Zizioulas, 1991:19) and Reeves (2012:43) who poignantly states:

What if God was not Father, Son, and Spirit? What if God was really just a single person? Well then, for eternity before Creation he must have been all by himself: no relationship, and nobody and nothing else for him to love. And, not having ever known fellowship himself, would he want to have fellowship with us? Would he even know what fellowship means? By

definition, a single-person God is not inherently about love and relationship.

Others, like Erickson, (1998) speak of the importance of the doctrine for the church today as well. So, God's nature is thus therefore best understood as a 'community of persons' (Cartledge, 2006:143; Grenz, 1994:60). This community of equal members works together in a seamless synergy accomplishing the will of the three-in-one in perfect harmony. At times, this relationship has been likened to a 'dance' (Baker-Trinity, 2012:12) loosely coming from the Greek *perichoresis* (see more on this idea presented in the model of Trinitarian online mentoring in Chapter 5) meaning to 'dance around' or to put it more obtusely 'interpenetration'. McLaren puts it this way: 'each person exists in dynamic social relationship with the others, and God is the relational unity in which they relate' (McLaren, 2012:56). This has profound effects on how we see the community of 'the church' and by extension, its academies. God is a community and we, His people, ought to reflect such communal-mindedness. The Trinitarian perspective then requires that mentoring be done with a deep and abiding belief in the importance of community in the educational spaces online. Every effort is made to allow for such community as it reflects the God that is being discussed in those spaces!

4.9.2 Trinitarian Characteristic # 2 - Love

In 1 John 4:8 we read: 'God is love'. A simpler yet more profound statement would be hard to find. The God who is love, demonstrated love for his Son – Jesus. In Matthew 3:16-17, we see Jesus as being the one in whom the Father is 'well pleased'. This passage, in addition to showing the Triune God in simultaneous action, also shows us that Love within the Trinity is intrinsic. Reeves (2012:44) states:

As the Son of God, Jesus reveals a God who is a Father. Before anything else, that is the eternal identity of the God revealed in Jesus. Before all things, the God made known in Jesus was a Father loving his Son. If at any time the Father did not have a Son to whom he gave his life and love, then he simply would not be a Father. To be who he is, then, this God must give out life and love. And so we begin to see why the Trinity is such good news: God is love because God is a Trinity, because for eternity this God has been giving out—positively bursting with—love for his Son

In John 13:34, Jesus gives his followers a 'new commandment', simply: 'love one another, as I have loved you'. Jesus wanted his followers to understand that love for the 'other' is an essential ingredient to the Christian life. Thus, our churches and theological programmes must embrace this ideal in praxis-orientated ways. Building loving communities online as we teach and mentor is an important facet of the Trinitarian perspective.

4.9.3 Trinitarian Characteristic # 3 – Unity/Diversity

The concept of the unity/diversity paradigm cannot be removed from the communal and loving aspects explained above. They all inform each other to a certain degree, yet are distinct enough to warrant specific attention. The Unity aspect has been somewhat dealt with in dealing with 'community' with a few additions here. To risk oversimplification, God is in Unity because God is One. That is to say, there are no separate agendas at play. Even though we may say the Father is the 'Creator', the Son and the Spirit are 'present' (Gen 1:2) in the creating act. The Son is the Redeemer but the Father and Spirit are involved (to say the least) in this ministry of reconciliation. As has been stated earlier, the interrelation, partnership and mutual dependence within the Godhead build an 'eternal, ontological unity' (Grenz, 1994:68). Reeves adds:

The loving unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit gives us a rationale for why men and women, black and white, introvert and extrovert should come together, not to be identical, but to be united in love (Reeves, 2012:45).

However, simultaneously, God is also diverse. There is differentiation within the unity. The persons are not one and the same but there is a plurality of personage. As the refrain of the classic hymn states: 'God in three persons, blessed Trinity!' Human attempts at trying to describe this ineffability of God have often proved to be insufficient. Instead of clarifying, they tend to obfuscate the issue even more. Words like 'generation' and 'procession' have sowed seeds for debate that has not yielded clarity. Simply understood, the members of the Godhead fulfill a specific role in a singular Divine initiative. This role is not the same, hence the diversity but it is part of one purpose, hence the unity. It is precisely this apparent paradoxical nature of this reality that makes life challenging within theological education online. One practical outcome of this understanding is that one does not mentor with the

intent of replicating oneself in that ‘other’ person, but rather to allow them to be ‘different’. Allowing and embracing that difference is reflective of a God who embraces diversity and unity simultaneously, albeit in a more perfect way than we are likely to encounter in our relationships!

4.9.4 Trinitarian Characteristic # 4 – Interdependence

Elkington (2013:01) has suggested that pastors are leaving the ministry in spite of being ‘well trained’ in ratiocinative knowledge. As he states: ‘Most pastors entering the ministry may be vastly unaware of the leadership challenges before them and the adversity they will face’.

Elkington also cites Oden (2013:8) who suggests:

There can be no absolute individualism in the body of Christ. The church is from the outset defined as a single living organism, an *interdependent* body with every member depending on the community of faith made alive by the Son through the Spirit (*italics mine*).

This *perichoresis* of mutually working to the benefit of each other may also be embraced in the African term ‘Ubuntu’. O’ Collins (2004:177) suggests that autonomous individuals ‘become thereby less of a person in the sense that such a policy of shunning serious relationships and interdependence will not contribute to their lasting human growth and well-being’. He goes on to conclude with ‘we need each other to be ourselves’ (O’ Collins, 2004:177). This is a good way of viewing the Triune God. The relationships within the Godhead are needed to be truly God. Independence is not an option or a desire. The statement of Christ ‘I and the Father are one’ (Jn 8:58) is not just Christ proving His deity, but it reveals the relationship they enjoy – they cannot be apart – they are ‘one’ and that is interdependence. Interdependence is at the heart of a Trinitarian perspective and the church and theological institutions alike perhaps need to take note of this implication for their programmes of leadership development. We might well need to ask: ‘How would teaching and learning change if it was done with a spirit of ‘interdependence’?

These four principles (and more could well be found I’m sure) inform the perspective that this author argues for throughout this study. As online theological educators wrestle with the permutations of what it means to teach and mentor well in the online environment, this author

believes that the Trinitarian Perspective is also needed to help inform how the teaching and mentoring decisions are made for the betterment of all concerned and for the glory of God.

'iSeminary': Christian theological and leadership development in the online environment. A Practical Theological study

Chapter 5

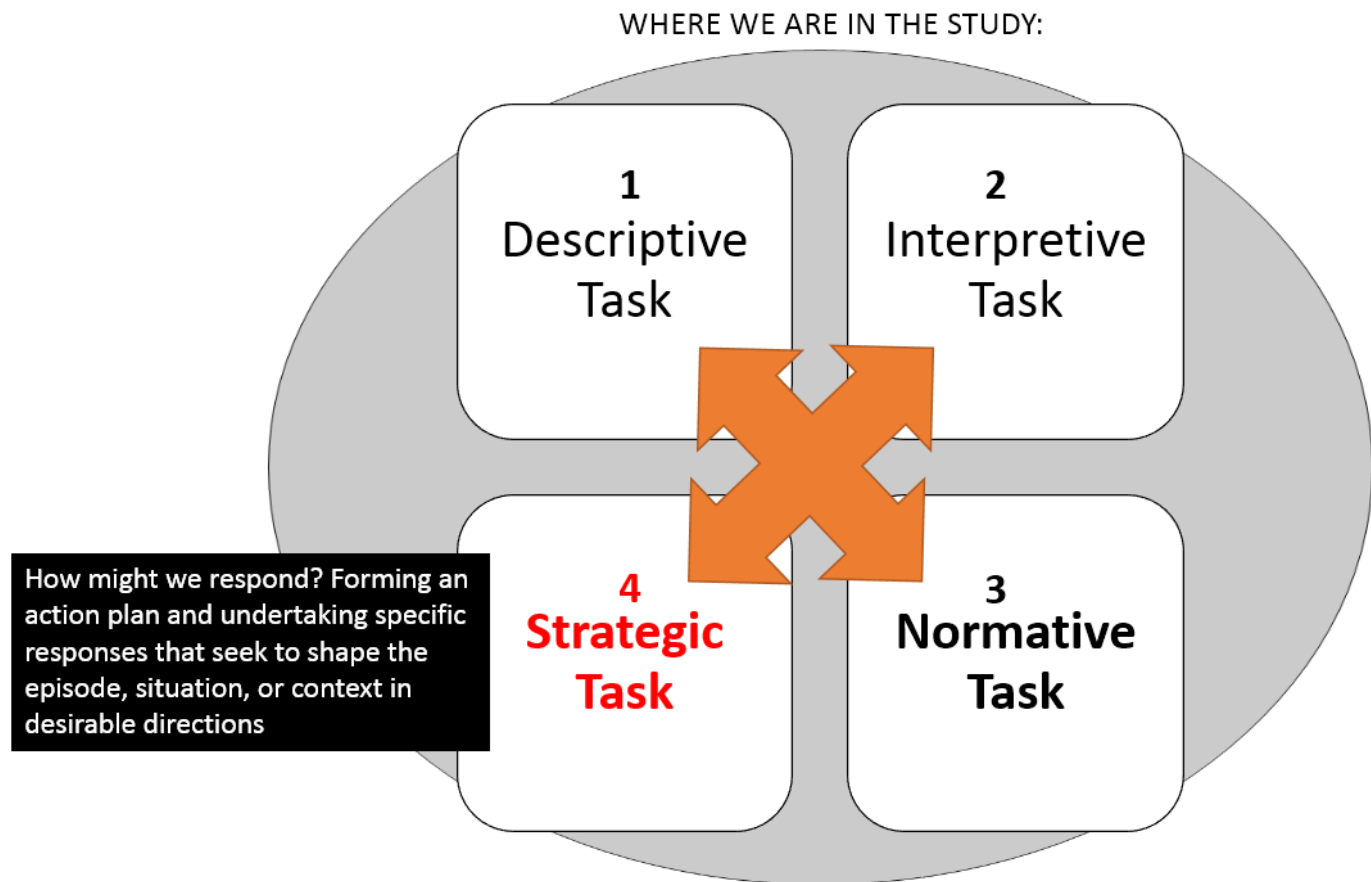
Christian theological and leadership development in the online environment

This chapter examines the **strategic task** of practical theological interpretation. *Using theological concepts to interpret particular episodes, situations or contexts, constructing ethical norms to guide our responses, and learning from 'good practice'* (Osmer, 2008:4). In answering the question, *how might we respond?* -- this author will be focusing on the strategic task of practical theological interpretation by providing a model and suggestions as to how the developments discussed in the previous chapters may be incorporated into online theological education within a Trinitarian paradigm. In brief, the developments that have been discussed thus far which contribute to the formulation of the model are:

- Chapter 2 – The empirical survey of Theological Universities in the North-East Pennsylvania region of the USA, and the conclusion that online mentoring is not happening in the manner that is desired. More alarmingly, a strategic effort to change that and a paradigm to follow seems to be lacking.
- Chapter 3 - The literature study that highlighted the nature and definition of mentoring from a societal and historical perspective, suggesting that mentoring online is possible but has not always been approached strategically within theological education.
- Chapter 4 – The literature and Biblical study about the need for and a the Biblical definition of mentoring within the Christian faith. It was shown that to redress some of the alarming problems within the church leadership of today (and tomorrow), a clear and cogent strategy must be sought for.

