

Retaining an Apostolic Approach to Church Life¹

Malcolm M Black²

Christopher L Pepler³

Abstract

This article briefly examines the current return to apostolic Christianity in various parts of the world and references three earlier Christian movements that came into existence at approximately 100-year intervals, beginning with the Methodist movement in the 1700s, culminating with observations of a current apostolic movement that began in the early 1980s, known as New Covenant Ministries International, in an attempt to ascertain how they embraced early apostolic principles.

The article highlights the strengths of several movements but also makes observations about how these movements lost their initial effectiveness by becoming institutional and, in many cases, forfeited their initial vision of impacting the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We examine possible reasons why these movements lost their fervour and discuss possible ways

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² Malcolm graduated with a Master of Theology from the South African Theological Seminary in 2007. This article emanates from his MTh thesis, entitled “Sustained church planting as a primary means of fulfilling the Great Commission, with special reference to New Covenant Ministries International”, supervised by Dr CL Pepler.

³ Chris is the founder and chairman of the South African Theological Seminary. He holds doctorates in different fields of Christian studies. He has also served as the senior pastor of the Lonehill Village Church for the past 20 years.

of how current movements could learn from their mistakes not only maintain their spiritual fervency but sustain their vision and momentum of reaching the nations with the gospel to succeeding generations.

1. Introduction

There is currently a re-emergence of apostolic Christianity⁴ throughout the world. A number of movements are reaffirming and committing to live out New Testament principles as faithfully as the early church did. These movements are also devoted to being an effective witness to the world and to fulfilling the mandate of Jesus Christ to His church to ‘go and make disciples of all nations’ (Matt 28:19).

Among the many groupings, the following are a sample of current ‘apostolic’ movements: New Frontiers International, led by Terry Virgo in England; New Foundation Ministries, led by John Crumpton in South Africa; Pioneer Ministries led by Gerald Coates in England; Christ for the Nations led by Tony Fitzgerald in England; Ichthus Fellowship of churches led by Roger Forster in England. In America, Miller (1997:19) cites the following as a sample of some of the movements: Calvary chapel, led by Chuck Smith, The Vineyard led by the late John Wimber, and Hope Chapel, led by Ralph Moore, all of which represent hundreds, and in some cases, thousands of churches who are working into many nations of the world. These movements, in varying degrees, have a desire to return to Apostolic Christianity as exemplified in the New Testament. Peter Wagner (1999:5) calls it “the New Apostolic Reformation” and says that it is the fastest growing movement in six continents.

In the past twenty-five years or so, many churches have been established outside of mainline denominational churches in an attempt to be more relevant to what the Scriptures teach about the function and calling of the church.

⁴ By apostolic I refer to the Christianity of the New Testament which finds its full expression in the person and work of Jesus Christ which was emulated in the life of the early apostles. At the heart of apostolic Christianity is the desire to fulfil the great commission of discipling the nations (Matt 28:19).

Broadbent (1931:395) lists many movements throughout the history of the church that have sought to embrace apostolic Christianity, such as the Cathars, Novatians, Paulicians, Bogomils, Albigenses, Waldenses, Lollards, Anabaptists, Mennonites, and the Stundists. Each in its own way desired to follow the example of the New Testament church in its life and practice. They desired to be free of the bureaucracy and institutionalism that had crept in and return to apostolic Christianity.

This article will examine three such movements: the Methodists, the Brethren and the Pentecostals, each emerging at roughly 100-year intervals. We have also chosen a current apostolic movement known as New Covenant Ministries International as a representative example of the movements mentioned above.

Although the three earlier movements may not fit a full ‘profile’ of early apostolic Christianity, it can be shown that, by embracing New Testament principles, they had a desire to emulate early apostolic Christianity in a number of ways. Each movement was able to impact the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ and played a major role in the expansion of the church throughout the world. In the life, practice and mission of each of these movements, one can discern a clear pattern of early apostolic Christianity.

Of special interest is the reason these great movements lost their initial impetus and their vision of embracing apostolic Christianity? In studying these movements, several common reasons emerge as to why they struggled to maintain their spiritual fervour and vision.

An examination of how these movements lost their effectiveness will lead to a proposal regarding how present and future movements can not only sustain their impetus and vision, but also go on to make a valuable contribution to the mission of the church: to reach all nations for Christ.

2. What is Apostolic Christianity?

True apostolic Christianity is first and foremost a desire to discover and embrace the ‘brand’ of Christianity found in the New Testament. It is not a new set of principles or a formula for an effective church. Instead, it is a

journey of discovering an apostolic lifestyle that seeks to align itself with the practices of Jesus and the early apostles.

