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Ecclesiology in the Major 'Apostolic' Restorationist Churches in the United Kingdom¹

Max Turner

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INTRODUCTION

This paper was supposed to be called 'The Ecclesiology of the House Church Movement' but I could not write to that title. In the first place I have had to restrict the scope of the discussion to what is going on in Great Britain—I could not find adequate literature for other countries. Indeed, in his preface to Joyce Thurman's *New Wineskins*, Professor Hollenweger could even describe the House Church Movement as a *pre-literary*, or *oral* culture. That description would be less apt in 1988 than it was in 1982, but there is still no substantial written work from within the churches concerned, and none that I know of save Andrew Walker's *Restoring the Kingdom* outside them either. I am in a position to tap the oral tradition in Great Britain, but not further afield. Hence the geographical restriction.

Second, I have abandoned the term 'the House Church Movement' in the title because it is inappropriate. As a label it potentially includes too many unrelated groups, both denominational and non-denominational², to discuss within the confines of a single paper. The designation also suffers the major drawback that many if not most of the churches it was originally coined to describe have long since outgrown the possibility of meeting in houses, even if they still have house groups³—for Sunday worship they meet now in hotels, schools, or their own buildings (for example, Bryn Jones' church in Bradford has 800; Terry Virgo's in Hove is closer to 1000). This essay will concentrate on the sector of the House Church Movement often called the 'apostolic' restorationist churches. There are good reasons for focusing on these groups, for they are the most significant both in terms of rate of growth and actual numbers (about 40000 in 300 churches)⁴; they are also the most influential on other groups, and it is they who have the most distinctive views of the nature of the church. When we use the term House Church Movement (henceforth HCM) below it will usually be *with reference to the apostolic restorationist sector of the movement*.

¹ A paper first presented to the *Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians* in Altenkirchen, August 1988.

² It would include the evangelistically orientated churches under Roger Forster, the Ichthus Christian Fellowship; a circuit of churches with a special brand of holiness teaching associated with Pastor North (see J V Thurman, *New Wineskins, A Study of the House Church Movement* (Berne 1982) 30-34; A Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom. The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement* (London 1988²) 33-34; the charismatic Brethren church in Chard (Somerset) with its offshoots (see Thurman, *op cit*, 34ff), and the various 'apostolic' restorationist churches, as well as house churches within established denominations (see A Walker, *op cit*, 26f).

³ For the stress on house groups in the movement see eg R Trudinger, *Cells for Life* (Eastbourne 1983) *passim*.

⁴ The figures are differently assessed; here I follow Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom*, 307. As far as growth is concerned, David Matthew claims that, in 1985-6, new members made up 32.2% of their church, and that 55.3% of the new members were either from entirely unchurched backgrounds (43.4%) or from entirely nominal Christianity (11.9%). A remaining 22% had transferred from churches at a distance (because of change of job, etc), only 15% or less being transfers from other local churches. Since that time the % of new members coming from other churches has fallen, and a much higher % of incoming members are new converts. D Matthew, 'The Sheep Stealing Myth', *Restoration* (Mar/April 1986) 23-25.

This leads to the need to consider a third departure from the original title—the substitution of the plural ecclesiologies for an originally suggested singular. What began as a unified movement with a single view of the church has diversified somewhat: both in its organization and its ecclesiology. But in the general features to be described below

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there is probably still sufficient apparent unity to justify retaining the originally suggested singular.

The roots and the shoots of the movement

The roots of the apostolic, restorationist house church movement can be traced back to meetings arranged (for Brethren and Pentecostalist leaders) by the independent ex-Brethren charismatics Arthur Wallis and David Lillie in 1958 (Countess Wear, Devon), 1961 (Okehampton), and 1962 (Mamhead Park)—it was from these meetings that the Charismatic Movement arose, and Restorationism is to be seen as a radical form of that movement which refused to see the charismatic emphases diluted in denominational and ecclesiastical traditions⁵.

The *apostolic* restorationist movement is best traced back to 1971, when Wallis, with an initial group of six independent charismatic church-planters, covenanted themselves to support each other in seeking to reunite the church under a restoration of what they regarded as a New Testament pattern of ministry and church life. Within the framework of this vision, the group (Arthur Wallis, Bryn Jones, Peter Lyne, David Mansell, John Noble, Graham Perrins and Hugh Thompson) recognized God was using them as the sort of leaders envisaged in Ephesians 4:8-12—including prophets and apostles—through which God would restore the church. They soon added a further group (mainly London Brothers) to transform the Magnificent Seven as they jokingly called themselves into 'the Fabulous Fourteen'—the additions being Gerald Coates, Barney Coombs, Campbell McAlpine, Ian McCulloch, John McLaughlan, Maurice Smith, and George Tarleton)—but even this was by no means understood to be exhaustive of those God was calling as apostles and prophets. It was simply that these fourteen thought they could support each other spiritually and be responsible to each other. There was no official union of churches or joint proclamation of doctrine; it was an informal matter of the leaders alone—of their sharing in worship around the Lord's Supper together, being personally committed to each other, and having a common understanding as men of destiny within God's purpose to restore the kingdom.⁶

1976 saw a divide in the group, between those who stayed with Wallis and Jones (Mansell, Virgo and Thompson), and those who took a rather freer line⁷. Substantially on the basis of this divide Walker provides the following useful algebraic notation to designate the (sociological) ideal types:

⁵ See P Hocken, *Streams of Renewal: Origins and Early Development of the Charismatic Movement in Great Britain* (Exeter 1986), chs 2-7, 21; Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom*, ch 2.

⁶ Walker, *op cit*, chs 3-4.

⁷ See Walker, *op cit*, chs 4 and 5. In 1982, David Tomlinson, then an apostle of R1 movement, transferred to R2, and in 1985 Terry Virgo became independent of the Bradford (R1) movement: see Walker, *op cit*, 111f and ch 14.

Let us say that *Restoration One* (R1) refers to all those Restorationist groups that have remained faithful to the Restorationist vision of the 1970s and have maintained a commitment to the apostolic and shepherding doctrines of those early years. Such an

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attachment sees the Restorationist kingdom as being under the control and direction of God's chosen delegates. This form of restorationism, in its pure form, has a tendency towards exclusivism.

Restoration Two (R2) refers to those fellowships that still cling to the major tenets of Restorationist ideology, but in changing and diluted form. There is less emphasis on hierarchical and paternalistic relationships (shepherding), and a continual redefining of apostolic ministry and church leadership. Such a redefining increasingly sees apostolic and prophetic ministries in terms of function—'enabling ministries'—rather than in terms of God's government and rule. This form of Restorationism has a tendency not only for change but for openness to groups outside Restorationist circles⁸.

This notation will be freely used in the account of ecclesiology below, though it should be noted that David Matthew, as a spokesman for R1, considers the actual differences in authority structure and practice in Restorationist churches *today* to be much less sharp than this description would suggest⁹.

A final word of introduction is perhaps appropriate. Because this is a nascent and fast growing movement, and because its leaders are not professionally qualified in theology (eg at master's or doctoral level), it is hard to find a formal ecclesiology of the HCM at all. Virtually all the 'ecclesiology' in the account offered has to be inferred from works written for popular consumption, and much of it is written with more zeal than systematic theology and academic balance. It would be wrong to write it off for this reason, for some of the leaders are highly intelligent men, who, given the time and opportunity, could restate much of what they are preaching with the quality of writing professional theologians are used to; they are simply not trying to address theologians. So for the present we need to take especial care to weigh the content rather than the form of presentation of their teaching.

APOSTOLIC RESTORATIONISM AND THE GATHERED CHURCH

The New Testament word for 'church', as we all know, is *ekklêsia*; a word that, as many have pointed out, means 'assembly', 'meeting' or 'congregation'. But the people of God in Colossae, Ephesus, Rome and Jerusalem never did meet together as a single congregation, any more than the people of God in Frankfurt, London, and Paris do today. So on what basis do the various New Testament writers refer to the plurality of scattered congregations in the singular as 'the (one) congregation (*ekklêsia*) of God (or of Christ)¹⁰? I think P T O'Brien¹¹ is fundamen-

⁸ Walker, *op cit*, 301-302.

⁹ A point made in a telephone 'interview', 20 July 1988.

¹⁰ Col 1:18, 24; Eph 1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23f etc.