It is with the above in mind that the paradigm to follow has been formulated.

According to Osmer (2008), this is where this chapter fits into the present study:



This strategic perspective however, would not tell institutions how to accomplish contextual challenges or goals, rather it will simply show via a constructive model what they ought to try to accomplish (Osmer, 2008: 131-2).

5.1 **Brief Review:**

As we have seen throughout the study, technology has without doubt changed the way we live our lives (Borgmann, 1984:03). According to Mwanza (2014), tablet computer usage in South Africa increased by at least 100% from April 2012 to April 2013 which exemplifies the fact that tablet technology is not only in the realm of the elite. Educational institutions are starting to embrace this new space and some have taken to converting their classes and even textbooks to a completely paperless environment (Sharma, 2013:58). In this new reality, all a student needs to complete their course of study – from lecture to assignments – is a tablet (or even a smartphone) and a broadband connection (Kolowich, 2013). So, the times have changed and technology has been at the forefront of that change, the question that remains is how best to utilise this technology to further the aims for which institutions exist.

In Chapter 2 (heading 3) the topic of ‘meta-themes’ was discussed drawing from the interpretation of data from the interviews that were conducted for this study. In Chapter 3 we discussed the ‘mega trends’ in the online learning world, with a specific focus on mentoring from recent literature and studies that have been conducted by others. Questions that were discussed included ones like: If education has indeed shifted suddenly into a new era, should this be celebrated or lamented? Should we be looking forward or backward to find solutions and best practices? What danger does this reality pose to the practice of mentoring? Teaching online is no easy task (nor, for that matter, is learning). Hege (2011:14) suggests that:

The online model is still novel enough to require deliberate and intentional reflection on the part of the instructor, specifically in terms of creating a safe and vibrant community of teaching and learning that respects and values the unique considerations and needs of the learners, the material, the instructor, and the delivery platform itself.

We examined the idea of ‘learner-driven education’ which observed that online education by its very nature, seems to be emphasising this ‘learner-driven’ approach (De Waard *et al.*, 2012:42; Peck, 2015) and to a higher level than before. The level of customisation that students now ‘enjoy’ is clearly unprecedented. Mentoring, by its nature a slower, more

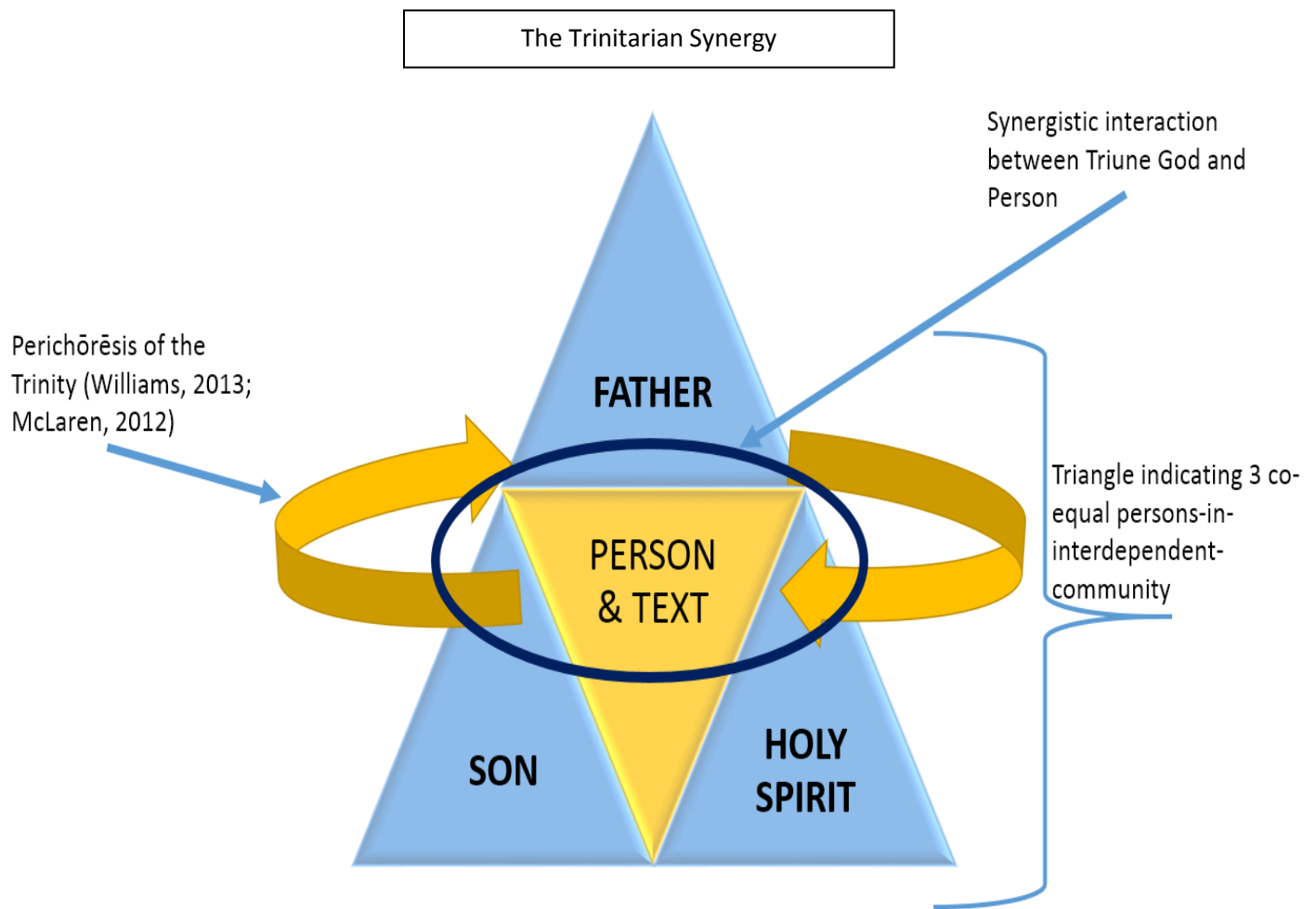
organic process gets lost in this wave of instant gratification. For students, the benefits of increased access to learning; flexibility of place, pace and interaction; and immediate feedback on progress (Sinclair, 2003:79-80) are just some of the reasons why this platform is growing exponentially. We further examined the advantages and disadvantages of the platform and suggested that, like any learning platform, online education is not perfect and cannot be relied upon as a 'silver bullet', but it also has distinct advantages (access to a global pool of students for example) that make the platform attractive and viable.

But, is it a good platform for mentoring? We have discussed how online education practitioners today are seeing success in mentoring online, but that it does take a shift in perspective for the 'traditionally' focused educator. 'E-mentoring' must be 'truly mutual, with both parties highly invested' (Plummer & Nyang'au, 2009:812). Mentoring is no easy task and perhaps in the online world, because it is a 'disembodied' (Maddox, 2010:12) world, the task becomes all the more challenging. People are not computers, or mere minds. We are minds in bodies' (Rovai *et al.*, 2008:14). So the concern is for the whole person '*cura personalis*' (Rovai *et al.*, 2008:4) not just the dissemination of knowledge (Rushkoff, 2015).

How does one overcome the challenge of simply not being physically present to engage '*in situ*' with a student? It would seem to boil down largely to methodology and pedagogical choices that accentuate the strengths and minimise the weaknesses of the online mentoring space. It may be suggested that good mentors always find ways best to engage with their mentees and this should be no different in the online mentoring reality. Furthermore, this author believes that a 'personal touch' of some kind must simply be retained, as I will explain later.

5.2.1 Implications for Online Theological Education with a Trinitarian Perspective: a suggested model

Throughout this study, a chief concern has been the implications of the online educational world on mentoring within online theological education. As has been stated (see Chapter 4 -- 'afterword'), this author believes additionally that our theological education needs to be understood through a *particular* theological lens. I have argued that one such lens is that of the Trinitarian perspective. This lens allows for us to understand how one may mentor one believer to another in disembodied contexts because this lens explores the depths of community and personhood. It allows us to understand how community can be built online when we understand the interdependency found in the Trinitarian relationship firstly and that relationship with humanity next. As Williams (2013:1) and McLaren (2012:13) have suggested, the relationship within the Trinity can be understood through the term *perichoresis* meaning to 'dance around' or to put it more obtusely 'interpenetration'. McLaren puts it this way: 'each person exists in dynamic social relationship with the others, and God is the relational unity in which they relate' (McLaren, 2012:56). This dynamic relationship in turn relates to the believer this way through the Scriptures. It may be diagrammed thus:



While there have been many attempts over the years to explain the relationship and nature of the Trinity, it is perhaps safe to say at least that God's nature is best understood as a 'community of persons' (Cartledge, 2006:143; Grenz, 2000:60). This community of equal members works together in a seamless synergy accomplishing the will of the three-in-one in perfect harmony (Mt 3:16-17). This is not easily understood or appropriated, but once it is, it has profound effects on how we see the community of 'the church' and by extension, its academies. Human attempts at trying to describe this ineffability of God have often proved to be insufficient. Instead of clarifying, they tend to obfuscate the issue even more. Words like 'generation' and 'procession' have sowed seeds for debate that has not yielded clarity. Simply understood, the members of the Godhead fulfill a specific role in a singular Divine initiative. These roles are not the same, hence the diversity but it is part of one purpose,

hence the unity. It is precisely this apparent paradoxical nature of this reality that makes life challenging within the church. The church after all, is a group of disparate peoples, each holding a different function yet the purpose is one (Phil 2:1-4; Eph 4:11-15). In the model I will propose next, this is important because each of the ‘members’ play a different but equally important role in the relationship.

Because the Trinity is a community, believers and educators should in turn be interested in community. Theological educators have throughout the ages (at least in theory) been interested in developing such community, going beyond ‘content’ and being concerned with the whole person (Heinemann, 2005:282). As stated earlier, the concern is for the whole person ‘*cura personalis*’ (Rovai *et al.*, 2008:4) not just the dissemination of knowledge (Rushkoff, 2015). The good news is that OTE (online theological education) not only allows for community (Hege, 2011:16), but perhaps supports it better than its traditional counterpart. Many in the typical classroom environment have presumed that community is built almost ‘automatically’ because people are occupying the same room for a certain period of time each day or week, but this is simply not the case. In fact, as Heinemann (2005) confesses: ‘teachers, I think—and I include myself at the top of the list—have been so busy teaching their subjects that they have little time for their students’ (2005:283). This ought not to be the posture of the online theological mentor. The process of ‘social construction’ (Cornu, 2008:71) and a constructivist (De Waard *et al.*, 2012:7) approach to teaching in general are important processes here. OTE needs to be conscious of the theologising process and contextual realities and realise that they are made all the more meaningful by the diversity afforded in OTE.

