

THE “NEO-CHARISMATIC” CHURCHES AND NETWORKS OF THE LAST THIRTY-FIVE YEARS

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The Historical Roots and Early Development of the neo-charismatic Churches in USA and Great Britain

Roots and Origins of the Non-Denominational Charismatic Churches

Quite different in UK and in USA.

1. Great Britain

In Britain, the strongest original thrust came from Brethren [Plymouth Brethren – Darbyists] baptised in the Spirit. From the mid-1950s, a series of conferences were organised in Devon [South-West England and an area with a stronger Brethren presence] by two men with Brethren backgrounds, David Lillie and Arthur Wallis. These began as local events, but from 1958 to 1965, a series of four week-end conferences were led by Lillie and Wallis. Lillie had been baptized in the Spirit in 1941, and so disfellowshipped from his Brethren assembly, while Wallis was open to this dimension, coming from his interest in revival. So they also invited as a major speaker Cecil Cousen, a Pentecostal pastor from Bradford, recently thrown out of the Apostolic Church for his association with the Latter Rain movement. Here we can find the first coming together of convictions that would later characterize the non-denominational charismatics in Britain: a focus on the restoration of the New Testament church (from Lillie), a focus on revival in the power of the Holy Spirit (Wallis) and a teaching on baptism in the Spirit and Pentecostal empowering (Cecil Cousen). The themes for these conferences were:

1958: The Church of Jesus Christ: Its Purity, Pattern and Programme in the Context of Today¹

1961: The Divine Purpose in the Institution of the Church²

1962: The Present Ministry of the Holy Spirit³

1965: The Apostolic Commission

The men invited to these conferences included many with Brethren connections, some independent Evangelicals (from FIEC) and a few Baptists. As the conferences progressed, the charismatic element became more pronounced and more public, as by 1961 – 62, the charismatic movement was becoming a subject of discussion, either of interest or of concern, in Evangelical revivalist circles. We can see here already two major themes that will flow into the non-denominational (House Church) movement: the concern for **restoration of the Church** and the concern for **dynamic Spirit-empowered Christianity**. The former differentiated them more from the Pentecostal movement (except perhaps for some more marginal Pentecostal groups like the Apostolic Church, from which Cousen had come). It was the restorationist more theological emphasis that made them “non-denominational” in the sense of a determination to avoid becoming denominations. This came directly out of the Brethren history and teaching. Here Lillie was the originator of a charismatic version of Brethren ecclesiological restorationism.

Another contributory factor was the independent pentecostal-style house church at South Chard in Somerset, led by Sid Purse, who had been baptized in the Spirit at the end of the

¹ Cousen spoke on the Power, Lillie on the Pattern and Wallis on the Purity.

² Wallis spoke on “The Divine Idea of the local Church”: “The two church movements that one might expect to offer most may provide the two greatest dangers to such New Testament churches arising in this end-time. I refer to the peril of ‘Brethrenism’ and that of ‘Pentecostalism’, with emphasis in both cases on the –ism.”

³ Cousen spoke on “The Holy Spirit and the Personal Need of the Believer”.

1940s and so been expelled from the Brethren⁴. By 1956, a church building had been built next to the Manor House. The Chard fellowship was very different from the restorationist patterns of Lillie, and placed a major emphasis on worship and on the supernatural in healing and deliverance. The Chard fellowship was strongly influenced by an independent Pentecostal, Henri Staples and his Glory Meetings. By the 1960s Chard was having quite a wide influence, even internationally, with Harry Greenwood (died 1988, aged 54) and Ian Andrew becoming well-known international speakers. However, Chard became a centre of controversy by the 1960s through baptizing only in the name of Jesus.

The Herne Bay conference in 1965 continued the seed-sowing, with many new leaders attending, including Campbell McAlpine, G. W. North and a newly-charismatic Baptist pastor, Barney Coombs. Through the 1960s, new fellowships were springing up, often fed by the ministries of experienced leaders like Arthur Wallis, Campbell McAlpine, and Edgar Trout (died 1968), but also the fruit of dynamic younger men at the start of their ministries: John Noble (born early 1930s: b-g Salvation Army); and by the end of 1960s, Barney Coombs (b. 1937: Baptist pastor who takes his church out of Baptist Union, see NIDPCM); Bryn Jones (1940 – 2003: bhs in AoG 1957, influence from Apostolic Church, time in OM, more working-class, see NIDPCM⁵); Gerald Coates (b. 1944: ex-Brethren, founds Cobham fellowship in 1970; NIDPCM); Terry Virgo (b. 1940; bhs 1962, ex-Baptist, Reformed theology). The HCM took off about 1969 – 1971, because the new young leaders who were all first of all pioneering pastors began to set the pace in place of the older men who had been travelling teachers. However, a meeting in Paignton in 1970 was the first gathering of those who would become the first leaders in the British “house church movement” of the 1970s.