¹¹ In D A Carson (ed), *The Church in the Bible and the World* (Exeter 1987) 88-119, esp 94ff. O'Brien is taking up and developing insights already present in K Berger, 'Volksammlung and Gemeinde Gottes. Zu den

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tally right when he argues that the explanation is to be found in the sort of thinking we meet strikingly in Hebrews 12:22-24. Here, in contrast to the situation of Jews who assembled to meet God at Mount Sinai, the writer affirms:

But you have come (*proseléluthate*) to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels of joyful assembly, to *the church of the firstborn*, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant.

The readers are assured, in other words, that they have already come to participate in the *heavenly* and *eschatological* congregation of God's people. O'Brien goes on to argue it is this heavenly, eschatological congregation Paul has in mind when (in Col 1:18 etc) he refers to the churches as 'the church'—and he sees the local congregations not primarily as component parts of some world-wide *earthly* church, but as full manifestations in time and space of the one heavenly eschatological assembly. That is, the true identity and life of the local congregation derives from its being raised with Jesus, and hidden in him in the heavenly realm (Col 2:12f, 3:3)—or, as Ephesians 2:5f puts it, in the congregation having been raised with Christ and seated with him at the right hand of God. What the believers are called to is to live out the consequences of the heavenly union (3:1—4:6).

This, too, is what Arthur Wallis, a founding father of the modern British Restorationist Movement, conceives as the essential nature of the church when he writes (with respect to Gal 4):

Local churches should be colonies of heaven, miniatures of 'the Jerusalem that is above', and providing on earth a corporate expression of 'the glorious freedom of the children of God'.¹²

And Wallis would agree entirely with Thieliicke that believers in the plurality of earthly congregations are called 'to exist in analogy to this... *ekklêsia*' (ie that of Heb 12:23)¹³—even if he, and British Restorationist leaders following him, draw very different conclusions from Thieliicke's about how this is to be turned into reality!

From the vantage point of this conception of the church as the earthly embodiment of the heavenly and eschatological assembly of the redeemed, and given an evangelical doctrine of salvation by faith and consequent new birth, we may understand much Restorationist critique of the church in history. For Restorationists, the gradual welding of church and state into Christendom, following the conversion of Constantine, was only a little less disastrous than

Anfangen der christlichen Verwendung von "ekklêsia", *ZTK* 63 (1976) 167-207. See also E P Clowney's important essay, 'The Biblical Theology of the Church', in Carson, *Church*, 13-87.

¹² A Wallis, *Radical Christian*, 162.

¹³ H Thieliicke, *The Evangelical Faith* III (Grand Rapids 1982) 206f, also calling on Berger's findings. H Küng, *The Church* (London 1967) 79-104, gives a not entirely dissimilar picture, though in his urgency to preclude identification of the kingdom with the church, or any idea of the church growing into the kingdom of God (see esp 93) he has been misunderstood (eg by A Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Dublin 1976) 97) to say that the kingdom of God brings the end of the church rather than its consummation.

the Fall itself. It created a mixed community, with more unbelievers than believers. Such an institution cannot exist in analogy to the heavenly church; it is rather

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precisely a manifestation of *the world*—the field of wheat and tares of Matthew 13:24-30, 38¹⁴—not of the redeemed holy community. And the institutional churches remain so even in our day, when church is merely an option embraced by those who form a cognitive minority, because of the deep inroads made by secularization amongst both the laity and the clergy¹⁵. David Matthew thus throws up his hands in horror when a leading Catholic says, 'There is a tremendous need in the Catholic Church for evangelism, both of its own members and in the church's mission to the world', and retorts, 'A so-called "church" whose own members need evangelising isn't a church at all, because "church" by definition means those who have *been* evangelised and have responded in faith'¹⁶—ie it is the community of *the redeemed*¹⁷. The mixed community of the institutional or state church is no more pleasing to God now than it was in the Old Testament or in 2 Corinthians 6.14f; God hates such mixtures.¹⁸ Unbelievers are not part of God's people, but of the world he loves and seeks to save. They are not part of 'the church' properly understood, even though they must be made welcome and served BY *the church*.¹⁹

As far as the Restorationists are concerned, the Bible is decidedly on the side of the gathered church, not the state, national or 'open' church. As they see it, the mistake of the Reformation was its loss of nerve at this point. Luther had had a glimpse (see the preface to his *German Mass*, 1526) of the character of the true church as the congregation of those with faith, meeting separately in one house for prayer, Bible reading and spiritual discipline, but political expediency, disillusionment with the charismatic sector, and his understanding of God's order in church and state combined to paralyse him²⁰. It was the Anabaptists who first sought in any disciplined way to translate into reality the biblical concept of the church as the community of

¹⁴ Restorationists vigorously denounce the use of Matthew's parable to justify retaining a mixed church: see eg Wallis, *Radical Christian*, 92; Matthew, *Church Adrift: Where in the World are we going?* (London 1985) 192.

¹⁵ The HCM is by no means alone in this judgement: Walker labels the invisible divide between the believing church and the modernist church the greatest schism since that between East and West, and that of the Reformation: see his 'The Third Schism: The Great Divide in Christianity Today' in T Moss (ed) *In Search of Christianity* (London 1986).

¹⁶ Matthew, *Church Adrift*, 188f.

¹⁷ Matthew, *op cit*, 188.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 192f; cf Thompson 1978: 15-18; Wallis 1981: 92.

¹⁹ (1) Striving for a church of believers does not mean instigating a witch-hunt; it means those who join are assumed to be true believers (they will be asked) and that they will willingly be incorporated into the church's aims to build up and sanctify the community. The radical discipleship and pastoral structure of shepherding would discern those with little spiritual life and take the necessary action to help them.

(2) Those who hold a theology of the gathered church have often been accused of being much narrower than their Master who was a friend of tax-collectors and sinners, and who made no attempt to circumscribe communities of his followers (so Rahner and more guardedly Moltmann). But this criticism is not attuned to the aims of Jesus (to call all Israel, as Israel, to participate in the restoration of Israel; and to challenge the pharisees' paradigm of Israel as the society of the holy, which interpreted the latter primarily in terms of separation from cultic defilement and rigorous obedience especially to the aspects of Torah that made Israel distinctive: see Marcus Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teaching of Jesus* (New York 1984), *passim*). Nor is the criticism attuned to the divisive impact of the Christ event, and the character of the apostolic church which was a circumscribed community of believers!

²⁰ So Wallis, *Radical Christian*, 89 (following E H Broadbent, *The Pilgrim Church* (London 1935) 164ff; Matthew, *Church Adrift*, 99-100; cf P Avis, *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers* (London 1981) 22-24.

redeemed believers²¹. The Restorationist Movement sees its spiritual roots in these Anabaptist circles²² and in the Free Church movements since.

FOCAL AND DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF APOSTOLIC RESTORATIONISM

What distinguishes the Apostolic Restorationist Movement more sharply from other expressions of the Free Church is (1) the theological character of its view of the church—its particular blend of eschatology, pneumatology, understanding of ministry, and the relation of these to the corporate life of the church—and (2) the (sociologically) radical character of its discipleship, that is, its comprehensive social control by leaders, and the unusual strength of personal commitment by members. In Walker's words

In the typical Evangelical churches, believers are expected to 'give their hearts to Jesus', and there is an expectation that some

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demands will be made on free time. Restorationists, however, are prepared to give their all to the kingdom, whether it be time, money, personal possessions, or skills. Being an Anglican or a Baptist can be a part-time pursuit (almost a leisure activity). To become a Restorationist is to adopt a total way of life.²³

Written by an outside observer to the movement—and one skilled in sociological analysis—this is a striking statement. I also think it is an overstatement—but I would agree that the sort of commitment expected is that which one would normally associate rather with a para-church organization, like a missionary fellowship or religious community. It embraces all aspects of living, not merely those usually regarded as the province of the church's guidance; as Anne Mather rightly observed, the emphasis is on

...a shared life... with mutual practical assistance whenever necessary. A member's monetary commitment will not only be to the church (tithing being a common practice) but also to any individuals within that church who may need finances—for a house, car, or holiday, for example. It is apparent that the house churches have developed not only an *alternative church*, but also an *alternative society*²⁴.