With this reality in mind, this author would like to suggest a way forward for online education and mentoring that is mindful of the TOP. As discussed in Chapter 2, many theological education paradigms simply do not have a theological system to think through how the education is delivered. As a reminder, some of the statements included thus under the heading ‘Meta-Theme 5: OTE programmes are run much the same way as non-OTE programmes’ (2.4.5). Beyond the general mission statements of the various institutions, there

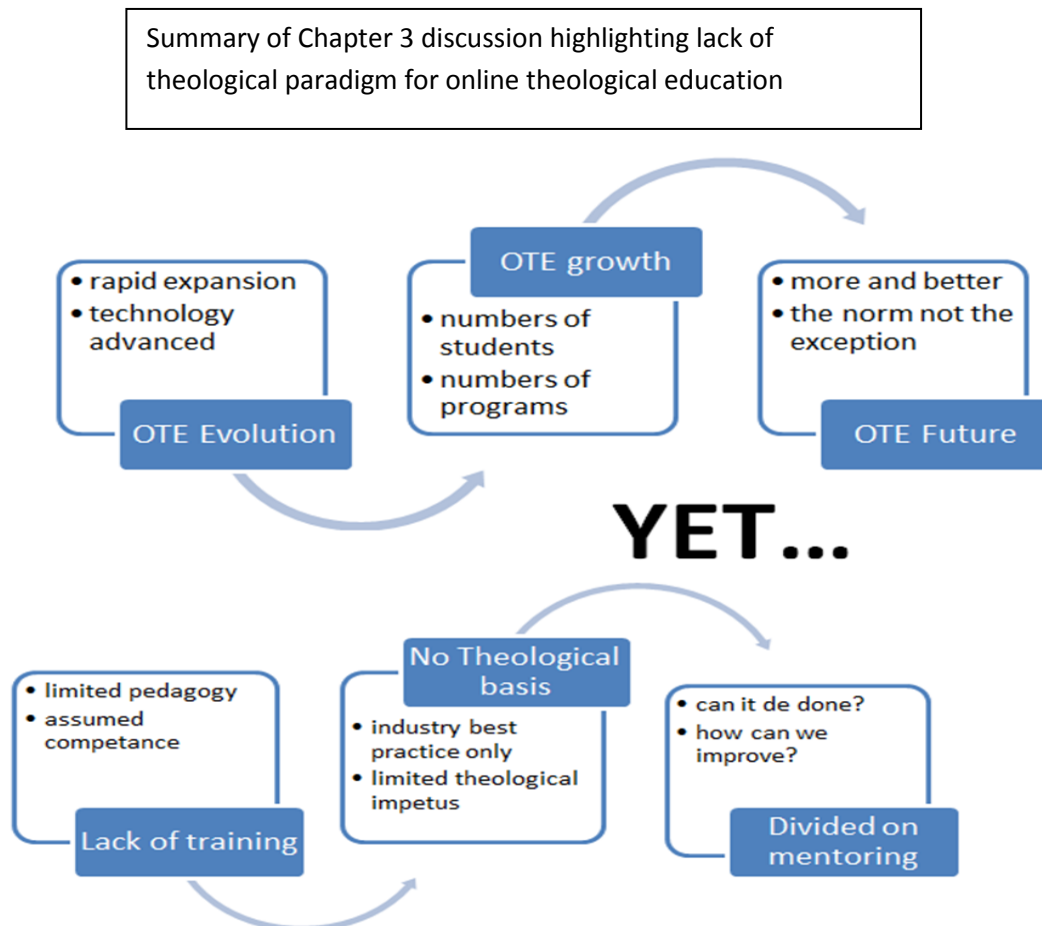
does not appear to be a theological philosophy that undergirds these choices. The following sentiments appear to support this statement:

‘...I don’t think that really has a tie, a direct tie back to a theological basis. So, the little bit that we have in writing is probably more theoretical and I would say that as a whole, there is not really a strong tie’.

‘...No, I would say there isn’t an emphasis on anything in particular.’

‘...The agenda would be our college mission statement, which is to educate students to think and live a biblical worldview, and serve Christ in their church and society. So that's the broad one.’

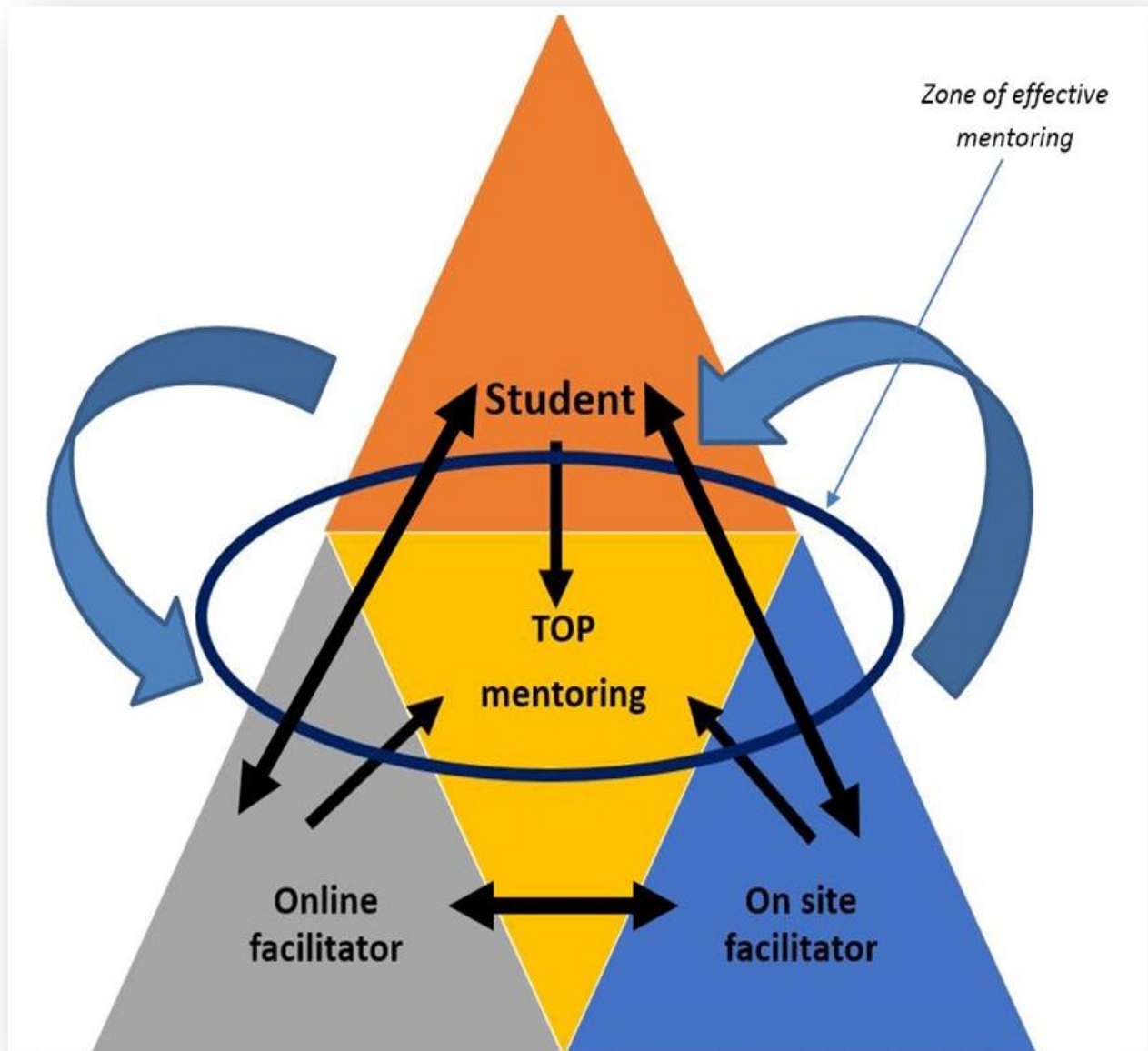
The following diagram was also used to show the current state and some of the issues the empirical study raised:



We have addressed the issues of training and tools that OTE's may use which would address the 'assumed competency' alluded to in the empirical study. Additionally, we have looked at how mentoring can be achieved in the online space exclusively. However, how can we overcome the 'disembodied' nature of the mentoring strata? I believe the answer may lie in the theological basis which gives rise to a praxiological solution that can be tested and applied.

But how would it work? This is the strategic task of Osmer (2008:04). There is more study that needs to be done, perhaps in creating and testing various theological grids, however, this author believes that this approach would be a good first step at least in advancing this conversation. Cornu (2008) correctly suggests that the challenge for OTE faculty is more 'personal' than their non-Christian counterparts, not the least of which when it comes to determining successful skills attainment (Cornu, 2008:84). Character has, and continues to be a key determiner for 'success', so how does one assess this in a human being one has never met in person? Practically, and with Osmer's (2008:04) process in mind, I share a diagram of what is proposed with an explanation following:

Diagram of TOP mentoring for OTE:



Using the same triangular structure as with the understanding of the Trinity, and again with the 'person' (in this case the student) at the centre, we can begin to see the synergy that can occur between the three persons.

Borrowing from the same paradigm as the *perichoresis* of the Trinity, effective mentoring in the online space also has three *interdependent* components. They are:

1. *The student* – who engages with an onsite and online mentor. The student is not an ‘empty bucket’ to simply receive instruction, but they too, contribute to the process through their own research and application of knowledge. Their experiences and interpretations are vital in the ongoing, mutually beneficial relationship. In online education, this aspect becomes more critical as the student and mentor are both on more ‘level’ playing fields – both interact predominantly behind a screen. It is critical that the students have ownership of the process as well and feel that they can make a contribution.
2. *The online mentor* – essentially the content expert who is pedagogically skilled and is familiar with best current online learning practices. They would offer mentoring specific to concept attainment. The online mentor is a person who has received the necessary training in order to design online classes that are engaging and utilise the most contextually appropriate technological learning methods in creating and distributing content. The online mentor would design learning activities that would stress the importance of real-life practice.
3. *The onsite mentor* – essentially a seasoned practitioner who assists in helping the student apply content to ‘real life’. The individual is one who may possess a different skill set to the online mentor. This would be a praxis-oriented individual who would possess the necessary character and skills to develop practical outcomes for the student to be ‘tested’. The onsite and online mentors would have a collaborative relationship based on the mutual goal of achieving the best interests of the student. The onsite mentor would view, assist and assess how the student performs and provide feedback to the online mentor.