⁴ This story is told in Hocken (1997), 11 – 20 and Walker, 51 – 65.

⁵ Jones shared a room in Bible college with Reinhard Bonnke.

In 1972, Wallis invited 5 brothers (Jones, Lyne, Mansell, Perrins & Thompson) to meet and pray. Jones prophesied “Seven shall be your number.” So they added Noble. They heard a call to covenanted relationships. Not long after, they added 7 more (inc. McAlpine, Coates & Coombs). “From 1972 to 1974, there was a growing interest, first in London, then in Bradford, Yorkshire, in teachings on apostleship, eldership and discipling.” (NIDPCM, p. 773). The network of Jones believed in a cover by a team of elders not the one-on-one American model. Also important was the Capel Bible Week in Surrey, held in an Elim Pentecostal facility but not endorsed by them. Capel had a Restorationist ethos. Jones spoke there in 1973, Jones and Ern Baxter from USA in 1974. In 1976, there was a split (Walker’s R1 and R2), primarily between North (Jones, Wallis) and London & West (Noble, Coates, Lyne, Perrins), but it affected leaders’ relationships most, and rather less the life of the fellowships.

R1: More restoration-oriented, with apostles; more authority; more strict morally; more coherent as a vision (in some ways closer to Pentecostals through Jones, from Welsh mining background).

R2: More pragmatic; more emphasis on the Spirit makes you free (from legalism); less coherent as a vision (united in resisting R1).

Each side had its own magazine, *Restoration* (Jones), begun in 1975, and *Fulness* (London), begun earlier around 1971. The American influence played a role in the split (see below).

By the mid-1970s, the first new church networks were in existence, with a prominent leading exercising an “apostolic” ministry over his network. The first networks were those of

Jones (Harvestime, Covenant Ministries International), Coombs (Salt and Light) and Noble (Team Spirit)⁶.

2. USA

In the USA, the first signs of any emerging “non-denominational” movement are later than in Britain. The first major independent expression formed around 1970 within the Holy Spirit Teaching Mission in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. HSTM had begun by 1963 as an inter-denominational lay initiative and in 1969 began to publish *New Wine* magazine. A crisis in the leadership of HSTM brought together a group of leaders with a teaching ministry: Bob Mumford, Derek Prince, Charles Simpson and Don Basham. HSTM was re-named Christian Growth Ministries (CGM). Originally non-denominational, because these leaders had no current denominational affiliations, they became “non-denominational” in a deeper sense as they developed their discipline-shepherding teaching and ministry. They advocated a “one on one” shepherding-discipling in a pattern of every pastor being under and answerable to one other leader. The Americans were generally less anti-denominational than the British, as they lacked the “anti-denominational” element from the Brethren. In the early to mid-1970s, there was quite close collaboration between the CGM leaders and the leaders of the mainline renewal communities, particularly the Word of God at Ann Arbor, Michigan. In 1974, the coming of Ern Baxter to CGM with his background in the Latter Rain movement linked the “discipling” ideas of CGM with his own vision for the restoration of apostolic and prophetic ministry. It was Baxter, who was the bridge between the fledgling movement in the USA and that in Britain⁷. Baxter interpreted the British situation as

⁶ Coates’s network was developing in the 1970s (called Pioneer People from 1991); Virgo’s from about 1980 (Coastlands, then New Frontiers); and in the 1980s Tony Morton’s (Cornerstone, based in Southampton). On Virgo and NFI, see David Smith, “An account for the sustained rise of New Frontiers International within the United Kingdom”, *JEPTA* (2003), pp. 137 – 156.