This last is no happy accident. Like the apocalyptists, the HCM tends to see the world as in the hands of the Evil One (without believing everything in it is bad; R2 parts of the movement are more positively related to culture than R1); and they see believers as called to live out the life of the age to come in this present age. In that sense they see the church as called to be a new society under and exemplifying God's rule, a theocracy created by God to witness to the world. The radical commitment of the apostolic HCM rests on a radical ecclesiology, which is largely *restorationist* and *charismatic*, and has a distinctive eschatological emphasis. Let us look at this in more detail.

²¹ See Avis, *op cit*, 51-61 for an ecclesiology of the Radical Reformation.

²² See above all N Wright, *The Radical Kingdom* (Eastbourne 1986) 29-46; to a lesser extent Matthew, *Church Adrift*, 100-102.

²³ *Restoring the Kingdom*, 127.

²⁴ A Mather, 'The House Churches: Their Emphases', *Evangel* 4 (1986) part 3, 14.

Restorationist ecclesiology

We must understand the adjective restorationist is applicable of the movement in three distinct yet related senses.

First, the adjective can be applied to characterise the 'shape' or character of its salvation history. This is spelt out in terms of God's reversal of that alienation of men from God and from fellow men brought about by the Fall and its consequences. The cosmos that was a unity of fellowship and harmony with God shall become one with him again: that is the content of the 'restoration (*apokatastasis*) of all things' promised in Acts 3:21; and it is the major theme of Ephesians. The unity of the church is an urgent issue in 4:1-6 precisely because the

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church is the witness to and locus of God's restorative or unifying purpose—the mystery of the Gospel is that God has *already* reconciled into *one* body the erstwhile divisions of mankind: Jew and Gentile (Eph 3:4-10). Jesus has already begun the cosmic restoration in bringing messianic peace through his horizontal reconciliation of Jew and Gentile, and vertical reconciliation of the one body so created with God (Eph 2:13-21); and all this is merely the historical manifestation of God's pre-temporal purpose 'which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, *to unite all things in him*, things in heaven and on earth' (Eph. 1:10; cf 1:22). The ecclesiology of the HCM, which is very much based in Ephesians, is thus rightly described as a restorationist ecclesiology in this salvation-historical sense²⁵.

Second, the ecclesiology of the HCM may be labelled restorationist in so far as it is a call to return to our roots²⁶, to restore the pattern of church life, discipline and ministry evinced in the early church. This call, of course, is shared by a number of radical groups from the Anabaptists onwards, but especially the Brethren. The version of it we meet in the HCM must be seen as a development from the discussions between mainly Brethren and Pentecostalist leaders at conferences brought together by Arthur Wallis between 1958 and 1965, and subsequently in 1971²⁷. The call is not a hankering after a by-gone golden age (the Restorationists are aware of the early church's all-too-apparent weaknesses and human failings!), but a plea to be disciples of the apostles in spiritual dynamic as well as in doctrine.

Third, the adjective 'restorationist' is applicable as a description of the movement's church-historical perspective. The HCM sees church history very much in terms of God's reversing the post-Constantinian ecclesiastical 'Fall', and restoring to the church aspects of its life that were lost in the dark ages (600-1500)²⁸. Thus, according to Matthew, God has gradually restored the centrality of the Word (in the Reformation generally), the independence of the church from the state (Anabaptists, Dissenters, Methodists, Baptists etc); presbyterian leadership (Puritans, Presbyterians and Congregationalists), the autonomy of the local church

²⁵ See eg Matthew, *Church Adrift*, ch 21; Wright, *Radical Kingdom*, 20-22 and ch 4.

²⁶ Wallis himself use the adjective 'radical' (ie which he etymologizes as 'going back to the roots') as a synonym for this sense of 'restorationist', and it is in that sense we should understand the title of his book *The Radical Christian*.

²⁷ For historical details see Hocken, *Streams of Renewal*, 30-37, and the important Appendix III, 200-204; Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom*, chs 2 and 3.

²⁸ For this sense of 'restoration' see Matthew, *Church Adrift*, 51.

(early Baptists, Congregationalists and Brethren); believers' baptism (Anabaptists, Baptists); the believer's right to expect to hear God's Spirit in his own life (Quakers); commitment to the holiness and discipline of the congregation (Methodism); the establishment of cell groups for spiritual nurture (Pietism); the commitment to social involvement (Salvation Army), leadership by the home-grown godly rather than the imposition of a professional outsider (Brethren) and, above all, the widespread experience of spiritual gifts (Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Movement)²⁹—all this moves up to the decisive new initiative God is seen to be taking now in reconstituting apostolic churches.

Before we spell out the significance of the total Restorationist

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package, we must note its other dimension; its charismatic emphasis, and its relatively distinctive eschatological focus.

Charismatic ecclesiology

Restorationism can be understood in part as the product of firing Brethren and Pentecostalist leadership in the crucible of the charismatic renewal. The RI movement owes not a little to the Assemblies of God heritage of its most influential leader, Bryn Jones³⁰. Like that Pentecostalist movement it tends to be fundamentalist, adventist and anti-clericalist, and to emphasise new birth, believers' baptism and subsequent baptism in Holy Spirit³¹. R2 is altogether more flexible, and could move in the direction of affirming that the gift of the Spirit received *at conversion* is the fount of the charismata experienced in the church³². Both sections of the Restorationist movement, however, have a radical charismatic ecclesiology.

There has of course been a wealth of charismatic theologies of the church since Felix Grau's thesis on the *Charisma* in the mid-forties, though not all have doffed the hat to Pentecostalism so explicitly and sympathetically as Lesslie Newbigin's *The Household of God*³³. With this new emphasis on the church as a charismatic community we have had a recovery of the Pauline emphasis on the diversity of gifts expressed through the whole congregation over against an early catholic tendency (often read into the Pastoral epistles) to clericalise the

²⁹ Matthew, *Church Adrift*, chs 10-14.

³⁰ So Thurman, *New Wineskins*, 25.

³¹ For the debt to Pentecostalism see Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom*, 129-33. In the RI movement, 'baptism in Holy Spirit' is still regarded theologically as a second blessing, even if it is assumed a Christian need not wait for it: see T Virgo, *Restoration in the Church* (Eastbourne 1985) ch 5; anon, 'Your Personal Pentecost: Baptism in the Holy Spirit', *Restoration* (May/June 1988) 10; Ling, 'Pentecost: Birth of a Prophetic People', *Restoration* (May/June 1988) 12-14; D Mansell, 'Spirit-Anointed—But for What?', *Restoration* (May/June 1988) 32-35. Strangely Virgo and Mansell clearly see the Spirit so given as the author of the fruit of the Spirit and obedient life-style, as well as affording charismatic gifts, without recognising the consequence—that without the Spirit affording regeneration and inner obedience a man could not be a member of the new covenant people at all (cf Ezek 36 and 2 Cor 3). In short, the theological character they predicate of baptism in Holy Spirit must tie the gift primarily to conversion initiation, not to some subsequent experience (see M M B Turner, 'Spiritual Gifts Then and Now', *Vox Evangelica* 15 (1985) 51ff [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/vox/vol15/gifts_turner.pdf], and compare Hocken 1986; 168-171).

³² See, eg, Wright, *Radical Kingdom* 148f.

³³ L Newbigin, *The Household of God* (London 1953) ch 4.

*charismata*³⁴. But Restorationist readers (if they bothered to read them at all) might well wonder if some of these treatments have not simply taken back with their left hand what they allowed with their right. For example, Küng's otherwise lucid treatment of Paul's concept of the *charismata* in the church abruptly becomes more difficult to understand when Küng attempts to argue at some length that Paul plays down 'ecstatic' (*Küng's* word) and extraordinary gifts like tongues in favour of gifts of service and of the highest charisma, love (1 Cor 12:31).³⁵ Who would ever have concluded from a reading of Küng that the gift which Paul actually advocated most strongly the Corinthians seek was *prophecy* (1 Cor 14:1), and that it is exegetically improbable that these chapters depict 'love' as either a charisma or a *pneumatikon* at all?!³⁶ And a few pages later Küng seems to dispose effectively of any other phenomena that might trouble the sleep of the church by labelling them mere (or even 'anarchic') 'enthusiasm'—under which, incidentally, he includes not merely the totality of Pentecostalism, but also German Pietism, Congregationalism, the Brethren, Baptists, Mormons and Seventh Day Adventists³⁷!