These three persons would work together and ultimately all benefit from the process and relationship that is formed in the time spent together. It is designed to be a mutually beneficial relationship for all parties concerned (Plummer & Nyang'au, 2009:812; Sinclair, 2003:89). Just as all the relationships within the Godhead are needed to be truly God, the same would apply here in order to be truly 'holistic'. Interdependence is at the heart of the paradigm here and perhaps educators and institutions need to take note of this implication for their programmes. We need to ask: 'How would teaching and learning change if it was done with a spirit of 'interdependence'? This paradigm attempts to try and give an answer to this. The mentoring space is now given to a 'team' rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. Does it work? This author believes it can but it must still be tested.

5.3 Steps to implementation:

Institutions who aim to do this would have to follow at least the following steps in starting to implement this approach:

1. Decide on a specific theological understanding that will undergird their online education offerings (this author suggests the Trinitarian perspective).
2. Offer thorough and specific training for all faculty on the perspective and rationale for it within programmes and modules.
3. Establish a Curriculum Design Committee of experts in online pedagogy, mentoring and curricular design whose main functions will include:
 - a. ensuring that all modules in programmes display the desired perspective in their design;
 - b. ensure that all parties involved understand the process and have access to (and know how to use) the technology required for the modules;
 - c. establishing and implementing policies that deal specifically with the role and goal of each party within the 'trinity' of this paradigm; and

- d. ensuring the modules allow for theory, reflection and praxis which in turn would allow for the mentors to have multiple 'entry points' or angles to engage with the student (and not just a final pass/fail exam).
- 4. Establish a database of sufficiently qualified mentoring staff 'on the ground' that students can learn from and with.
- 5. Establish a quality-controlled environment for the mentors to collaborate on a regular basis to:
 - a. discuss class content, goals and objectives;
 - b. establish goals for student success;
 - c. discuss interactions with the student;
 - d. assess and grade student achievement on multiple grade points; and
 - e. ensure that they are consistent within their theological undergirding.
- 6. Trial the process in a small, controlled environment and allow for necessary adjustments to occur.

A very important aspect to the process is the establishment of the Curriculum Design Committee (CDC). In the interviews conducted in Chapter 2, only one institution had such a committee in place (even though they did not deal specifically with 'mentoring') and the others seemed either not to have a process or the process was not the same every time. A committee of highly skilled people to help accomplish this task of training, development and implementation is critical.

In South Africa, this author is aware that at least one attempt at a similar model has been trialed at the Cornerstone Institute in Cape Town¹⁰, where students are paired with a mentor who is close to their geographical location as well as a subject matter expert who delivers the online experience. This author has taught such a class and has seen the benefit of having an 'on-site' mentor and a virtual one. This author taught this class while in the USA and the on-site mentor was in South Africa. They have been providing education this way since 2013. Perhaps what is lacking in this scenario however, is the collaboration between the three

¹⁰ www.cornerstone.ac.za

parties involved, not just the student and one or the other party. To follow the model I propose, there would be a need to regular, online discussion between the 'educational trinity' to discuss and collaborate on the desired outcomes. It is good to have other parties involved but if the '*perichoresis*' is missing, it can lead to competition and confusion.

Another way that the 'trinity' can work in this regard is in modules that are 'team-taught'. In this fashion, a hybrid of the model I suggest above is what is used in the mentoring process. Essentially the student has two mentors who are both online and physically present simultaneously. This again adds to the spirit of interdependence and can work well if the mentors are within the same institution specifically. This author has had such an experience in teaching a module with a lecturer from another discipline but within the same University. The course content was delivered by both lecturers and both served as mentors as well. The fact that one colleague was female and I was a male certainly helped provide a contextually (and maybe culturally?) appropriate mentor for the student. It was imperative that the mentors involved and the students understood what was expected and that clear and deliberate attempts were made to ensure the students had both the needed *information* and the necessary *skills* to perform adequately. This needed to be discussed and assessed continually. Thus, the mentors need to have an open, trusting and collaborative relationship. A perspective that can be formed by a good understanding of the Trinitarian perspective.

The reality is, there is a need for mentors who are specifically adapted for the online modality. It is a separate skill. We have already seen how students who take online courses and programmes generally require more discipline to complete their study (Allan & Seaman, 2015:23), so the need for a competent online mentor to assist them becomes all the more critical. Mentors, as we have seen, ought to display a concern for their mentee but how this is displayed will perhaps look a little different online than if one was face to face (Heinemann, 2005:283). Or perhaps, as suggested above, the ideal answer is found in having both?

Maybe the link between the educational mentor and the ministry mentor needs to be established (or re-established?) for the benefit of the student as Heinemann (2005:284) seems to indicate:

Can the (online) classroom setting truly nurture a burden for the lost, a heart for ministry to people, or a passion for the preaching of the Word? Admittedly, the Lord sometimes breaks into a formal class in an awesome way, but, more often than not, transforming moments come in the context of doing ministry. Thus, ministerial development is an intimate, personal process of discipleship that demands the context of personal ministry for its full fruition.

This author believes that developing a system whereby students have access to different kinds of mentors and mentoring, not only increases the *koinonia* of community (Rovai *et al.*, 2008:2; Maddox, 2010) but also exemplifies the synergy of the Body not unlike that of the Godhead Himself. Rovai *et al.* (2008) are persuaded that it is arguably a more 'Biblical' approach for those within the church to adopt in particular:

Not only can isolation adversely influence a student's attitude towards learning, and arguably learning outcomes as well, but the concept of learning exclusively in isolation runs counter to biblical themes. As evidenced in I Corinthians 12, God gives His people different gifts that are to be manifested for the common good. This can best occur in a strong community environment where people love and edify each other and where excessive individualism and competition are avoided, hence the analogy of the parts of the body in that same passage (Rovai *et al.*, 2008:3).

It is also noted that Paul the Apostle accomplished much of his mentoring with a 'blended learning' approach, using both face to face and the correspondence/distance *modus operandi* of his day – letters. He clearly believed that God could use him to mentor people even though he was physically absent. He also had numerous times in his ministry (Acts 18, 27, Rom 16) where he relied upon others to be the 'contact' mentors while he was the 'distance' mentor. Some have indicated that Paul's conception of the church (1 Cor 12:12-27) was as a 'body of interdependent believers, all of whom contribute to the functioning of the whole' (Grenz, 1994:544). Thus, it does not appear, even from the Biblical text itself that this model is

particularly new. Perhaps it has just not been applied within the mentoring structure of the online theological academy enough.

In sum: online education will only grow over the next decade and if we want to ensure that we have mentored effectively the next generation of leaders then one must simply find ways to overcome the barrier of being disembodied in online theological education. Using some of tools described above and perhaps other ones that are just around the technological corner, faculty must be seeking new and better ways to live in deeper community, create mentoring moments online (Castle & McGuire, 2010:36), entrust real-world mentoring to others (Ulrich, 2010:21) and trust the Spirit to do the work of developing His Kingdom. We need to define and create a platform that will enable the institution to develop leaders who are able to achieve the needed ministry functions (training, mentoring/coaching) whilst embracing and not resisting changing forms (e- and m-learning). The solution to this is not simple and we should caution against being overly reductionist in attempting to deal with it. However, by attempting the merge of the Biblical foundation with 'best practice' efforts in other fields as well as practical suggestions from field research, I believe that this model, which seeks to ground the theory in a biblical pattern whilst also embracing what online educators seem to see the need for, can be a helpful contribution to the thinking in this field.

5.4 Conclusion and summary of chapter

In this chapter, I have attempted to address the strategic task of Osmer's (2008) paradigm. I have described a paradigm and a process that I believe will assist in helping move the discussion forward. The next chapter will thus present a summary of the study thus far and provide suggestions for further study.

iSeminary': Christian theological and leadership development in the online environment. A Practical Theological study

Chapter 6:

Conclusion and areas for further research

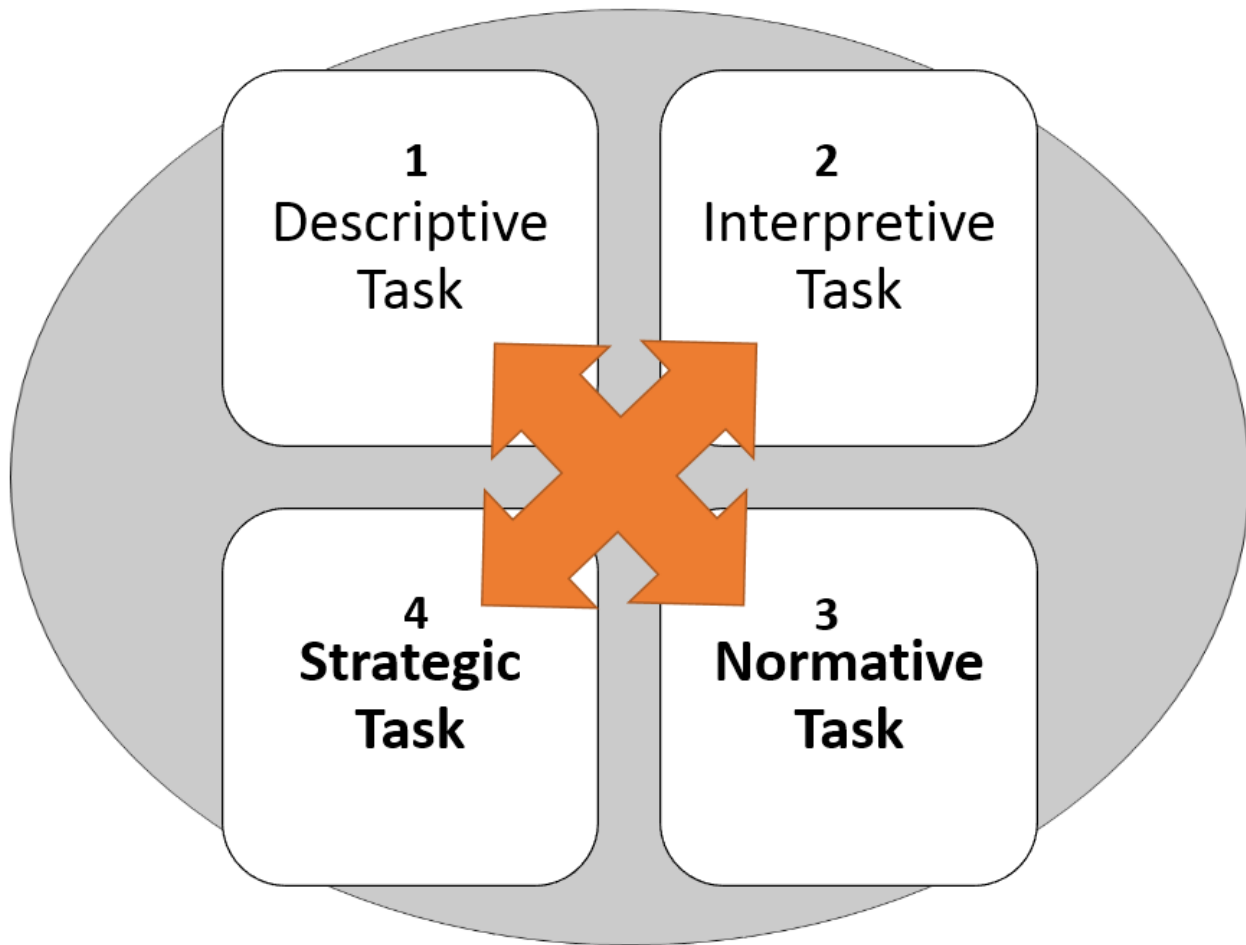
This study, as many studies tend to do, has taken this researcher on an interesting and in some ways unexpected journey. The study itself has already proven to be eminently practical in this researcher's own career journey as well as widening horizons in terms of what 'mentoring' is and what it can and perhaps should look in the online, disembodied context of online theological education today. This study has explored this idea from an educational and theological perspective as well as a 'nuts and bolts' approach in terms of practical application. The empirical component of Chapter 2 took this researcher to various Christian University settings in the North-East USA and was able to speak directly with programme developers and online education experts at these various Universities. This process was illuminating as one saw both the similarity in struggle and the plurality of potential solutions that were being trialled and implemented at these places of learning. The world of online theological education is growing as we have seen throughout this study. The need for well-mentored leaders within Christian leadership development programmes has been much discussed as well. This study has emphasised how mentoring in the online world must occur and it must be robust to face the growth of the coming years. Below is a summation of how this researcher has attempted to deal with the central theoretical argument posited in the first chapter of the study.