An apostolic church has a mandate to see the church advancing in its witness to the world by fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt 28:19), by planting churches in every town and village, making disciples of all nations (Daniel 2001:65).

3. A brief overview of four Christian movements

3.1. Methodism

The Methodist movement was birthed in the eighteenth-century revival in England as a result of a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit (Wood 1988:448). The most influential channels were the Moravians, the Calvinistic mission of George Whitefield and the evangelism of the Wesley brothers, John and Charles.

Wood (1967:74) claims that John Wesley felt that he had been raised up to reform the nation, and to spread Scriptural holiness over the land. He died with the satisfaction that primitive (apostolic) Christianity was being restored in his day (cf. Keefer 2005).

The hallmark of Methodism was a belief in instant conversion and a radical commitment to the Bible as ‘the only rule of faith’, echoing the words of the great reformer, Martin Luther.

Without wanting to start another church or denomination, Wesley nevertheless had to provide care for the thousands of converts. These he gathered into societies which, in reality, were congregations of believers.

Wesley formed a number of societies and acquired a piece of property where he built his ‘New Room’ as a central meeting place. “The Wesleys preached, the crowds responded and Methodism as a mass movement was born” (Snyder 1980:33).

In America, the growth was even more spectacular. Finke and Stark (2005:57) state that

in 1776 the Methodists were a tiny religious society with only 65 churches scattered through the colonies. Seven decades later they towered over the nation. In 1850 there were 13,302 Methodist congregations, enrolling more than 2.6 million members – the largest single denomination, accounting for more than a third of all American church members. For such growth to occur in eighty years seems nearly miraculous.

Wesley and his early helpers were amazed that thousands upon thousands were coming to Christ, not only in their native England, but far across the shores in America. Wesley did want to establish another denomination but a major movement was nevertheless established. In administering, they made ample provision for new converts to be assimilated into communities. These would in turn continue the work of evangelising the lost and playing a major role in fulfilling the Great Commission.

3.2. The Brethren

The Brethren movement originated around 1825 emerging out of a longing to be free from denominational restrictions. Their desire was to return to Biblical roots and a New Testament way of life. The Brethren insisted that their roots were really in the apostolic age, and their aim was to maintain the simple and flexible church order of New Testament times (Bruce 2005). The founders of the Brethren movement

were a group of young men, mostly associated with Trinity College, Dublin, who tried to find a way in which they could come together for worship and communion simply as fellow-Christians, disregarding denominational barriers. They had no idea that they were starting a movement; still less had they any thought of founding a new denomination, for that would have defeated the very purpose for which they came together (Bruce 2005).

From humble beginnings, a significant church movement was born that became a worldwide group of churches. Similar to the Methodist movement in many ways, they sincerely desired to emulate New Testament Christianity.

They were strongly missionary-minded and made a significant contribution to fulfilling the great commission by planting churches throughout the world.

3.3. The Pentecostal movement

Unlike the Methodist and Brethren movements, the Pentecostal movement was not birthed by a central figure or group. Dunn (1988:683) believes, however, that the most important figure within that stream in previous centuries was John Wesley. He emphasised the 'witness of the Spirit' and so, in some way, paved the way for a new work of the Holy Spirit in America.

At the beginning of the twentieth century there was a growing restlessness among the restrictive holiness movements and a growing interest in the gifts of the Spirit, specifically those of speaking in tongues and healing. Dunn's (1988:618) opinion is that the revival in Azusa Street, Los Angeles in 1906 really forged the link between Spirit-baptism and speaking in tongues. This was the launching pad for twentieth-century Pentecostalism.

The movement continued to grow by staggering proportions. Synan (2005) says that

the Pentecostal movement is by far the largest and most important religious movement to originate in the United States. . . . By 1993 they had become the largest family of Protestants in the world. With over 200,000,000 members designated as denominational Pentecostals, this group surpassed the Orthodox churches as the second largest denominational family of Christians, surpassed only by the Roman Catholics.

Pentecostalism was similar to the Methodist and Brethren movements in their zeal for returning to the essence of early apostolic Christianity. What set them apart as a movement was the sustained move of the Holy Spirit and the demonstration of signs and wonders that propelled them forward into the exceptional world-wide expansion mentioned by Synan above.

3.4. New Covenant Ministries International

We turn our attention now to a current apostolic movement known as New Covenant Ministries International. In the short space of just over twenty-five years, NCMI has developed into a significant movement that forms part of a wider apostolic movement that is growing throughout the earth. NCMI's vision is to embrace a New Testament pattern of ministry that will enable it to accomplish the mission of making disciples of all nations.