For Restorationists, the model of the church as a *charismatic body*—a symphony of diverse types of spiritual gifts (of leadership, service and utterance) orchestrated by the Spirit—is a *primary* theological model of

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the church. And by referring to the ecclesiology of the HCM as radically charismatic, I mean that the movement expects the actual life, worship and ministry of the church to be a full and credible sign (Dulles might say a sacrament) of the doctrine. That is, to put it almost too sharply, *the HCM would claim Paul's doctrine of the charismatic nature of the congregation should be capable of being deduced from observing the churches' practice*. Their point is that no-one entering the rather formalised worship in most Anglican, Baptist or even Pentecostalist churches would conclude that the church was (or considered itself to be) a vital organism in which each had gifts, which were manifest acts of the Spirit, and which the congregation acknowledged as workings (*energēmata*) of God through a plurality of different members for the common good. From observation *alone*, an observer might often deduce rather that the Christian church is not untypical of a wider set of religious movements that have a sacred priestly cast, who perform most of the religious duties, and a relatively quiescent people who observe, listen to teaching, and respond in a variety of formalised ways in song, action and utterance. The HCM wants those who attend its worship (both in the main congregation and in the smaller house groups), and observe its day-to-day conduct, to be able to see Paul's concept of the church as a charismatic body lived out before them; and expect more-or-less the full range of the gifts of the eschatological Spirit mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12-14 (with Rom 12 and Eph 4) to be operative.

³⁴ See, for example, the important discussions by such varied writers as Küng, *Church* 150-203 (esp 179ff); J D G Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (London 1975) part 3; J Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (London 1977) chs 5 and 6 (esp 294-300), and H Thielicke, *The Evangelical Faith* part 1 (esp section B).

³⁵ Küng, *Church*, 181-191.

³⁶ On the nature of Pauline *charismata*, the emphases of 1 Cor 12-14, and the place in the argument of ch 13, see *Vox Evangelica* (1985) 7-64, esp 27-36, 38 [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/vox/vol15/gifts_turner.pdf], and D A Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids 1987), *passim*.

³⁷ Küng, *Church*, 191-203, esp 195.

The worship thus, while usually loosely but definitely structured (even though many HCM leaders have inherited an almost pathological fear of tradition from the Brethren³⁸), and still giving an important place to teaching from the Bible, is more than merely potentially 'open to the Spirit': it is positively expected God will speak into the congregation's worship through a plurality of diverse charismata. This should not be taken to imply anyone can get off with anything, for the group dynamics of the leadership is such that only those who have established a record of useful and responsible contributions would seek and be given relatively free access to the podium or microphone (others being expected to approach a leader during the meeting and explain what they felt the Lord wanted them to say or do before addressing the church as a whole—if the leader felt it was appropriate both in content and in timing).

This radical charismatic ecclesiology also comes to expression in their understanding of **ministry**. For the HCM, it is important *the Spirit first* endows a man with the particular set of gifts he needs for the task to which God calls him. Only when such gifting is clearly in evidence—in other words when the man is actually fulfilling some charismatic function in the church (often in its house- or cell-groups) will the church take steps to recognize that ministry formally (if such is appropriate) and perhaps salary the functionary to release him for fuller work. In

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principle this applies across the board—even those the HCM calls 'apostles' would only be recognized as such when they have demonstrated what are regarded as the relevant charismata: including the successful planting, nurture and government of thriving churches. The nearest to 'office' one finds in the church is the 'eldership' ('deacons' are found only irregularly; more generally in the R1 part of the movement than in R2 churches), who are usually officially appointed either by the 'apostle' or by the existing eldership—but once again, the criterion for the choice is the congregation's own recognition that this man is already *leading them* spiritually, already evincing the necessary gifts, and sure of God's call to the responsibility concerned. Almost invariably elders are appointed from *within* a congregation, not imposed from outside; and on the basis of spiritual maturity, and pastoral and leadership ability, rather than on successful completion of a formal theological education.

The HCM is not anti-intellectual (most of its leaders are from the professional classes, and many have keen enquiring minds); nor is it against theological education—some of its best teachers have benefited from it (see the writings of, eg, Roger Forster or Nigel Wright), a trickle of its young people are being encouraged to go to the more academically orientated Bible colleges, and the leaders themselves are increasingly being invited to speak at such colleges. But (1) the HCM has more than occasionally found those with theological education to be unsympathetic, even, alas, arrogant towards it; (2), more important, the leaders of the movement have (probably legitimate!) doubts about the relevance of much we teach in universities and Bible colleges; and they feel that the academic isolation of the colleges rips theological knowledge out of the context of the church's life and of its fundamentally practical and pastoral concerns³⁹; (3) there is also the feeling that our courses even fail to relate to the spirituality of the students themselves: 'the Bible colleges must train leaders to

³⁸ See especially Wallis, *Radical Christian*, ch 10. For the Brethren connection see Hocken, *Streams of Renewal*, 203f.

³⁹ See eg R Trudinger, *Built to Last* (Eastbourne 1982²) ch 22.

live, not merely to lead', complains Coates⁴⁰, and (4) theological training is seen as only a small part of the total equipment required by leaders; the emphasis coming rather on their ability to hear, and to put into effect, what the Spirit is saying to the church *today*—which includes the **prophetic word** (new direction, new diagnosis, new encouragement, not new revelation⁴¹), **spiritual teaching** (not merely exegesis, but how the Bible is to be *applied* in the concrete and ever-changing circumstances of particular congregations and specific individuals), the **liberating word** (the God-given word of release for some who are sick or oppressed: cf Lk 4:18f; 1 Cor 12:9f) and the **charismatic direction** in wholehearted praise and worship of God.

Other, more traditional, types of church ministry are felt by the HCM to jeopardise Paul's model of the charismatic body. Emphasis on academic theological training as a *primary* basis for leadership suggests

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ministry is rooted in a model of the *professional elite* instead of that of a *charismatic body*. Similarly, denominational appointment of leaders to congregations suggests the church is seen primarily as a large corporation directed from its Head Office. Again the widespread concentration of ministries in one official appointee, together with the use of vestments, and especially the exclusive right to consecrate the elements of the Lord's Supper, perpetuate the great clergy/laity divide, and reinforce the alien model of cultic (temple) priesthood. Of course all these traditional church ministerial patterns can be *rationalized*—eg in the fiction that the congregation are handing over powers to their minister *as their representative*; but the question remains whether the practices that result do not set before the world an entirely different model from Paul's—and one that completely smothers his vision of the church as an organism of members made interdependent by the sovereign distribution of spiritual gifts.

As we shall see in more detail below, the model of the church as a charismatic body also in practice governs the restorationist understanding of the relationship of responsibility between leaders and the church as a whole. It relativizes the authority of the leadership and emphasizes the responsibility of the congregation to discern God's will and to bring it to effect.

The distinctive eschatological focus

The elements we have discussed above are combined in the majority of Restorationism with a rejection of the doom and gloom of a post-tribulation pre-Millennialism, which sees Christ coming to save a battered church, worn and torn by the messianic woes. In its place is put an eschatology based primarily in Ephesians 4 and 5. From 4:13 and 15f it is deduced that Paul expects the church ultimately to reach unity of faith on earth, and full spiritual maturity—'attaining the full measure of perfection found in Christ' (4:13). Jesus is coming back for a spotless and radiant bride (Eph 5:25-27), not a shabby war-weary refugee⁴². Nothing in the text of Ephesians prepares the reader for, eg, Markus Barth's view that this

⁴⁰ G Coates, *Divided We Stand?* (Eastbourne 1987) 76 (our italics).

⁴¹ Cf Turner, *Vox Evangelica* (1985) 54-56. Only concerning churches under John MacLaughlan and Graham Perrins have I heard the (unchronicled) criticism that prophecy has been elevated in authority to the level of scripture, and I am informed that Perrins has since moderated his radical views.