6.1 Research Design

Richard Osmer's volume is especially useful for the type of research that this study called for. Osmer, (2008:4-12) proposes a model of practical theological interpretation with four tasks:

1. The descriptive-empirical task asks, 'What is going on?'
2. The interpretive task asks, 'Why is it going on?'
3. The normative task asks, 'What ought to be going on?'
4. The strategic task asks, 'How might we respond?'

I have used Osmer's (2008:4-12) heuristic throughout, with its descriptive, interpretive, normative and strategic elements. This methodology can be diagrammed as follows (Osmer 2010:7):



Osmer's model, as suggested in this diagram, sees the interpreter of the data in distinct yet connected tasks or 'spiral' that allows for each spiral to inform the other as we move towards strategic implementation. This research methodology was critical in directing the study and I included a diagrammatic as well as written explanation of where each chapter fits in under this heuristic as we went along. I will include the diagrams in the chapter summary below as well as a reminder. The above-method was chosen with the aim of answering the original research question, namely:

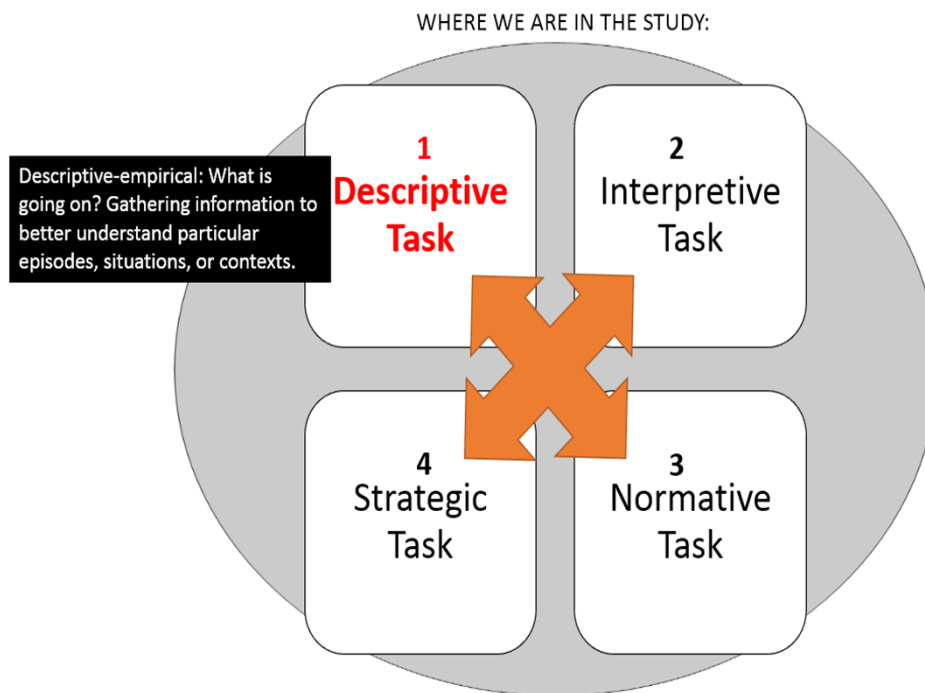
How should a contemporary theological academy fulfil the strategic task of leadership development in an online environment and reflect a Trinitarian ontology, in order to move towards the goal of producing competent leaders?

The above question leads to several individual questions that had to be investigated in order to provide a strategic answer to the above. In this next section the researcher will show the original sub-question as well as the chapter that dealt with this question and a summary of the specific chapter which dealt with the question.

6.2 Summary of chapters as they relate to the original research questions

6.2.1 Chapter 2

Research Sub-Question:	Chapter Description (Osmer):
What can be learned from an empirical study of the present situation with regard to online theological education and mentoring?	Descriptive-empirical: <i>What is going on? Gathering information better to understand particular episodes, situations, or contexts.</i>



As can be seen from the diagram, the first task to be addressed was the descriptive task, asking: what is going on? This chapter included the following material:

1. Introduction and brief analysis of the terms that need to be understood within the context of online education today.
2. A brief history from a prior empirical study that the researcher was involved in that served as a motivation for the current study.
3. Explanation of methodology employed for the empirical component that was done in accordance with NWU Ethics procedures¹¹.
4. Empirical component comprising a qualitative interview analysis of online theological educational programmes within the authors delineated parameters. Meta-themes were formulated and discussed

As detailed above, a brief 'glossary' of sorts was presented here as there are many somewhat unique terms attached to the idea of 'online' learning today. It was imperative to discuss some of those to avoid confusion later in the study and to explain properly the nomenclature that was to be used in the study. Then, brief reference was made to this researcher's MTh study which served as a precursor of sorts to the current study. In the prior study, research was conducted on the success of mentoring within a small Bible College environment. What was discovered is that 'mentoring' was often assumed and this was cause for concern when it became evident that students were graduating without being mentored.

The current study then used an 'open-qualitative' interview method to interview six training institutions in the North-East USA. These institutions all have current and viable Christian online learning programmes. At the conclusion, some trends were observed namely:

- Meta-theme 1: *OTE has evolved technologically in the last decade and continues to do so.*
- Meta-theme 2: *The interest and numbers of students involved in OTE are increasing.*
- Meta-theme 3: *OTE is projected to grow even more in the next decade.*

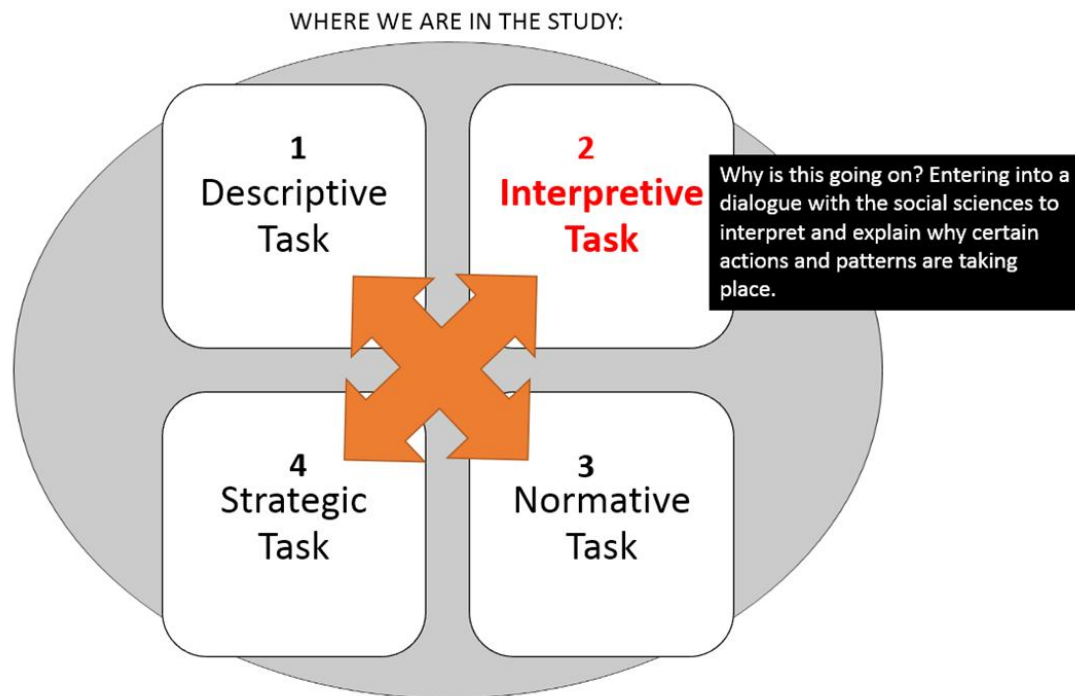
¹¹ <http://www.nwu.ac.za/content/research-support-research-ethics>

- Meta-theme 4: *Faculty members are not adequately equipped for this new reality.*
- Meta-theme 5: *OTE programmes are run much the same way as non-OTE programmes.*

These themes demonstrated, amongst other things, that mentoring was often assumed in the online education world as well. Additionally, there seemed to be little difference in the approach to mentoring online between a ‘secular’ and ‘Christian’ perspective. This was the reality and so the next task was to consider what could be learned about what mentoring actually is and what it can and perhaps should look like in the world of online theological education.

6.2.2 Chapter 3:

Research Sub-Question:	Chapter Description (Osmer):
What can be learned from a literature review of the present situation with regard to online theological education and mentoring? and what insight can societal and historical perspectives give regarding the definition and role of a mentor?	<i>Interpretive: Why is this going on?</i> Entering into a dialogue with the social sciences to interpret and explain why certain actions and patterns are taking place.