Their founder, Dudley Daniel (2004:47) believes that in order to enjoy New Testament results, the church must embrace the whole Bible as God's pattern of ministry for the way the church is structured and the way it ministers into the nations.

NCMI believes that the most effective way of fulfilling the Great Commission is to plant churches throughout the world, wherever God opens doors. To achieve these goals, healthy churches need to be producing 'healthy' disciples, who in turn will play their role in helping the church reach its desired objective (Daniel 2001:65).

4. Strengths of the various movements

Each of the earlier movements discussed had tremendous strengths and made a significant impact on the church and the world. Each movement embraced the Great Commission and was motivated to extend God's Kingdom throughout the earth by planting churches wherever they were able. All groups pursued an apostolic lifestyle, in one way or another. All believed in the need for a flexible church structure to contain the life-flow of the Holy Spirit that was being poured out upon them, bringing them more into harmony with a New Testament understanding of the church. All sought to practise the priesthood of all believers and, without exception, sought to honour the Lord Jesus Christ as the head of the church (Eph 4:15).

4.1. Methodism

The outstanding feature of the early Methodist movement was that they were a people who believed in the power of the Holy Spirit. Wesley's preaching was

often accompanied by a demonstration of God's power where countless numbers of people were radically converted to Christ.

Alongside this powerful move of the Spirit was the fact that the early Methodists had a high view of Scripture and regarded it as the only rule of faith. Wood (1967:209) says that Wesley saw the Bible as the only standard of truth and the only model for 'pure religion'. Wesley strove to base all that he did on his understanding of God's Word.

As the revival spread, the Methodists experienced unprecedented growth. Not only was Wesley an outstanding evangelist, he was also a genius at organisation. He gathered the new converts into what he called societies, which in effect became churches. The converts were, in most instances, placed in these societies where they were established in the Christian faith. Although not intending to be church planters as such, almost by default, the Methodists became prolific church planters. Snyder's (1980:54) statistics provide clear evidence of this:

After thirty years, in 1768, Methodism [in England] had 40 circuits and 27,341 members. Ten years later the numbers had grown to 60 circuits and 66,375 members. By 1798, Seven years after Wesley's death, the totals had jumped to 149 circuits with 101,712 members... by the turn of the century about one in every thirty adult Englishmen were Methodists.

The societies in turn were divided into class meetings, which became one of the Methodist's strongest features. Here the members were cared for and were able to enjoy the fellowship of smaller groups. Each class was supervised by a class leader, who, in turn, was accountable to the local minister. Snyder's (1980:54) observation is that the class meetings were the cornerstone of the movement and were, in effect, house churches meeting in various neighbourhoods. The class leaders functioned as pastors and disciplers. Wood (1967:191) describes the class meeting as "a system of pastoral care, especially for the newly-converted".

Probably one of the most outstanding strengths of the early Methodists was the high priority Wesley gave to the training of his people. Wesley put one in

ten (perhaps even one in five) of his people to work in significant ministry and leadership. Snyder (1980:63) describes the process:

The extensive system of bands, classes, societies and preachers, together with other offices and functions, opened the doors wide for leadership and discipleship in early Methodism. By the time Methodism had reached 100,000 members at the end of the century, the movement must have had over 10,000 class and band leaders.

Very early on the Methodists were zealous to reach the world with the gospel. As early as 1760 (which was only 20 years after the movement started in England), Methodism spread to America, which was a direct result of the preaching and organising activities of John Wesley. The first Methodist societies in America were founded by immigrants from Ireland, who were converted under John Wesley (Davies 1963:158).

Methodism grew by staggering proportions. By Finke and Stark's (2005:57) estimation, Methodism in America had grown to 2.6 million members in seventy years—the largest single denomination, accounting for more than a third of all American church members. This astounding growth was in part due to the mobility of the circuit riders who travelled the country tirelessly, preaching the gospel.

The Methodists purposed to be free from any man-made laws and constitutions. Their life and practice was a reflection of their endeavour to be a people whose way of life was based on New Testament principles. According to Littell (1961:113),

Wesley shifted by steady steps from the developmental and sacramental view of the institutions of Christendom to normative use of the New Testament and reference to the early church. He justified field preaching and the itinerancy, class meetings and their disciplinary structure . . . on the argument that he was following 'apostolic' practice.