⁴² See Wright, *Radical Kingdom*, 184-187 and Mansell, 'Growing Up in Christ', *Restoration* (Sept/Oct 1987) 18-20, for a clear statement of this position; but it goes back to Wallis and the 1971 colloquium (see eg Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom*, 67 and 133-137).

glorious state is produced *by* the Parousia, and in sharp contrast with what existed before; rather it seems to be portrayed as the result of a continuous *process* of growth (cf 4:12f and 16). Similarly, Hugh Thompson can argue from 1 Corinthians 15:24-27 that the End (identified with the Parousia of Jesus) comes only when Jesus has subjugated all enemies; and as Satan was expelled from heaven through the resurrection-exaltation, it must be through his saints on earth, that the Lord finishes the operation (cf Rev 12:10-12)⁴³—ie through a triumphant church. Or, again, it is held Jesus' prayer for unity of the church must be fulfilled—and the prayer is for nothing less than a visible unity of such depth as will convict the world of the oneness

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between the church and God (Father, Son and Spirit): John 17:20-23. The prayer of Jesus in John, and the hope expressed by the apostle in Ephesians 4:12ff, are one and the same.⁴⁴

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE ECCLESIOLOGICAL MOTIFS DESCRIBED

The combination of the motifs discussed above possibly account for most of the prominent features and emphases of the ecclesiology of the movement.

Vision of the church

We can see expressed in its vision of the church on earth as existing in analogy to the heavenly congregation of the redeemed the following features: the call for a *gathered* church rather than a mixed one (this reiterates a Brethren and Pentecostalist legacy); a church emphasizing praise and worship (an emphasis it substantially took over from Pentecostalism anyway); a church expecting its members to live in Christ's victory, and the call to offer not merely an alternative church, but an alternative society—one which affords a glimpse of that unity and love which characterizes the heavenly city and ultimately the joyful unity of Father, Son and Spirit.

Attitude to existing denominations

When we combine the movement's salvation-historical concept of restoration as cosmic reconciliation, or unity in Christ, with the vision of the eschatological unity of an earthly church rising to the full measure of the stature of Christ, then it is easy to understand the fierce antidenominationalism of the HCM. It is not that they regard the original schisms that produced the denominations as wrong—they accept the inevitability, indeed rightness, of, say, the Reformation departure from Rome, the Baptist separation from the established churches, and the Pentecostalist exodus from all of them⁴⁵. Nor are they claiming to set up a pure church which all are summoned to join, and from the safe vantage point of which others may be

⁴³ H Thompson, 'Satan on the Run', *Restoration* (Sept/Oct 1987) 14-16.

⁴⁴ John 17 is possibly the chapter of the Bible most quoted in restorationist literature after Eph 4 and 1 Cor 12-14.

⁴⁵ Matthew, *Church Adrift*, 204, takes David Watson to task for calling the Reformation split one of the greatest tragedies of the church.

criticized⁴⁶. The call is rather to go beyond the Reformation and Renewal movements—for these (and all that went between them) leave too much of the church's structure, life and tradition unredeemed. What is needed in the church's flotilla is not a new charismatic coat of paint to cover over the rusty leaky denominational hulls, but a complete refit—a total inner restructuring according to New Testament norms⁴⁷. In the light of God's intention to destroy the denominationalism that separates his people,

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the Charismatic Renewal Movement is seen simply as 'being occupied with re-arranging the deckchairs on the Titanic'⁴⁸.

The point needs emphasizing. On the whole the HCM is not calling believers to leave other churches and join them—Noble, for example, immediately perceives the chaos that would ensue if there were a Gadarene rush into the HCM!⁴⁹ It is true that some of the leaders of the HCM are so pessimistic about the openness of the denominations to change that they *virtually* (though even then not always unequivocally) advocate abandoning ship⁵⁰, but others like Terry Virgo and most R2 leaders are working with and in some denominational congregations⁵¹, and are members of the Evangelical Alliance—and John Noble is at times almost more positive about denominational congregations than he feels he can be about the HCM⁵².

It is in this context that we must understand the movement's repeated claim that it does not want to form another denomination, nor does it regard itself exclusively as the true church. Rather, Restorationists regard themselves as local manifestations of a pattern of church life and structure that God is restoring, and which one day will embrace all the churches in unity. Sociological factors both within the HCM and in interplay between it and the traditional churches may eventually make the movement into a denomination (if it has not become one (or more) already)⁵³, but in their own perception (at least in R2) they are a movement both outside and inside the traditional churches through which God will bring all true believers to unity.

The way to unity

The combination of their emphases, and perhaps especially the pride of place given to Ephesians 4, explains the way in which they expect that unity to be restored. It cannot be through an ecumenical papering over of cracks between the modernist, mixed and gathered churches, for the fundamental questions of truth and spiritual essence are merely glossed over here⁵⁴. Unity will only be arrived at when the traditionalism and party spirit of

⁴⁶ See J Noble, *Forgive us our Denominations* (Romford 1971), *passim*.

⁴⁷ Matthew, *op cit, passim*; Wright, *Radical Kingdom*, ch 1.

⁴⁸ So Bob Mumford, *Restoration* (May/June 1986) 6.

⁴⁹ *Op cit*, 1.

⁵⁰ So, eg, Wallis, *Radical Christian*, ch 11.

⁵¹ See Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom*, ch 14, esp 315ff; and Coates, *Divided We Stand?*, chs 2 and 3 are clearly intended to challenge Anglicanism and the Free Church to put their house in order, not to demolish or abandon it.

⁵² J Noble, *House Churches: Will They Survive?* (Eastbourne 1988) ch 1.

⁵³ See the sensitive and sociologically informed discussion of the issue in Walker, *op cit*, chs 10-12.

⁵⁴ P Avis, *Ecumenical Theology and the Elusiveness of Doctrine* (London 1986) *passim* correctly perceives the total inadequacy of ecumenical theology to cope with the fundamental problems in Anglican-Roman Catholic

denominationalism is overcome by repentance and restoration of New Testament norms of church doctrine and constitution. Specifically Ephesians 4:11-16 provides the key; *a church under apostles and prophets (so 1 Cor 12.28), one with ministries that equip the saints for works of service⁵⁵ which build up the body of Christ⁵⁶.*

While Kallistos Ware, Lesslie Newbigin, and others are tentatively seeking towards a church united around bishops (the question being 'of what kind?'), the restorationist movement denies their basic premise, namely that it must be round bishops that the churches gather *for want of apostles⁵⁷*. According to the Restorationists, God is now restoring apostles and prophets to the church. The precise origins of this belief are obscure⁵⁸, but in any case unnecessary for an understanding of their perceived character and role.

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EXCURSUS ON APOSTLES AND PROPHETS IN THE RESTORATIONIST CHURCH⁵⁹

Merely to avoid misunderstanding in what follows several points of restorationist teaching need to be clarified.

First, the HCM distinguishes two types of 'apostles of Christ' in the Early Church—the 'apostles of the Lamb' (those appointed before the ascension, or by resurrection appearance (often restricted to the twelve and Paul, despite 1 Cor 15:7 which makes it clear they were a wider circle)) and 'apostles of the Ascension' given *subsequently* to the church by the

relations (cf also A Walker, *Enemy territory: The Christian Struggle for the Modern World* (London 1987) ch 8). Walker sees no point in an ecumenical programme simply to join churches when the real (and unbridgeable) divide is within the churches—between the believing church and the modernist church (224-240).

⁵⁵ We accept the usual protestant exegesis that *eis ergon diakonias* is subordinate to *pros ton katartismos ton hagiôn*, not co-ordinate with it (as in Catholic exegesis), and note Schnackenburg's repentance of his earlier position in the light of his detailed work on the text: see his commentary *ad loc.*

⁵⁶ This is constantly reiterated; see, eg, D Tomlinson, 'Key Ministries in the Quest for Unity', *Restoration* (July/Aug 1979) 10-13, and virtually all restorationist writings.

⁵⁷ For explicit statement of the premise see Ware in P Moore (ed) *Bishops But What Kind?* (London 1982) 2; compare Newbigin's position, influenced by (but modifying) A M Ramsey *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (London 1956²) in 'Bishops in a United Church' in Moore, *op cit*, ch 12.

⁵⁸ Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom*, attributes the view on restoration of apostleship to the influence of the Latter Rain movement (compare Hocken, *Streams of Renewal*, 25); but a more proximate source is Watchman Nee's *The Normal Christian Church Life*—indeed many elements of restorationist ecclesiology could be traced to this work; and it should be noted it is one of the two books Noble (*Forgive Us Our Denominations*) emphatically recommends readers. Similarly the only cited work in Derek Brown's study of apostleship ('The Apostolic Ministry—A Study and Survey', *Towards Leadership* 8 (1983) 2-3) is Watchman Nee. It is also worthwhile noting, as Walker admits (*op cit*, 40), that Nee is all but universally recognized as an apostle amongst the restorationists.