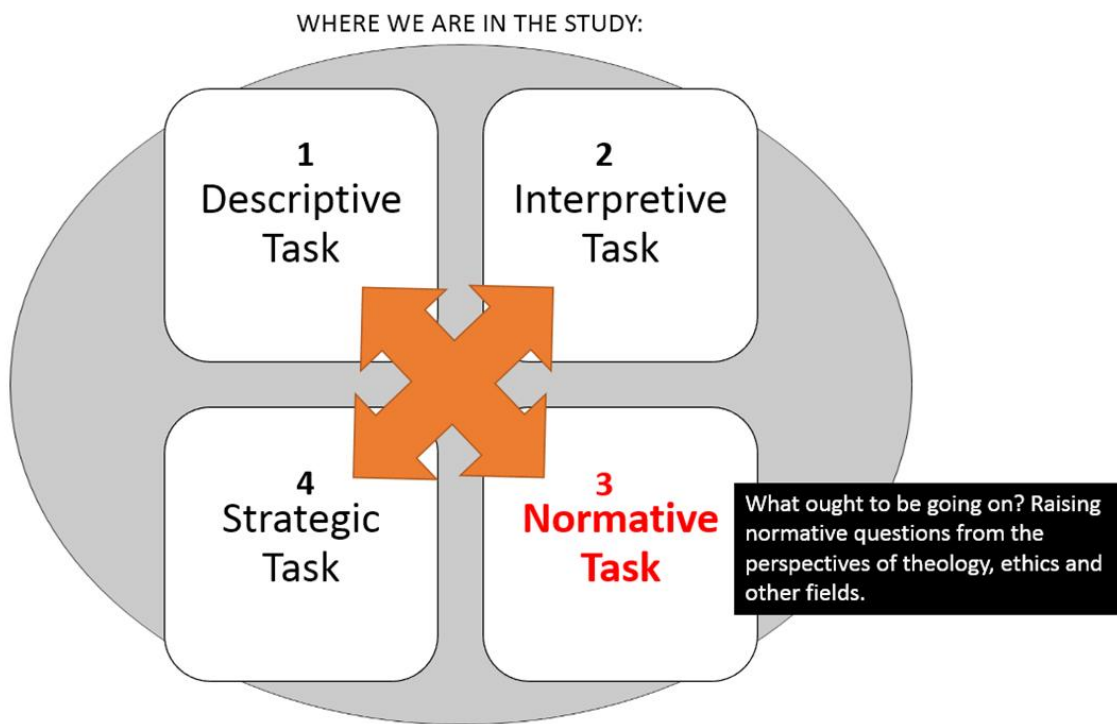


This chapter was primarily concerned with drawing from the vast body of literature and attempting to synthesise it into a coherent framework from which to understand the process and outcomes of the idea of 'mentoring'. It is a common enough idea and word for its true meaning sometimes to become lost. By exploring the depths of the idea both within contemporary society and through a peek through the lens of church history, one can perhaps get a better sense of the term. So, an analysis of mentoring as a 'meta-ethical' system was conducted. In addition, present literature (within the past decade and mostly within the last five years) was assessed to give a better sense of the thinking around mentoring online within theological education specifically, along with advantages and disadvantages of the platform.

Also initially, a brief analysis of two figures in church history – St. Augustine of Hippo and Soren Kierkegaard were discussed as both had made significant contributions to the need of the 'other' in a person's life and in Augustine's case, had a robust philosophy of mentoring rooted in the Scriptures. This philosophy is very similar to the one used by this author throughout the study namely a strongly Trinitarian undergirding to his approach.

6.2.3 Chapter 4

Research Sub-Question:	Chapter Description (Osmer):
What insight can the Biblical and theological perspectives give regarding the definition /role of a mentor and the Trinitarian Ontological perspective?	<i>Normative: What ought to be going on? Raising normative questions from the perspectives of theology, ethics and other fields</i>

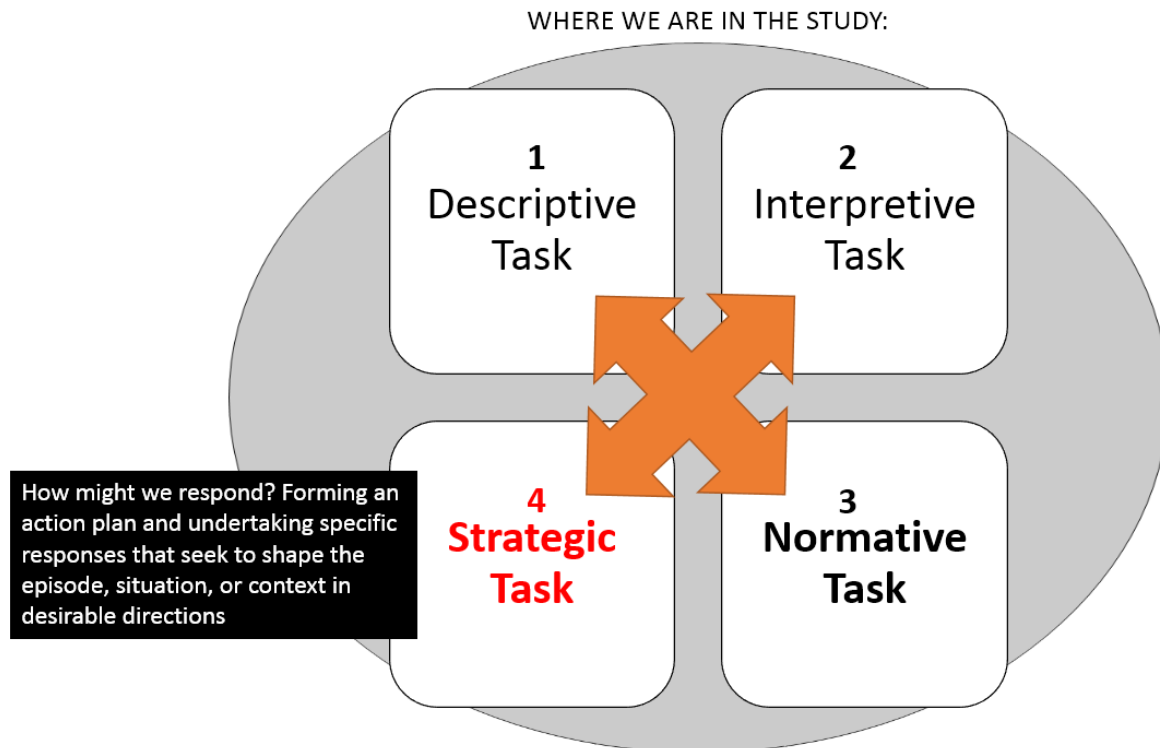


This chapter was part of a greater project undertaken by my co-promoter for this study, Dr Robert Elkington. This chapter was eventually published as an article in its own right but fits well into the discussion of online mentoring especially as this stage of the study deals with the question of: 'what ought to be going on'? This article touches again of the importance of identifying and developing leadership and mentoring these leaders to become 'omni-competent'. This is in part due to the reality posed in this article that many ministers of the

Gospel are leaving the ministry and much of the reason for this is a sense of inability to do the task that they are required to fulfil. Part of the reason for this attrition is a lack of understanding of what leadership is, what is required of a leader and how leadership is fostered. Part of this normative chapter was also to look at the Biblical idea of mentoring. Certain characters within the Biblical text (like Paul) give us some good food for thought as to how mentoring may occur within Christian settings and more specifically, the posture of mentoring one adopts. Also, the various instances of 'leadership' vocabulary found in the Old and New Testaments offer some assistance here as we attempt to forge a new perspective. This author also offered an additional 'afterword' to this chapter to delineate more specifically what is being argued as the 'Trinitarian perspective' throughout the study. This additional content, informed by the Scriptures, serves as an attempt at helping to develop the theory around the model that is offered in the next chapter.

6.2.4 Chapter 5

Research Sub-Question:	Chapter Description (Osmer):
What sort of model may be developed from interplay between the exegetical basis, literature study and field research components of the study?	<i>Pragmatic: How might we respond? Forming an action plan and undertaking specific responses that seek to shape the episode, situation, or context in desirable directions.</i>

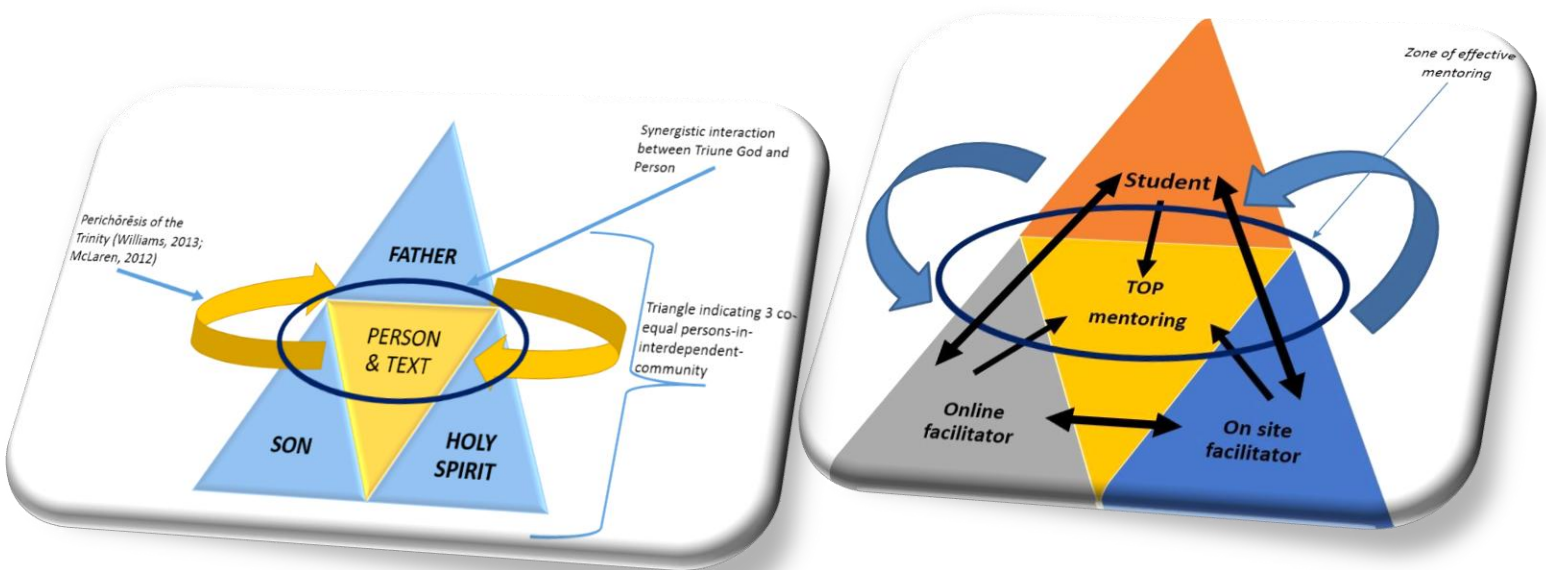


This author attempts to synthesise the findings of the study up to this point in Chapter 5. It is also now incumbent to create a solution to some of the issues that have been raised throughout the study. In brief, those main concerns were:

- a. A lack of mentoring and an understanding of what it takes to achieve such a process in the online theological education realm.

- b. A lack of a coherent theological framework that underpins the process.
- c. A lack of a clear, concise and consistent model that can be used by an institution

Thus and in accordance with the strategic task of Osmer (2008), this author presented a model for consideration that was based on the understanding of the Trinity but also was based in practicality. Two diagrams that helped to illustrate this were presented thus:



In this model, the institution takes a leading role in ensuring that the student has mentorship in both the 'online' and 'real-world' spaces. These mentors would have differing responsibilities but their chief objective would be the development of the student. In essence, the disembodied context of the online space has to be overcome by having an element of a 'personal touch'. This model aims to achieve this by having a network of appropriate mentors who can assist students in areas their 'disembodied' mentor cannot and vice versa. Furthermore, a 'to-do' list of sorts was suggested as a means to get started in this process with very clear and actionable steps.