4.2. The Brethren Movement

The primary strength of the Brethren was their strong desire to return to a more ‘simplistic’ way of being the church. They were strongly motivated to ensure that their gatherings were patterned on New Testament principles. Their name bares testimony to the fact that they simply wanted to be the ‘brethren’ of the Lord, gathering together in His name to worship, study the scriptures and evangelise the lost. They believed implicitly in the priesthood of all believers. Because of this, their meetings were open to all believers to share communion and live out Paul’s encouragement: “When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation” (1 Cor 14:26).

Their passion was for Jesus Christ (Lineham 2003). They had an intense belief in the Lordship of Christ, were deeply committed to Him and sought to glorify Him above all else. Along with this passion for Jesus, their greatest strength was their commitment to the Bible as the only rule of faith, as it was for the Methodists. Their motto was, “every person to be a Bible student” (Lineham (2003). “[T]he place of the Bible in the early Brethren movement was . . . essentially the same as in the great traditions of Protestant renewal” (Coad 1968:250).

Although the early Brethren did not use the term “church planting”, the establishing of assemblies amounts to churches planted. Tatford (2005) describes their impact in the mission field:

The Lord blessed them, and the number of assemblies (people) and halls (places of meeting were not regarded as sanctuaries) multiplied. Missionaries in their thousands went abroad without human ordination...new assemblies were formed, and the movement reached to the uttermost parts of the earth even to the most inaccessible, remotest, and perilous jungle and mountain fastnesses. The impact which has been made has been out of all proportion to their number or to the size and importance of the assemblies from which they went.

The Brethren penetrated nations around the world, which included Spain, Portugal, Italy, America and Canada. The work later spread to Australia and New Zealand. Works in India, Malaysia and Singapore were also established. Much of the work established in the China Inland Mission sprang from the Brethren movement (Coad 1968:190). Lineham (2003) says that they had the highest level of missionary service of any denomination and became the backbone to Christian mission.

4.3. The Pentecostal movement

The outstanding strength of the Pentecostal movement was that they consistently experienced the demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit in their meetings. The initial manifestation of the power of the Spirit was the widespread baptism of the Holy Spirit, with speaking in tongues as the chief evidence of that baptism. Their experience was, however, much wider than merely speaking in tongues. They experienced the power of God with signs and wonders. Wagner (1986:128) says that the greatest contribution Pentecostalism has made to Christianity in general was the restoration of signs and wonders experienced in the New Testament.

Another strength, according to Wagner (1986:168), was that the “Scriptures [were] final”. Coupled with this, they believed in conversion that was a radical, life-changing experience, much the same as John Wesley.

Like the Methodists and Brethren, the Pentecostals were strongly missionary-minded. “This first wave of Pentecostal pioneer missionaries produced what has become known as the ‘Classical Pentecostal Movement’ with over 11,000 Pentecostal denominations throughout the world” (Synan 2005).

4.4. Summary

To sum up, each group was strongly Word-based and enjoyed strong demonstrations of the Holy Spirit’s power. Although the movements did not use the term ‘church planting’, they nevertheless became prolific church planters. Each group was free from institutional restraints and had a strong belief in practising the priesthood of all believers. By their own understanding, they were pursuing early apostolic Christianity. However, in its own way each

movement gradually moved away from the pursuit of expressing apostolic Christianity and lost some of its initial fervour to emulate the principles of New Testament Christianity.

5. How did these early movements move away from an apostolic pattern of church?

When studying the various earlier movements the question must be asked: What caused such powerful movements to lose their initial fervour and momentum and settle down into an institutionalised way of life, often forfeiting or diminishing their vision and effectiveness?

Each of the earlier movements discussed started out with the desire to be strongly Word-based and made a tremendous impact on the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Each movement had a desire to emulate apostolic Christianity, but allowed itself to fall prey to becoming over-organised, institutional, 'professional' and traditional in its thinking and practice. In the end, this caused them to lose much of their effectiveness as movements.

Jackson (1999:370) asserts that “it is rare in church history for a movement to sustain vitality for more than one generation”. By the movement’s own criteria, its people lost their initial vision and focus. Bosch (2001:94) explains it like this: “Where the institutional aspect begins to eclipse the dynamic aspect of the movement, the creative tension disappears and petrification sets in.”

Phillips (1989) offers a helpful insight in this regard when he says: “In the first generation a perceived truth is a conviction; in the second generation it settles down to a belief; in the third generation it becomes merely an opinion”.