⁵⁹ The following are the main sources consulted on apostleship in restorationist teaching: J Noble, *First Apostle, Last Apostle* (Romford 1973); H A Snyder, *The Community of the King* (Downers Grove 1977) 80-90; D Tomlinson, 'Key Ministries in the Quest for Unity', *Restoration* (July/Aug 1979) 10-13; Brown, *Towards Leadership* 8 (1983) 2-3; P Greenslade, 'What is an Apostle?', *Towards Leadership* 8 (1983) 8; H R Jones, 'Apostles Today?', *Foundations* 13 (1984) 16-25; M Harper, 'Apostles Today—Yes and No', *Renewal* 118 (1985) 26-27; B Jones, 'Apostles Today—for Tomorrow's Church', *Restoration* (Sept/Oct 1985) 30-34; T Virgo, *Restoration in the Church* (Eastbourne 1985) ch 12; A Wallis, 'Men on the Spot, Men on the Move', *Restoration* (Sept/Oct 1985) 2-5; Wright, *Radical Kingdom*, 76-116; Coates, *Divided We Stand?*, ch 7; Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom*, 68-74, 83-84, 150-153; 170-172. Most of the essays have now been revised and collected together in D Matthew (ed) *Apostles Today* (Bradford 1988). On prophets see esp: B Jones, 'Apostles and Prophets—What's the Difference?', *Restoration* (Nov/Dec 1985) 24-27 and H Thompson, 'The Role of the Prophet is more than Prophesying', *Restoration* (Nov/Dec 1985) 2-7.

ascended Lord as Ephesians 4:8-11 states—a group which is taken to include Paul himself again (his post-ascension resurrection appearance makes him a bridge between the types), James (despite 1 Cor 15:7), Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14; 1 Cor 9:5f), Silas (1 Thess 2:7), Timothy (1 Thess 2:7?), Andronicus and Junia (Rom 16:7) etc. While the former group is taken as closed (Paul being the last to see the resurrection Christ (rather than merely a vision of Christ): cf 1 Cor 5:8), the latter group is seen as potentially open⁶⁰. The former group alone had the authoritative role as guarantors and canonical interpreters of the Gospel.

Second, the HCM claims that Ephesians 4:11-13 assumes ongoing apostolic and prophetic ministry as much as it does ongoing evangelists, pastor-teachers and other ministries: they are all explicitly given by Christ for the upbuilding of the church until (*mechri* (v 13) cannot be other than temporal) the church achieves the full maturity of Christ. These fundamental charismatic ministries, lost during the early institutionalizing of the church, are what God is now restoring. This should not be taken to deny there were any such functionaries between the first and twentieth centuries—at other times we may have had them under another guise (calling them, eg, 'missionaries of remarkable insight and power'); but now they are appearing in plurality, and in the appropriately recognized ecclesiastical context and structure.⁶¹

Third, we may best think of these 'apostles' in functional terms as church-planting charismatic bishops.⁶² The main differences being (1) They are not appointed by the church (usually it is merely a matter of the man concerned gradually being recognized as functioning as an apostle⁶³, and so eventually called one); (2) they serve no legal association or denomination, but within an organic relationship with other such leaders; (3) as a consequence, they have no institutionalized authority (ie no canon or church constitutional law to define their rights and responsibilities)—though they are expected to appoint elders (with due consultation) and, as we shall see, they may in fact have considerable power in the congregations under their oversight, and (4) they usually function not individually but in apostolic teams modelled on the relationship between Paul and his co-workers.⁶⁴

Fourth, the criteria for recognition of an apostolic calling are (1)

⁶⁰ The division between pre- and post-ascension apostolates here cannot easily be grounded in Eph 4. The reader will not assume the apostles of 4:11 are different from those of 2:20 and 3:5ff, and these must include those who gave and defined the gospel. That the apostles of Eph 4:11 are differentiated from the foundational apostles by being given to the church by the *ascended* Lord (so 4:8-10) is unconvincing—for even if the apostles of 1 Cor 15:7f were appointed before the ascension, it was only with the bestowal of the Spirit *after* Christ's ascension that they became active and so began to function as Christ's gift to the church.

But the HCM position has a valid insight. Within the hellenistic communities there was a concept of apostleship for which a resurrection appearance was *not a necessary condition*, and Paul echoes this when he calls Silas, Barnabas, Junia and Andronicus 'apostles'. His usage cannot be explained (or dismissed!) in terms of the familiar distinction between 'apostles of Christ' and 'apostles of particular congregations' (as Epaphras can at 2 Cor 8:23): see the detailed study of Schnackenburg in W W Gasque and R P Martin (eds) *Apostolic History and the Gospel* (Exeter 1970) ch 20 [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/apostles_schnackenburg.pdf]. These men were 'apostles of Christ' in the sense that the early communities (and Paul) recognized them as commissioned by the ascended Lord to plant churches, and nurture them (and it is in this sense we take Acts 14:4, and 14 too). I can see no objection to maintaining that such a group was open, and even that it remains open.

⁶¹ Cf Tomlinson, *Restoration* (July/Aug 1979) 12.

⁶² So Wright, *Radical Kingdom*, 76-78.

⁶³ Though at the earliest stage there appears to have been a formal recognition and sealing: cf Walker *Restoring the Kingdom*, 349-51.

⁶⁴ See, eg, Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom*, 151f, 176f.

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fundamental Christian character and clear call of God, (2) the pioneering or planting of chains of new churches, (3) nurture and discipling of those churches to spiritual maturity, (4) ability fruitfully to direct and steer mature congregations, (5) charismatic authority of teaching and insight, (6) working of signs (healing, exorcism etc) and (7) suffering—though the last two are not regarded as criterial, and the final one somewhat rarely discussed. In other words, the criteria are largely character, charisma, and dynamic and quality of workmanship. Apostles are perceived as the power house, and master architects of the church and those carrying the greatest charismatic authority.

Fifth, 'prophets' in the movement are not merely people who have uttered occasional, even regular, prophecies (that would be expected of most leaders, and many beyond the leadership circle)—'all may prophesy one by one' (1 Cor 14:31), but 'not all are prophets are they?' (1 Cor 12:29). 'Prophets' are expected to stand out as men of God, as visionaries who stand in the Council of the Lord, intercessors, and as men of confrontation and direction—when they speak what the Lord has shown them they change things.

END OF EXCURSUS

At the risk of considerable oversimplification, classical Restorationism sees these apostolic figures, and their teams, as (1) promoting the internal unity and rise to maturity of individual congregations (by the teaching, example and discipline exerted by the leaders under their leadership), (2) providing the visible unity between dependent congregations (for each apostle is responsible for a plurality of churches: David Tomlinson and Terry Virgo, for example, work with about fifty each at present), and (3) providing the link between different apostolic works (in the covenanted commitment of the apostles God raises up to support each other), thus potentially providing the focus, or cement, of unity for the whole church.

Of these, the first two are entirely realizable if uncontroversial goals. The third is the significant, but highly problematic one. In the *first* place, the history of the movement itself does not suggest that even the 'Fabulous Fourteen'⁶⁵ have found true unity easy—witness the fragmentation into R1 and R2 movements—though perhaps this should not be stressed too strongly, for (1) there are signs of reconciliation (notably in the *Together for the Kingdom*⁶⁶ conference held in Sheffield, September 1988), and (2) there is a fundamental unity between restorationists at the level of beliefs and styles of church life anyway, and they do not desire uniformity. In the *second* place, an ever-expanding circle of apostles (for they are not limited in number) can only be increasingly difficult to unify. *Third*, it is by no means clear what will persuade all the evangelicals in the denominations to come into

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⁶⁵ The 1971 covenant of fourteen leaders out of which the apostolic Restorationist movement was really formed: see Walker, *op cit*, ch 3 for their coming together, ch 4 for division, ch 14 for elements of reconciliation.