⁷ On Baxter’s influence in the UK, see Walker, 92 – 101.

lacking the coherence and submitted relationships of the Fort Lauderdale group. The American 5 thought the UK situation couldn't go fwd without addressing the personality clash between Jones and Noble; they proposed that these two should submit to Wallis, who would be covered by an American apostle. Noble refused this idea saying Wallis lacked the strength for such a role. Baxter and FL leaders supported R1 against R2. But Jones was not willing to be a US satellite, and Baxter did not return to R1 events after 1977, and this US – UK link ended in 1979. However, Jones pastured a church in St Louis (1978 – 83) and a US edition of *Restoration* was produced.

However, there were already quite a number of de facto independent ministries and congregations of a Pentecostal or charismatic character in the USA. Two of the best-known independent pastor-teachers in the charismatic sphere at this time were Robert Frost and Judson Cornwall. This tendency to independency was very congenial in the North American entrepreneurial capitalist society. People would start a church just as you might open a new business.

By the mid-1970s, the discipleship-shepherding teaching of CGM had become highly controversial, and was strongly attacked by Pat Robertson, Dennis Bennett and others (David du Plessis was also against). At that time, the “non-denominational” charismatic world was made up of those who believed in stronger authority (shepherding of pastors) and those who did not. Both streams were represented separately at the big Kansas City conference of 1977.

Characteristics

Already we can see some emerging characteristics of the new charismatic churches.

1. **Restoration Vision**

At the origins there was a widespread sense of the need for the restoration of the “New Testament church” (in UK and NZ coming from a Brethren inspiration)⁸, but even wider was a sense of the disastrousness of division and the need for a new unity (point 2 flows from this). More attention was given to the question of Church than was common in either Evangelical or Pentecostal circles.

2. Non-Denominational

Disunity was blamed on denominationalism. The Restoration ecclesiology coming from Brethrenism opposed denominationalism on principle. In general, the first generation of new church charismatics thought that the Pentecostal movement had been of God, but that it had made a disastrous mistake when it became a cluster of new denominations.

The new charismatics typically regard inherited (denominational) church structures as an obstacle to evangelism, to vigorous church life and to dynamic church growth. Their opposition to formalised structures affects everything: worship, teaching, ministry, mission. No fixed structure for worship means openness for the Spirit to lead and to shape the worship. In teaching, there is a reluctance to draw up credal statements and to distinguish a ministry or a network on doctrinal grounds⁹. In ministry, there is a reluctance to formalise ministries by patterns of ministerial ordination.

Although the Pentecostals are only one century old as a movement, they have become in effect a cluster of Pentecostal denominations with some associated ministries. The new churches think that the Pentecostals took a major wrong turning when they formed denominations, thereby seriously weakening the dynamic of the Spirit, and they are determined not to repeat

⁸ Thus Terry Virgo wrote a book, *Restoration in the Church* (1985).

⁹ An exception here is Germany, where several of the new churches have produced statements of faith.

this mistake. The new church attitude is vividly illustrated in this quotation from a magazine interview: “Q: **How are you going to keep all this going?** A: We’re not! It’s vital we don’t keep it going. So often, initiatives which start with God soon become part of an institution. We’ve got to keep God central to all that is happening. He has started this and He must continue to inspire it. We don’t want to become an organisation, but keep as a movement.”¹⁰

The American Dick Iverson of Portland, Oregon, has listed three factors that cause fellowships to become denominations: credentialing (with ordination of ministers), ownership of buildings, and having a central missions board. Thus, Iverson’s network, Ministers Fellowship International, has three other principles that bind leaders together in a way that preserves fellowship without denomination-forming tendencies: relationships, integrity, and doctrinal compatibility¹¹.

Iverson’s ideal of “doctrinal compatibility” illustrates very well the characteristic new church approach to doctrine: doctrine is not unimportant; the new churches do share fundamental Evangelical-charismatic convictions about God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, the Scriptures, redemption, conversion, worship, sin, repentance, deliverance. But what matters is not subscription to a formula, ancient or modern, but fundamental agreement in spirit. They do not start from a doctrinal system, and they do not easily nail down their beliefs in propositional form. Hence “doctrinal compatibility”.

3 Networks

With the rise of trans-local apostolic ministries came the development of “networks”. Each major leader with an apostolic ministry gathered around him pastors and congregations that accepted his apostolic authority and input. In

¹⁰ “Talking to Pete Greig” *Jesus Life* 60 (2002), p. 13.