6.3 The central theoretical argument

All the above now warrants a return to the original theory presented in Chapter 1:

The contemporary theological academy must fulfil the strategic task of leadership development in an online environment and reflect a Trinitarian ontology, in order to move towards the goal of producing competent leaders

This author believes that this argument has been followed and explained throughout the chapters above and while there is much more that would need to be explored and discussed on this matter, it is hoped that this argument has been sufficiently discussed for the purposes of this thesis.

6.4 Conclusion of this study

Online education is the present reality and it will only continue to grow and become more wide-spread in the future. For educators concerned about Christian leadership development, the adaptation that this new mode of learning requires has, at times, been troublesome. Christian education is often very personal as it entails dealing with a faith position that is at the deepest core of a person. It is not abstract or ‘merely’ academic, in many cases, it is dealing with truths that many would be willing to die for! So, when trying to communicate through lectures or lessons, Christian educators mostly want their students to be ‘changed’ by what they learn and become good ambassadors of the Christian faith in their communities. Very often, that is the whole reason for the institution’s existence! So, what are we to do when we can no longer observe our students in class? When we can no longer take them aside or meet with them in our offices or over coffee and discuss their personal goals? Can we even have confidence that they have ‘got it’? These are important and real questions. Since online education is a reality and it is one that will only grow over the next decade, theological educators need to consider anew how they go about one of their most treasured tasks – ‘mentoring’ – in a virtual world.

Throughout this study, this author has tried to lay some foundational blocks to help answer these and other important questions like them. We need to have a good understanding of

what the issues are (Chapter 2) and what we even mean when we discuss mentoring (Chapter 3). Not all mentors are created equal and at least some of the blame is due to a misunderstanding of the task rather than a platform that is not capable. We must also, as theologians, see how Scripture informs our task. Our understanding of who God is (Chapter 1 & 4) must surely be the starting point. From there we can glean understandings from key figures in the Scriptures (Chapter 4) who demonstrated an understanding of mentoring – even mentoring from a distance like Paul the Apostle. We also need to understand what we have and do not have in the online mentoring spaces. This author believes that in many cases we have created a false dichotomy – either you can or you can't mentor online – when it is possible to have both. There is no doubt a 'personal' element is lost online, so why not try and at least maintain an element of that in our programmes? At the same time, just because you are able to see each other 'face to face' does not mean that 'mentoring' will somehow just happen – it takes expertise and in many cases the subject matter expert of the online course has such expertise. Chapter 5 is a foundational attempt to get the conversation started in that area with a brief model and explanation.

In sum, online education can achieve what Christian leadership educators have always hoped to achieve: omni-competent leaders who are able to lead Christendom into this next era with great skill and know-how. They need mentors of various kinds to help them. We can and we must do just that.

6.5 Areas for further research

There are many areas that this study has only been able to touch on or discuss briefly that would need to be discussed and debated further. Some of these areas that are needed for further study and which this author would like to explore in the future would be:

- 6.5.1 A deeper understanding of the Trinitarian Ontological Perspective through the lens of church history and post-reformation theology. Many great thinkers within the faith were not mentioned here and much can be learned about this perspective through their eyes.
- 6.5.2 A more explorative empirical study that would involve:

- 6.5.2.1 more qualitative surveys and added countries to the study;
 - 6.5.2.2 focus groups and surveys with students – past, present and prospective about their online education experience and desire; and
 - 6.5.2.3 greater understanding of various learning management systems to determine if some have a greater propensity towards mentoring outcomes than others.
- 6.5.3 A deeper understanding of online mentoring especially within the field of medicine which appears to make the most use of virtual mentorship in the development of doctors globally.
- 6.5.4 An empirical survey of workplaces that have hired students that have graduated from fully online and fully traditional universities and colleges. This study would explore potential differences employers see (if any) and if any possible models and conclusions can be made as a result.
- 6.5.5 A more thorough investigation of how mentoring occurred in pre-internet education times through distance. From Paul in the New Testament mentoring through 'letters' to education on the radio and TV in the 1960's in the USA – how were these students 'mentored' and is it any better or worse than what we have happening today with online learning?

ANNEXURES:

Below are the various annexures that have been referred to in this study according to the chapters in which they first occurred:

1. ANNEXURE A – 2011 QUESTIONNAIRE FOR EMPIRICAL STUDY (MTh)

Annexure A: Questionnaire from 2011

1. Please enter the following information (your data will be kept anonymous) – Name, region and email details.
2. Please state the year you graduated from BBCKZN.
3. Please state your current occupation.
4. To what degree do you believe the knowledge you acquired at BBCKZN prepared you for your current occupation? (1 being not helpful at all to 5 being extremely helpful)
5. Do you believe that your training at BBCKZN helped to improve your leadership capacity?
6. Do you feel that there was a sufficient 'mentoring' process attached to your programme? (A mentor is defined as a person who coaches you in the ability to take classroom knowledge and make it practical in ministry).
7. Do you believe that the training you received dealt with the specific needs of the South African context?
8. Do you think that classes that dealt with business management, social concern/responsibility as well as technology and the Internet would have been helpful to you in your training?
9. Do you believe that it is important for ministry that a person is able to understand the social and cultural aspects of the people they are ministering to?
10. If your answer to the above is 'no', please explain why you disagree with the statement above.

2. ANNEXURE B – INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR CO-RESEARCHERS 2014 STUDY

Dear Sir/Madam

I am working on a PhD in Practical Theological Studies. The theme of my study is, Leadership development in the online environment: towards a Practical Theological proposal from a Trinitarian perspective. The objective of the study is to investigate how the theological academy considers spiritual formation, primarily mentorship, in the online learning environment. During our e-mail conversations, you have agreed to be a participant in the study and I would like to express my sincere gratitude for your willingness and eagerness to participate in the research. If you should feel self-conscious or uncomfortable when answering some of these questions during the interview, you can withdraw from the study at any time. I assure you that all the information will be handled in absolute confidentiality and anonymity. The material will remain in the possession of the researcher and will not be published un-interpreted.

Please be so kind to sign the attached 'informed consent form' as required by the Ethics Committee of the North-West University.

After the interview, we will again discuss any uncertainties you might have.

Yours faithfully

Rev. Darryl Meekins

.....

Contact: 570.702.5796 (Cell)

dmeekins@bbc.edu

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT TO VOLUNTEER AND PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY CONDUCTED BY DARRYL MEEKINS

You are kindly invited to take part in the following research study: Leadership development in the online environment: towards a Practical Theological proposal from a Trinitarian perspective. If you participate, you will be part of a study involving other online theological educators and administrators within the Tri-State area. The person in charge of this study, and also the Project Leader is Rev. Darryl Meekins of the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus. The people assisting Rev. Meekins are Prof. George A. Lotter (Chief Promoter) from the Faculty of Theology, under Practical Theology at the North-West University Potchefstroom campus and Dr. Robert Elkington (Co-Promoter) of North-West University.

The research will be conducted and scheduled during September-November 2014. If you participate, you will take part in an interview where certain questions will be asked regarding the objective of this study. This interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes of your time. There is no risk of revealing any information when answering these questions in the interview. If you should feel self-conscious or uncomfortable when answering some of these questions during the interview, you can withdraw from the study at any time. If you decide to continue, it should be because you really want to volunteer and participate in the study. There are no costs involved in taking part in this study and all the interviews will be treated with utmost confidentiality. Although your name is requested at the end of this form, no answers in the interview will be identified with a person. Should the need arise for further discussion with regard to the study you can feel free to contact me at any time.

I,..... hereby consent to be a participant in the research project: iSeminary: Christian theological and leadership development in the online environment - A Practical Theological study and I also give consent that the interview can be audio-taped.

Signed at

on the.....day of.....2014

.....

.....

Signature of co-researcher/participant

Date

I undertake to treat the above co-researcher's/participant's individual responses as anonymous and confidential.

.....Signature: Rev Darryl Meekins (Project Leader)

3. ANNEXURE C – BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF US INSTITUTIONS VISITED IN THE STUDY

Biographical information on the institutions surveyed in this chapter

1. **Appalachian Bible College, West Virginia. www.abc.edu**

Appalachian Bible Institute was founded in September, 1950 at the Independent Baptist Church in Pettus, West Virginia, by Rev. & Mrs. Lester Pipkin (from Minnesota) and Pastor & Mrs. Robert Guelich (from Pettus). The school started as a Bible training institute for the youth of the Appalachian Mountains. In 1954 the school was officially incorporated. The school was organized as a faith mission under the auspices of Appalachian Bible Fellowship. Since 1955, the school identified itself with the National Home Missions Fellowship, which is known today as the Fellowship of Missions (FOM), an organisation of independent, fundamental mission agencies. The Vision of ABC is described as follows:

‘Our vision is to be a quality fundamental ministry of Biblical higher education by:

- Creating a quality future-driven learning environment and academic experience that prepares servants to effectively fulfill Christ's mission for His Church.
- Providing Christ-centered opportunities, which nurture the whole person to maturity.
- Securing and sustaining a qualified team of missionaries and support members dedicated to achieve our mission with excellence.
- Expanding our student body and increasing our outreach and ministry among all people that we serve.
- Assuring financial and physical resources that support current and long-term ministry plans’ (Appalachian, 2014).

Academically speaking, ABC offers a number of degree and certificate options. Students can complete an Associate of Arts degree (AA); Bachelor of Arts Degree (BA) as well as Bible Certificate programmes and a Master of Arts programme (MA). In terms of online learning, ABC uses a professor-led model that combines video-enhanced instruction, text-based study

and live sessions. ABC's online programme is known as 'ABC connect' and is a regionally accredited course of study.

2. Summit University of PA. www.summitu.edu

Summit University was founded in 1932 in Johnson City, NY. For its first 36 years, the College used the facilities of First Baptist Church in Johnson City. As the student body grew from the first enrollment of 40 students, the College gradually purchased and built buildings of its own. In the 1960s, the need for a new campus became evident. In 1968, Pennsylvania Governor William Scranton assisted in locating the Clarks Summit campus for the school. Classes began in the Seminary in 1972 and in the College's graduate programmes in 1989.

The vision of BBC/S is as follows:

'Summit University has an overarching vision of pursuing excellence in Biblical higher education for effectiveness in global Christian leadership' (Baptist Bible College, 2014).

When it comes to online education, SU offers a number of options at both an undergraduate and post-graduate level. This includes a Bible Certificate, Associate of Arts Degree (AA) and various Bachelor's degrees at the undergraduate level and Master of Arts (MA); Master of Education (MEd); Master of Divinity (MDiv); Doctor of Ministry (DMin) and PhD to name a few at the postgraduate level.

Students participate in an asynchronous learning environment that is primary text- and discussion board-based. SU is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. Middle States is a regional accrediting agency recognized nationally. All degrees have been approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The College has been accredited since 1968 by the Association for Biblical Higher Education.