⁶⁶ This conference was a public act of reconciliation and commitment between the various R2 leaders, together with Terry Virgo and Tony Morton. Though Bryn Jones of R1 was not there, that sector was represented by David Matthew.

unity with this apostolic movement! The answer given—that the growth in obedience, loving fellowship, prayer, spiritual maturity and power of the apostolic churches will inevitably draw true believers into the fold (leaving unbelieving denominational remnants to atrophy)—can obviously only be offered as a statement of robust faith; and those who offer it are aware there has been all too little progress.⁶⁷ But restorationist writers insist unity can only come about as God's people determine to *do* all God's will—ie, back to the New Testament! And ultimately only by such means will we achieve a church which is truly one, holy, catholic and apostolic.⁶⁸

The notion of the church of Christ eventually coming to unity round some kind of 'apostles' cannot be too lightly dismissed—after all it is virtually what some of the contributors to *Bishops: But of What Kind?* are suggesting, albeit in the name of bishops/superintendents. And arguably when we press the question 'what kind of man do we need as the *pastor pastorum?*', then men who have proved themselves successfully in both pioneering and overseeing a plurality of vigorous churches should be considered strong candidates indeed. But whether the rest of the western churches would readily rally to even highly successful, spiritual and charismatic men, but men nevertheless who give the appearance of having eschewed any attempt at serious exegesis and responsibly informed theological discussion, must remain doubtful. Perhaps, if and when the restorationist churches become more prominent, they, like the Coptic church, will find they need more theologically nuanced apostles as their spokesmen.⁶⁹

Radical discipleship

From (1) the vision of the church as a full sign or sacrament of the heavenly congregation, (2) the focus on the ministry gifts and their authority and purpose in Ephesians 4, and (3) the understanding of the church primarily as a charismatic *body*, we should perhaps predict the sociologically radical nature of the discipleship in the restorationist HCM. That is, the goal of the church is both to produce a holy community living out of its unity with the resurrected Lord, and Christian disciples who are able to contribute to the building up of the church (cf Eph 4:12, where the task of leaders is *to fit the saints for the work of service* in building up the body: cf v 16 '...the whole body... grows and builds itself up in love, *as each part does its work*').

Other explanations, however, have also been suggested. Walker attributes the radical discipleship much more specifically to the notion of delegated authority and shepherding, or covering.⁷⁰ It seems to me this is, at best, a partial explanation—not least because the same radical discipleship is still apparent in those sectors of the HCM which no longer embrace such theories, or have always held them in a diluted form.

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EXCURSUS ON DISCIPLING, DELEGATED AUTHORITY

⁶⁷ See, eg, D. Matthew, 'Is Unity Any Nearer?', *Restoration* (Jan/Feb 1987) 36.37: he urges we should not complacently sit around and await God's move; rather we should reach forward to the future envisaged by Eph 4, and pull it back into the present. We should drop denominational names now and reach out here and now for apostolic and prophetic ministries.

⁶⁸ Cf Wright, *Radical Kingdom*, 184-187.

⁶⁹ See Bebawi's analysis in Moore (ed) *Bishops*, ch 5, esp 76.

⁷⁰ Walker, *Radical Kingdom*, 153-162.

AND SHEPHERDING IN THE HCM

We cannot cover the whole area, but five important points need to be clarified:

First, the most general term here is 'discipling', and it is to be understood in continuity with, eg, Richard Baxter's attempt to catechise every individual in his parish and John Wesley's classes focusing on the application of Christian teaching at the individual level and in a dialogical context. It involves ascertaining what the Christian has learned, and pastorally and individually guiding his growth, rather than trusting he will pick up and apply himself what is more generally preached and taught.⁷¹ In these terms 'discipling' can only be right.

Second, 'delegated authority' need mean no more than that God's will for us may be mediated to us by an apostle, elder, or teacher, and that God's rule in our lives is then accomplished by voluntary submission to the authority of those leaders. As a general principle there need be no problem with his view. Everything depends (1) on the character of model of delegated authority which is invoked, and (2) whether the model becomes a *central*, even exclusive principle of transmission of authority in the church.

The *model* used by Ron Trudinger,⁷² and the Basingstoke communities, is based on the Old Testament. Judges and 1 Samuel are considered to evince that democracy in God's people is wrong (bang goes Congregationalism!); the democratic and sinful choice of Saul is replaced by *God's* appointed leader, David, who mediated God's rule through his own reign. Jesus is David's greater Son, the new covenant is the restoring of David's tabernacle (Acts 15:16f), and this provides the key to how God's rule will operate: God's chosen king Jesus comes to be seen as mediating God's will through a pyramidal structure starting with apostles at the top, then passing through prophets, elders, teachers, and other leaders (in downward progression of submission), to disciples (and hence down to their wives and children, if they are men with families). This model is sometimes combined with the view, clearly expressed in Watchman Nee, that a man or woman should voluntarily submit to the authority over them, even when their guidance is perceived to be *wrong*—for disobedience is regarded as a manifestation of the cardinal sin of rebelliousness, and obedience absolves of responsibility (which will be laid at the door of the one who issued the wrong guidance!).⁷³

Such a model could easily produce a hierarchical government every bit as rigid as the old Catholic institutional, clerical and juridical model of the church,⁷⁴ and theoretically it could lead either to the holy virtues of monastic obedience or to the demonic manipulation (culminating in the mass suicide) of Jonestown. Most of the leaders of the movement would, however, probably concur with Tomlinson (then an R1 apostle)

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who said that if anyone, in the name of shepherding, demanded 'absolute and unconditional obedience', he would forthwith declare their demand 'absolute and unconditional nonsense'.⁷⁵ As we have stated, there is more than one model of 'delegated authority', and Trudinger's is

⁷¹ D Tomlinson, 'Is Discipling Biblical?', *Restoration* (July/Aug 1980) 2.

⁷² Trudinger, *Built to Last*, chs 1-5, 7, 13.

⁷³ For Nee's view and its influence see Walker, *op cit*, 157f—and note the important example assuming such a doctrine at 89f.

⁷⁴ See Dulles, *Models*, ch 2.

⁷⁵ Tomlinson, *Restoration* (July/Aug 1980) 2.

far from being generally accepted—one of the major faults of Roy Peacock's recent book, *The Shepherd and the Shepherds*, is that he tends to tar all with the same brush.⁷⁶

Third, teaching about 'delegated authority' (whether in a 'soft' or 'hard' form) is often (but by no means invariably) combined with the setting up of a fine pastoral infrastructure in the church in which each person is spiritually responsible to someone else, usually either a more experienced person at the same level in the pyramid, or their husband or father (in the case of married women and children), or, someone above them in the pyramid (house group leader to elder; elder to apostle, etc). This pastoral infrastructure of one-to-one responsibility is usually called 'shepherding' or (earlier) 'covering',⁷⁷ though its more dictatorial and degenerate forms are perhaps not unfairly dubbed 'the gruesome twosome'. At its best, however, it can be very good: it can involve a stimulating, challenging, God-centred, and directive dialogue conducted in the context of an open, ongoing, committed and loving relationship of people who are already friends. And that is what is aimed at. The model of 'headship-submission' invoked most commonly to elucidate these shepherding relations is taken from the husband-wife relationship envisaged in Ephesians 5—not David's kingly rule over his people! Shepherding, in other words, is by no means tied to the notion of 'rule'. But a shepherding emphasis of any variety can go wrong, sour relationships, and the 'rule' versions of it easily lead to a new legalism.

As far as I am able to discern, the majority of restorationist churches do not operate a rigid 'one-to-one' form of shepherding, but have a looser and more general framework and consultative structure.

In the congregation of which I am a member, an apostolic team is responsible for the general oversight of the church. It relates chiefly to the church's eldership and leadership group, in a very flexible, but positive pastoral way. It spends most time listening to and weighing the leadership's own feelings about where things are going, and offers advice which is openly discussed rather than commands to be obeyed! In addition the team has also provided manpower support for special projects, like initiating evangelism in an area. Similarly, the eldership 'oversees' the remaining church and house group leaders in a pastoral but dialogical way. This has once included systematically visiting the leaders, asking quite probing and personal questions about spiritual progress, and offering constructive criticism where appropriate (the relationship involved in this was largely reciprocal). But usually the oversight is more general—a matter of keeping up with individuals and spotting where help or support may be needed. In like manner, the

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house group or area leaders 'shepherd' those in their group (without any suggestion of limited access to the eldership or church leadership!). The structure of 'shepherding' is thus much more flexible than, eg, Trudinger's account would suggest.

Fourth, in *practice* (despite flourishing *rumours*) there has been relatively little misuse of the delegated authority and shepherding system.⁷⁸ This is partly because Trudinger's exposition is

⁷⁶ R Peacock, *The Shepherd and the Shepherds* (Eastbourne 1988) *passim*—much of the criticism also appears dated.