Evidence from the three historical movements surveyed would suggest that when apostolic Christianity is embraced, there will be an increased effectiveness in the life and witness of its people. If this could be sustained and affect every generation, it would bring greater glory to God. Paul saw that apostolic Christianity would result in God having the glory “in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever” (Eph 3:21). A

study of the Methodists, Brethren and Pentecostals reveals, however, that, for various reasons, they lost their initial momentum and effectiveness.

According to several Christian sociologists (e.g., Finke and Stark 2005; Poloma n.d.; Wagner 1999), it appears that there are several factors that caused this loss of momentum and effectiveness.

5.1. The problem of institutionalism

One of the greatest problems that movements face is institutionalism. *The Oxford Dictionary* (1986:281) describes an institute as: “an organised body for promotion of scientific or other aim”. The church on the other hand is by design a living organism which Paul refers to as the Body of Christ (Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:12, 27). It was never meant to become institutionalised. Whenever this happened, it negated the organic life and power of God. Institutionalism is often at the heart of stifling the life and work of the Holy Spirit.

The most telling sign of the onset of institutionalism is in fact a diminished reliance on the work of the Holy Spirit. This causes man to depend on organisation, man-made structures, and hierarchical authorities and programmes to carry the work forward. Perhaps a key indicator of institutionalism is when spirituality becomes routine and mundane, often causing the initial passion and drive of the movement to diminish. A good example is Paul’s interaction with the church in Galatia. They had started out well in the Spirit (Gal 3:3) but had fallen back into old forms of religion, which according to Paul, was tantamount to embracing another gospel (Gal 1:6). Paul exhorts the Thessalonians not to quench the Spirit (1 Thess 5:19).

Speaking from a Pentecostal view, McClung (1986:143) says, “though consolidation, structures, and organisations were necessary (and Biblically founded), they were never intended to drift toward the institutionalisation and bureaucratisation which plague Pentecostal denominations today”.

Warnings abound in the New Testament for churches not to lose their fervency (Rom 12:11), not to put out the fire of the Spirit (1 Thes 5:19) and

not to get bogged down in the traditions of men that take the focus off the essence of faith in Christ (Col 2:8).

Institutionalism manifests itself in many ways. One of the strongest elements of institutionalism is bureaucracy. *The Oxford Dictionary* (1986:67) defines bureaucracy as: “government by central administration; *officialism*; set of dominant officials”.

Organisation is vital as long as it serves the essential purpose of a movement. One of the elements of bureaucracy, however, is an unhealthy form of organisation. Jackson (1999:103) says that true organisation allows the organism to continue to grow. Even Jesus had some form of organisation in His ‘movement’. The fact that he gathered to Himself a group of disciples can be seen as a form of organisation. That He organised ministry trips could be seen as a form of organisation. That they had times together for teaching and instruction is a form of organisation. But organisation was always the servant of the goals of the team leader and the team. If organisation is not the servant of the organic life of the group, it will end up being the master and will destroy it. When form and structure becomes more important than the people who make up the organisation, the mission of the movement suffers (Getz 1974:193).

According to Eberle (quoted in Wagner 1999:13), when a leader of a movement is no longer able to lead, control invariably ends up in the hands of those with gifts of administration, with pastors serving under them. He elaborates as follows:

The Apostolic anointing is replaced by superintendents, district representatives, overseers, bishops, and others with various titles, but all of whom have administrative hearts. . . . [T]he Holy Spirit is restricted through well-meant rules and programs. Administrators become a ‘lid’ on the people involved under them.

Speaking of the problems that the wrong form of organisation can cause, Snyder (1977:67) remarks,

an institutional or organisational model is based on hierarchy, delegation of authority, impersonal relationships and formality. This is a legitimate form of human organisation admirably suited to some kinds of endeavours, but it is not a proper model for church structure.

Very early on in the Methodists' history, presidents, conferences and constitutions formed the fabric of the movement. These would later stifle its initial vision of being Word-based, Spirit-empowered, and having a strong motivation to see the gospel preached to all nations.

Observing the Assemblies of God in America, Poloma (2005:44) says that the AOG has become a well-structured bureaucracy with a proliferation of programmes to mobilise groups and resources. It has become a complex organisation, which attempts to maintain the vision and carry out the mission of the Assemblies of God. Her conclusion is that institutionalism and over-organisation has stifled the initial power and charisma of much of the Pentecostal movement.

5.2. The Problem of Professionalism

One of the pitfalls for young vibrant movements is the drift toward professionalism, where the movement begins to rely on human expertise rather than on the power of the Holy Spirit and the Word. This inevitably leads to a loss of spiritual effectiveness.