3. Cairn University, Pennsylvania. www.cairn.edu

Cairn University enjoys a heritage that spans over one hundred years. Founded in 1913, it is the result of the merger of two separate institutions which formed Philadelphia Bible Institute in 1951, a school which offered only three-year diplomas and focused primarily on the training of lay people. In 1958, PBI became Philadelphia College of Bible when the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania granted the institution approval to offer a four-year programme leading to the Bachelor of Science in Bible degree. This established PCB as a school for training students for vocational ministry in the church and related organisations.

In 1979, the College relocated from Center City Philadelphia to the Bucks County suburb of Langhorne, Pennsylvania. Bachelor degrees in Education and Business Administration were developed as well as graduate level programmes in Biblical Studies, Counseling, Education, Educational Leadership and Administration, Organisational Leadership, and a Master of Divinity. In 2000, the Commonwealth granted approval for university status and the institution changed its name to become Philadelphia Biblical University. In 2012 the University's Board of Trustees voted to change the name of the institution to Cairn University, in an effort to overcome the perception that the University's educational offerings were limited and had a narrow vocational focus.

The Mission and Vision of Cairn is as follows:

'Cairn University exists to educate students to serve Christ in the church, society, and the world as biblically minded, well-educated, and professionally competent men and women of character' (Cairn University, 2014). Cairn currently has a hybrid system of online education and is developing the method and curriculum for a fully online degree programme(s). Cairn is accredited by Middle States Commission on Higher Education and the Association for Biblical Higher Education.

4. Davis College, New York. www.davisny.edu

Practical Bible Training School emerged in 1900 from a series of Bible classes that were conducted in downtown Lestershire (Johnson City), New York, by a young evangelist, John A. Davis, who attended the Chicago Bible Institute (now Moody Bible Institute) where he served D. L. Moody's table. On September 24, 1993, Practical Bible Training School became Practical Bible College, and was authorised to grant the two-year Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree and the four-year Bachelor of Religious Education (BRE) degree. The college continues to offer a one-year certificate in Bible and a three-year diploma. A major in Bible/Theology is at the core of all programmes. On August 1, 2004, Practical Bible College became Davis College, a Practical College of Bible and Ministry.

The Vision and Mission of David College is as follows:

'Davis College is a Bible-centered higher education institution committed to making an impact upon the world for Jesus Christ by the fostering of Christian character and the equipping of students with the knowledge, competencies, and skills needed in an ever-changing world for service and leadership within the church, Christian organisations and society. Davis College is leading the way in affordable biblical higher education, connecting quality faculty with cutting-edge technologies and world-class facilities to prepare servant-leaders for Jesus Christ' (Davis College, 2014).

The online learning platform is known as 'Davis Online Learning' and it is described as 'providing quality, cutting edge courses from on-campus to online. DOL uses Blackboard CourseSites as the online platform for its e-learning environment' (Davis College, 2014).

Davis College was accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education in 2005 and in 2006 Davis College was reaffirmed for its accreditation with the Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE) for the next ten years.

5. Lancaster Bible College, Pennsylvania. www.lbc.edu

Lancaster Bible College was founded by Henry J. Heydt in September 1933. Eight day students and 14 evening students were enrolled in the original class, which met in the Convention Hall at West Orange and Pine Streets in Lancaster. In 1961, the school's academic dean, Stuart E. Lease, was elected president. During his seventeen-year presidency, the student body grew to more than 400 students, and the campus expanded to 36 acres. Finally, in 1973, the school earned provisional approval to grant the degree of Bachelor of Science in Bible, and the school officially became Lancaster Bible College (LBC).

The Mission of LBC is described as follows:

'At Lancaster Bible College, our focus is on your journey to fulfill God's purpose for your life. Our mission has remained constant for over 80 years: to educate Christian students to think and live a biblical worldview and to proclaim Christ by serving him in the Church and society' (Lancaster Bible College, 2014).

The Online programme at LBC allows for students to complete a Bachelor of Science in Bible (B.S.); an Associate of Science in Bible (A.S.) and a Bible Certificate. The online programme is known as MyLBCOnline and includes video and text asynchronous content delivery.

Lancaster Bible College is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) and the Association for Biblical Higher Education Commission on Accreditation (ABHE).

6. Nyack College, New York. www.nyack.edu

Nyack's founder is widely recognised as one of the foremost figures in the American missionary movement. Dr. A.B. Simpson resigned a prestigious New York City pastorate to develop an interdenominational fellowship devoted to serving unreached people. Simpson's view was shared by a wide group of men and women, including mainline church leaders, laborers, and theological scholars. This ever-growing alliance was bound together by a desire to inspire the church to fulfill its Great Commission of world evangelisation. Alliance Theological Seminary, previously the Jaffray School of Missions, was founded as a graduate programme of Nyack College in 1960. The Jaffray School of Missions emphasised the interdisciplinary encounter between theology and the social sciences.

In 1974, the Jaffray programme was redesigned to include the preparation of students for North American as well as overseas ministries. The name of the school was subsequently changed to the Alliance School of Theology and Missions. In September of 1979, the Alliance School of Theology and Missions became Alliance Theological Seminary (ATS). Increased course offerings and additional faculty have enhanced the seminary's commitment to the worldwide evangelistic task of the church.

The mission of Nyack is as follows:

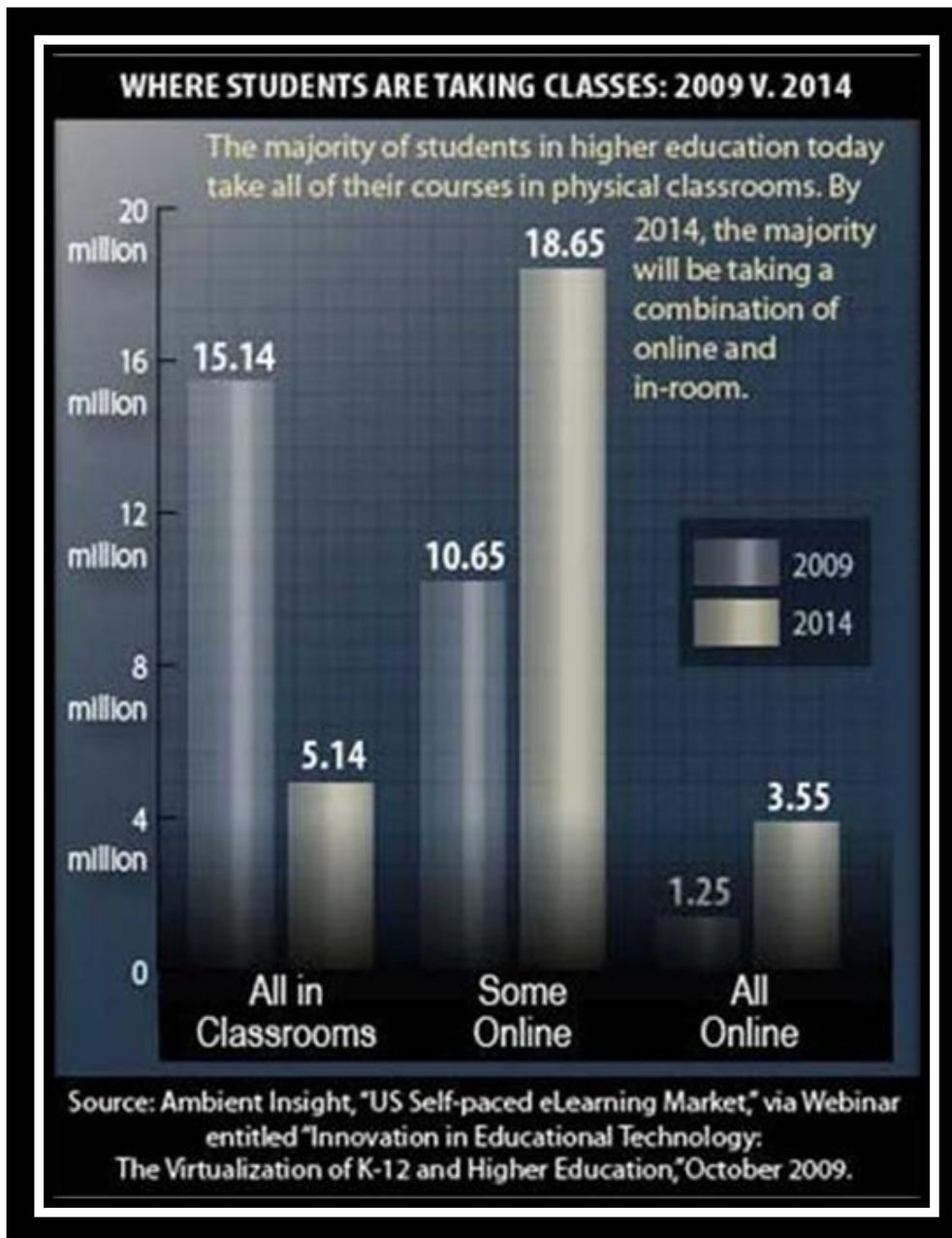
'Nyack College, a Christian and Missionary Alliance educational institution, through its undergraduate, graduate and seminary programmes, pursues its historic mission of preparing men and women to 'take the whole Gospel to the whole world' (Nyack College, 2014).

Nyack's online programme is known as 'Nyack Distance Learning' and various programmes can be taken including an Associate of Arts degree (AA); a Bachelor of Science (BSc); a Master of Divinity (MDiv) and a Master of Arts (MA) degree. Nyack College is chartered by the Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York and is also accredited by Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. Alliance Theological Seminary is also accredited by the Association of Theological Schools.

4. ANNEXURE D – CODE APPLICATIONS FOR EMPIRICAL COMPONENT GRAPHIC

Media	Codes																
	Delivery System	Duration of involvement in OTE	Interviewee Personal History in OTE	Level of involvement in OTE	Mentoring enhanced/inhibited in OTE	Mentoring through OTE	Number of OTE Programs	Number of OTE Students	OTE Evolution last 5yrs	Theological Basis for OTE	Throughput	Training for OTE Instructors	What is the Future	What to improve	Why OTE Institution	Why OTE - Student	Why OTE Faculty
Questions.docx	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1
Nyack Interview.doc	2		1		2	3	1	2	1	1	2	2	1	2	1	1	
LBC Interview.doc	2		1	1	2	3	2		2	3	5	3	4	1	2	2	1
DBC Interview.doc	1	1	1			2			2	2	2	3	3			1	
CU.docx	2		1	1	9	4			4	3	1	2	3		1		1
BBC interview.docx	3		1		2	5		1	2	2	4	1	3	4	1	1	2
ABC.docx	3		1		7	6				2	3	3	2	1	1	1	2
Totals	14	2	7	3	23	24	4	4	12	14	18	15	17	9	7	8	7

5. ANNEXURE E – ONLINE STUDENTS 2009 VS 2014 WORLDWIDE GRAPHIC



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