⁷⁷ For accounts see Trudinger, *Built to Last*, ch 23; Virgo, *Restoration*, ch 8; Coates, *Divided We Stand?*, ch 6; Wright, *Radical Kingdom*, ch 6; Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom*, 177-188.

⁷⁸ See Walker, *op cit*, 285-294.

regarded by many as extreme; partly because other factors come into play (the leaders are not altogether unendowed with spiritual and common sense; those involved in shepherding someone are having to give an account of their covering to whoever pastors *them*; the whole process is supposed to take its agenda from the Bible, those *being* disciplined are expected to be given a good hearing if they have misgivings about what is advocated⁷⁹ etc); but mainly because it has been *balanced by other models of God's rule coming to expression in the church*.

Thus, fifth, (1) the model of delegated authority, which emphasises God speaking to the individual horizontally through other men, was never in real danger of eclipsing the model of the church as a *charismatic* body, which emphasised the vertical relationship to God, and the openness of the individual member to hear God directly.⁸⁰ Furthermore, (2) the model of the church as a charismatic *body* was also bound to emphasise submission to God's word through *the assembled congregation led by the Spirit*, more than point in the direction of hearing God in one-to-one relationship with a shepherd.⁸¹ (3) The model of delegated authority, when interpreted in terms of analogy with David's rule, was immediately open to the criticism that it did not conform to the character and ministry of Christ—and conflicted with Jesus' specific teaching that the notion of *kingly rule was inappropriate* for his disciples (Luke 22:25f).⁸² The example of Jesus pointed to a servant model for the church, but not that of the civil servant! (4) The delegated rule model, while it could be made to fit with a view which proclaims the church either as 'the people of God' or 'the Israel of God', nevertheless accords poorly with models of the church as 'the family of God' (cf Barth's 'brotherly Christocracy'); 'fellowship', 'body' and '*ekklêsia*' itself, and conflicts even more strongly with the constant preaching of the church as the realm of God's messianic *freedom*. There is a place for talking about loving submission to leaders in the Christian life; but to express that submission as a semantic converse to 'ruling' (x *submits* to y = y *rules* x) is at least to invite misunderstanding, while to give such a notion central place as an expression of Christian discipleship is nothing short of courting disaster.

END OF EXCURSUS

'Shepherding' is simply a pastoral structure; as such it carries no

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guarantee of content, and so cannot itself explain the radical nature of the commitment of time and resources in the Restoration movement. Shepherding could be used to reinforce whatever norms of discipleship were current in the church, but what we need to know is how the norms of discipleship are generated in the first place. I suspect the analysis involved here would be extremely complex, but would involve an interplay between such factors as: (1) the major emphasis on a call to *radical* Christianity; (2) a lively sense that *God* is present and actively addressing the congregation (in the charismata of apostolic teaching, spiritual exposition, prophetic utterance, healings and lively corporate worship) and requires response; (3) the

⁷⁹ See Tomlinson, *Restoration* (July/Aug 1980) 4.

⁸⁰ Peacock, *Shepherd*, appears to assume, throughout, that where congregations have embraced a 'shepherding' scheme this has always operated to undermine the individual Christian's direct responsibility to hear and obey the Lord—but in practice the latter has usually been emphasised alongside the former, and as the more fundamental commitment, rather than as an alternative to discipling.

⁸¹ Cf Wright, *Radical Kingdom*, 105-112.

⁸² See the perceptive criticism of Wright, *op cit*, 89-100.

spiritual responsibility placed on each by the emphasis on the congregation as a charismatic body to which each is expected to contribute; (4) powerful preaching which focuses at least as much on practical application as on theological principle; (5) the inculcation of a sense of destiny and immediate purpose to which energies should be bent; (6) the example of highly committed leaders (we must remember they are chosen because of their performance, not theological competence); (7) the relative youthfulness of the congregation—the young are often both more malleable and more zealous!; (8) house groups or cell groups which reinforce the message and ethos in the context of discussion.

Authority of the leaders

Commitment to the church understood as a *charismatic body* provides the context for a degree of relativizing of the authority and significance of the leaders. Not only do we mean the leaders may personally be challenged by individual prophetic words or other expressions of Spirit-given wisdom, but there is an awareness God may sometimes choose to speak through an apostolic figure, sometimes through the eldership and sometimes through the congregation (through an individual or collectively—the jargon for which is 'ascending vision').⁸³ Neither apostolate nor eldership have absolute authority, nor yet does the whole reduce to congregationalism (though the congregation of men and women with the Spirit have the responsibility of weighing all utterance purporting to elucidate God's will⁸⁴).

Where the concept of apostolic *rule* (on the basis of delegated authority) has not predominated, and the charismatic character of the whole congregation come more fully to be recognized, there has been an increasing tendency for the apostles to see themselves more as servants of the church. Early Restorationism inevitably put 'apostles' at the centre of the ecclesiastical wheel, because, like the bishop in the Roman Catholic institutional model, the apostle was seen as having the ultimate spiritual authority in the church, and he was head of the shepherding chain. With a looser shepherding system, and a watering down of the notion of delegated authority, the authority perceived to be carried by

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the apostle changes. He is now rather *primus inter pares* amongst spiritual men in the congregation. He is approached as one with God-given resources of wisdom and power to plant, to serve, to build and to guide the church, rather than as Christ's plenipotentiary and the church's ruler. Three related consequences of this shift may be perceived. First, the whole issue of 'apostleship' as such becomes less significant within the HCM. Second, as 'apostleship' is perceived as a name for a set of functions already to some extent exercised by other men (or groups of men) in churches outside the HCM, rather than denoting an entirely distinct species of ministry, so the restorationist HCM loses something of its former sense of separate identity. And the urgency of the call to Restorationism (in order to experience 'the NT pattern of apostles and prophets') is liable to become at least slightly muted. There are signs of this already in the R2 apostleship.⁸⁵ Third, this new self-understanding (it is not entirely new) of the apostles as 'servants' of the charismatic body, the church, favours a much greater openness to those outside the immediate Restorationist circle. The outworking of this

⁸³ Cf Wright, *op cit*, 96f and 105-112.

⁸⁴ The pattern of authority/power interplay is similar at a number of points to that J D G Dunn describes as the Pauline model: 'Models of Christian Community in the New Testament' in D Martin and P Mullen, *Strange Gifts: A Guide to Charismatic Renewal* (Oxford 1984) 270-300.

⁸⁵ See Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom*, 324-327.

can be observed in the recent tendency (particularly in R2 and in Terry Virgo's churches⁸⁶), to engage with denominational congregations in an advisory capacity, and to seek first and foremost the up-building of the wider church, and evangelization and social transformation in the world. And the title of John Noble's latest book can ask the erstwhile impossible question, *The House Churches: Will They Survive?*

CONCLUSION

In the above we have attempted primarily to describe what is distinctive to Restorationism. Much that it shares with other churches we have had no time to touch. For example, the model of the church as a *herald* of the word of God is important to its teaching and practice (the R1 churches are especially vigorous in evangelism), though it would not be content to place this above, or in antithesis to, the model of the church as a full sign (or sacrament) of the heavenly congregation. The church ought to be able to point to itself as a credible witness to the outworking of the Word, not to the Word *alone*.⁸⁷ And the R2 part of the movement would increasingly emphasise the church as *servant*: not in the secularized sense implied in Dulles's account of the model⁸⁸—for the HCM still preserves the distinction between world and church—but as a call to the church to be actively involved in social transformation in the inner city, as a sign of Jesus' love for all men. The move of David Tomlinson's church to Brixton, and the appointment of sociologically trained analysts and social workers within or alongside the apostolic teams, is a strong witness to the seriousness of this element in the HCM's conception of the nature and task of the church.

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When all is said, however, the major challenge of the HCM ecclesiology is its restorationist and charismatic character. It offers a summons to the church to a more radical discipleship that is prepared to subject its own ecclesiastical tradition, and norms of life and commitment, to the searching light of the New Testament. It offers a summons to strive for a visible unity of true believers that is a credible sign of God's ultimate purpose to unify all things in Christ. And it calls the church to look again at its pattern of ministry, and the relation of ministerial authority to congregational life, and carefully to consider to what extent it matches the vision of the charismatic body of 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4.

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⁸⁶ See Noble, *House Churches*, *passim*.

⁸⁷ See Dulles, *Models*, chs 5 (church as herald) and 4 (church as sacrament).

⁸⁸ Dulles, *op cit*, ch 6.