Early Methodism in America is a good example of a movement falling into the trap of professionalism. Although the Methodists said that they would never 'manufacture' preachers (Fink and Stark's 2005:77), research shows that this happened. Within seven decades, a professional class of ministers had been established.

Finke and Stark (2005:116) found that local class-leaders and exhorters no longer led most congregations. The 'amateurs' had been replaced with professional clergy. The trained ministers now ran the Methodist church in a fully realised Episcopal fashion. Many Methodist clergy had begun to read

their sermons, and many of the younger ministers now came to the pulpit from Methodist seminaries.

The Pentecostals suffered a similar fate. Writing in the 1980s, Wagner observed that Pentecostal ministers were considered more respectable if they went to college. This developed into a two-tiered ministry of clergy and laity, which in turn promoted a form of professionalism. This compromised some of the initial passion and zeal and fundamentals of the movement (McClung 1986:131).

5.3. A desire for acceptance by other denominations

For the Pentecostals, a desire for acceptance and respectability from other denominations would cause a similar effect to take a grip on the movement. McClung (1986:130) explains that Pentecostals were lumped along with the Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons and were persecuted for their beliefs. However, from around 1945, they rapidly became more “respectable” and were accepted as a fully-fledged denomination. But, as he points out, respectability came with a heavy price of compromise:

One price of respectability is that you will continue to be accepted so long as you do not stress your doctrinal distinctiveness. For Pentecostals this meant keeping a low profile on Baptism in the Holy Spirit...miraculous healings and exorcisms, prophecies . . . and many more.

This led to a compromise of some of the movement’s core values, previously held so dear by the Pentecostals.

5.4. The problem of traditionalism

Another dynamic that causes movements to lose their effectiveness is traditionalism. Tradition, in itself, is not a bad thing. Paul uses the term “tradition” both positively and negatively. To the Colossians, he warns the Christians of being taken in by the deceit of “human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col 2:8). In this sense, Paul is referring to practices of human origin that would nullify the

work of Christ. On the other hand, Paul uses tradition in a positive sense, warning the brethren to keep away from the idle and from that which is “not in accord with the tradition that you received from us” (2 Thes 3:6).

Any tradition or pattern that originates in man’s thinking and not by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit ends up stifling the work of the Holy Spirit. When this takes place, the danger of humanistic tradition setting into the movement is very real. As a result, unbiblical traditions and structures limit the growth of the church until they are either corrected or (more often) burst open as new wine bursts old wineskins (Snyder 1977:119). Therefore, a challenge of any movement is to be continually renewing and refreshing itself in the Word and the Holy Spirit. Addressing the Corinthian church, Paul reminds them that they did not receive “the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God” (1 Cor 2:12). Because the Corinthians had the Holy Spirit, who is not of this world, they should desist thinking like this world (Fee 1987:113).

When the traditions of men take the place of the Word and the work of the Spirit, the movement is robbed of its essential life, power and momentum as well as its essential mission. When man leans on his own understanding, he negates the Word of God and gradually extinguishes the fire of the Holy Spirit (Prov 3:5).

5.5. Routinisation of charisma

Another factor that causes a movement to lose its impetus and effectiveness is what sociologist Weber (2005) called *the routinization of charisma*. Any movement, be it secular or sacred, can move from being a dynamic expression of the initial life of the movement to becoming something that is merely routine and machine-like. *Routinization* sets in when the church relies on its own intuition and not on the Word and the Spirit. *Routinization* ends up changing that which is holy and sacred into something that is mundane and worldly. As a result, it loses the impact of the life of God.

John Wimber felt that routinization normally sets in within a generation of the genesis of an organisation (Jackson 1999:349). A challenge that faces every movement is to maintain the dynamic of the Holy Spirit in all its endeavours.

This is the danger that we continually face when we formalise that which is meant to be alive and dynamic. For this reason, the church is in need of constant spiritual renewal. It must avoid the trap of becoming mundane and routine-like in its life and witness.

Commenting in this present era on the ‘new apostolic’ groups, Donald Miller (quoted by Wagner 1999:132), warns that there could be an inevitable evolution of the new paradigm [his term for ‘new apostolic’] groups toward denominationalism. The danger, according to Miller, is that, “In time, they will start centralising authority, insisting on uniform practices, and creating bureaucratic layers of approval for acts that previously were spontaneous and Spirit-led”.

This is a challenge that faces any movement. The challenge is to keep the vision alive and to ‘walk in step’ with the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:25). Jackson (1999:353), speaking on behalf of the Vineyard movement, declared its determination to resist the *routinisation* of charisma by maintaining a radical dependence upon the presence and power of God and the administration of the Holy Spirit.