¹¹ See Wagner, *op.cit.*, pp. 176 – 177.

the networks, the emphasis was on relationships rather than structures, particularly between pastors and those with apostolic leadership gifts. The lack of permanent structures and the emphasis on personal relationships gave an element of flexibility, and in effect it was not unknown for a pastor and congregation to change networks by relating to a different apostolic leader.

How do you organise “church life” without developing centralised organisations that are new denominations in the making? A major element in “new church” answer to this question is “networking”, which is seen as a flexible “non-institutional” form of partnership and collaboration. Much of the new church movement consists of networks of local churches accepting the leadership of a pastor recognised as having an apostolic ministry¹². In most cases, the leader of the network was the founder of a church that became a model, a kind of flagship church, from which other churches were planted and around which some existing churches gathered. As the network grows, the main leader hands over the local church he founded to another pastor, and concentrates on network leadership and wider ministry, seen as an apostolic role. The story of Terry Virgo told in his autobiography *No Well-Worn Paths*¹³ is characteristic of this pattern.

However, there are many independent charismatic churches that are not part of networks, that perhaps pick and choose from the conferences and resources from which they wish to benefit. But most of those that are unattached are small. Those that are successful draw others and breed others.

In Britain today, there are several new church networks, of which the roots mostly go back at least to the 1970s: the largest

¹² See also section below on the restoration of apostolic and prophetic ministries.

¹³ The excellence of Virgo’s book is shown by Andrew Walker’s acclaim that “it is destined to become a classic”. One of its qualities is its evident honesty, a refreshing trait in a movement not known for its modesty.

is New Frontiers International, led by Terry Virgo, from Brighton, Sussex; others include Pioneer, led by Gerald Coates (Farnham, Surrey); Salt and Light, led by Barney Coombs; Cornerstone, led until recently by Tony Morton (Southampton); Ground Level, led by Stuart Bell (Lincoln). In Northern Ireland, there is LifeLink, led by Paul Reid (Belfast). Two British networks deserve particular mention because they buck the pattern by being more blue-collar churches: Ichthus, founded by Roger Forster (South-East London); and Multiply, led by Noel Stanton (Northampton)¹⁴. Ichthus: Forster more educated, more theological, inspired by Anabaptists and T. Austin-Sparks. Multiply (Jesus Army – Bugbrooke): originally a local Baptist chapel, separated over discipline and elders; community vision; strong authority; businesses; celibacy; black churches. Multiply grew up much later than Bugbrooke and Jesus Army.

In the USA, major new church networks include Christian International Ministries, led by Bishop Bill Hamon (Santa Rosa Beach, Florida); Dove Christian Fellowship International, led by Larry Kreider (Ephrata, Pennsylvania); People of Destiny International, led by C. J. Mahaney (Gaithersburg, Maryland); Harvest International Ministries, led by Che Ahn (Pasadena, California); Ministers Fellowship International, led by Dick Iverson (Portland, Oregon). In France, there is a network called , led by Pierre Cranga of Macon.

Of course the styles of leadership and fellowship vary from one network to another. In general, the British networks are more informal than the American, the offices of the main leader less like the office of a CEO. The Europeans have avoided titles, such as one finds in some U. S. networks, e.g. Apostle John P.

¹⁴ Multiply is the network that grew out of the Jesus Fellowship. Their story is told in Cooper and Farrant.

Kelly, Apostle John Eckhardt, Bishop Wellington Boone, Bishop Bill Hamon¹⁵, Bishop Keith Butler¹⁶.

4 Fivefold Ministries

Virtually all of the new church leaders believed in the restoration of the fivefold ministries of Eph. 4: 11, but in practice this meant above all apostles with some attention being paid much later to prophets (not so much attention was paid to pastors, teachers and evangelists). Among the early leaders, none called themselves apostles, but most spoke of having an apostolic ministry and of developing apostolic teams. In practice, this meant a very different pattern of government from traditional “free church” circles, with a decisive move away from “congregationalism” towards supra-local leadership and authority. This pattern is in some ways much more episcopal, but without the territorial element of traditional episcopal ministry. This was always opposed by David Lillie, the original pioneer of a restorationist vision of the New Testament Church.

¹⁵ These four titles found in *The New Apostolic Churches*, edited by C. Peter Wagner. Eckhardt, Boone and Butler are all African Americans, who use titles – particularly that of Bishop – much more readily than Caucasian Americans being less tied to the latter’s Evangelical antipathies.

¹⁶ Word of Faith International Christian Center, Southfield, Michigan.