6. What is required to keep the current apostolic movement effective?

Because we have a tendency to slip back into patterns of thinking that are more humanistic than Christ-centred, it is important for the apostolic movement to maintain its focus on Christ and continually be renewed in our way of thinking that will enable us to keep an upward momentum of spiritual health and effectiveness. Fee (1996:17) argues convincingly that, in Pauline thinking, the Spirit dwells in and among God’s people (1 Thes 4:8; 1 Cor 6:19; 14:24-25; Eph 5:18; 1 Cor 14:24-25; 2 Cor 6:16). It is therefore imperative that a movement avails itself to the on-going ministry of the Holy Spirit for refreshing and renewal of vision.

There are many injunctions in the New Testament, especially those made by Paul for the church to live in a place of spiritual health and vitality. Although a number of his exhortations to the church to live in a place of spiritual health seem to be for the individual, they have a corporate application as well. Fee

(1996:64) argues that Paul's focus and concern are always on the people as a whole. "Though entered individually, salvation is seldom if ever thought of simply as a one-to-one-relationship with God. . . . God is saving a people for his name, not a miscellaneous, unconnected set of individuals".

Paul consistently cautioned the Christian community not to slip into mundane patterns of thinking that would rob the church of its rich spiritual life. The key to avoid the trap of allowing the church to slip into the realm of the mundane is the Spirit. According to Fee (1996:105), "Rather than give them [the church] Christian rules to live by Paul gives them the Spirit." He prays for the Colossian believers that they might "be filled with the knowledge of God's will by means of the spirit's wisdom and insight" (Col 1:9-11). Further on he exhorts the Colossians to "set their minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Col 3:2). In a similar way, Jesus challenges Peter at a critical point in his ministry not to be a hindrance to him because he was "not setting his mind on the things of God, but on the things of man" (Matt 16:23).

In light of this, a number of Paul's exhortations to the church have a direct bearing on the community as a whole. For example, when he speaks to the Corinthians, he is speaking to a representation of the corporate body of Christ. "*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed* into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18, emphasis added). Transformation should be a constant dynamic in the life of a movement. When the church and its leaders stay in a place of "beholding the glory of the Lord", it allows the Spirit to continue the process of transformation in God's community.

In the parable of the wine and wineskins (Luke 5:37), Jesus speaks of the new dispensation of the Spirit that He would usher in. The Messianic community is likened to a wineskin that would receive and contain the new wine of the Spirit. The use of Christ's analogy of the wineskin is very pertinent. The believing community, as the wineskin, would need to remain flexible in order to contain the continual flow of the wine of the Spirit. The inference of Jesus is that there will always be the 'new wine of the Spirit', requiring the wineskin to be flexible to accommodate the new wine.

Commenting on this parable, Geldenhuys (1950:196) says that “it is fatal to attempt to preserve the vigorous, new form of divine worship, which Jesus brought, in the old, obsolete forms of religions”. The fact that Jesus chooses to compare the messianic community with a wineskin, indicates that this is not a once-off event in the life of the Christian community, but an on-going process of renewal in the Spirit.

Bruce (1980:303) has a similar view on this parable and sees in it the on-going dynamic of the Holy Spirit’s work in keeping the church in a place of perpetual renewal. The new wine of the kingdom is spontaneous and continually responds to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

This constant flow of the Spirit into the life of the believing community is further confirmed by the declaration of Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles in John 7. Here Jesus infers that out of His belly will flow rivers of living water as a constant supply of His life to all who would come and drink. Similarly, Paul encourages the Ephesians to “keep on being filled with the Spirit” in order to be effective in their Christian walk (Eph 5:18).

For a movement to sustain its vision and momentum, it must continually position itself to receive the new wine of the Spirit. This will in turn allow the Lord to bring the shape and form to the church that will not only glorify God, but be an instrument for extending His kingdom.

Daniel (2001:34) believes that the church must position itself to receive the new wine in such a way that it both ‘contains and sustains’ the fresh flow of the Spirit. In other words, the wine is ‘handled’ in such a way that it does not fall away, but is ‘contained’ in a way that the church is able to sustain what God is doing in the constant fresh flow of His Spirit. Many movements tried to contain what God was doing but ended up stifling the on-going, dynamic move of the Spirit.

Jackson (1999:349) quotes a provocative question once posed by John Wimber: “Would it be possible to build a perpetually self-renewing organisation?” Not only is it possible but absolutely necessary for movements to be in this cycle of perpetual renewal, keeping the vision alive and passing a vibrant faith on to the next generation.

According to Wilson (quoted by Poloma 2005), although a movement can trace its pedigree and can show the relationship of each successive generation to its predecessor, each new generation still has to “be born in reproductive passion”. He says that revivals last, not because the movement had an impressive beginning, but rather because periodic renewal keeps the enthusiasm of its people vibrant despite energy sapping generational, organisational and circumstantial changes.

6.1. The importance of the apostolic/prophetic

A vital key to the on-going health and vitality of the church is the five-fold ministry (Eph 4). Of the five gift ministries, the apostle and prophet are the spearhead of ministry to and for the church (Eph 2:20). The apostolic ministry is of paramount importance in the process of keeping the church focussed on its essential calling and mission and to ensure that the church grows to maturity (Eph 4:13) and lives in spiritual health.

It is vital that the two gifts work hand in hand to steer the church into the unfolding purposes of God. Daniel (2001:75, 77) combines the two offices and talks of an “apostolic/prophetic” model for the church. “The Apostolic and prophetic gifts are designed to work together in establishing churches. The Apostolic is designed to work with the prophetic, and the prophetic is designed to work with the Apostolic”.

In order for the church to keep in step with what God is doing, the prophetic ministry, working in conjunction with the apostolic ministry, is able to take the church into the future. This enables the church to see and taste, in a measure, the presence of the future in the present. The prophetic ministry is like a compass to the church. It is constantly used by God to break carnal mindsets and helps guard the church from leaning to its own understanding to ensure that the church stays on its Biblical course.

6.2. The need for strong working relationships

The heart of vibrant Christianity is based on relationship. So much of what Jesus did was based on healthy relationships. This was the key to the training of His disciples. The early church was founded on relationship before function

and organisation. Churches and movements often forfeit their organic life which is essential to sustain them. They become institutionalised when relationships are compromised, when organisation and structures take prominence of place over meaningful, accountable relationships. When vital relationships are in place the organic life of the church is nurtured. When the fellowship among leaders is based on transparency, accountability and vulnerability, the church or movement is in a state of health.

Commenting on how institutionalism stifles healthy, functional relationships in the church, Getz (1974:193) lists eleven factors. We have chosen seven to illustrate the point:

1. When organisation (the form and structure) become more important than the people who make up the organisation
2. When individuals begin to function in the organisation more like cogs in a machine
3. When individuality and creativity are lost in the structural mass
4. When the atmosphere becomes threatening, rather than open and free; people are often afraid to ask uncomfortable questions
5. Communication often breaks down, particularly because of a repressive atmosphere and lots of red tape
6. People become prisoners of their procedures. The 'policy manual' and the 'rule book' get bigger, and fresh ideas are few and far between
7. In order to survive in a cold structure, people develop their own special interests within the organisation, creating competitive departments and divisions. The corporate objective gives way to a multitude of unrelated objectives which, inevitably, results in lack of unity in the organisation

Speaking as a member of the United Methodist church, Schaller (1999:74) says that the polity of the United Methodist church is organised around distrust of individuals. The outcome, according to Schaller, has the following result:

The number one responsibility of a denominational system is to regulate the role, behaviour, and beliefs of individuals, congregations, and regional judicatories. This normally calls

for a legalist polity designed to facilitate permission withholding.

6.3. The need for servant leadership

Hierarchical structures have invariably been a factor in causing movements to become institutionalised. The pattern that Jesus set before His disciples was one of servant leadership. Although he was Lord and master, He treated His team of disciples as friends (John 15:15). His admonishment to them was that they were not to lord it over one another, but to be servants to all (Matt 20:26). He then gave His life as the example: “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve” (Mark 10:45). Paul emulated this way of life when he said, “follow me as I follow Christ” (1 Cor 1:11).

Many of the current apostolic movements have re-discovered the value of team ministry and in most cases have developed apostolic teams who provide guidance and direction for the particular movement. Their purpose is to serve the churches in the movement by giving apostolic guidance and direction. An apostolic team was never meant to be an executive group, elevated above the rest of the church. Its purpose and calling is to serve the church and help facilitate the fulfilment of the Great Commission.

In order to ensure sustained momentum and growth in a movement, several elements need to be in place.

- **Keeping the prophetic voice alive**

Listening to the prophetic voice of God for vision and direction is of paramount importance for the health and effectiveness of the movement. According to Wallis (1981:184), “wherever God is moving freely the prophetic voice will always be heard bringing correction, wisdom, insight and direction”. Leaders in the apostolic movement will need to be constantly listening for the voice of God in order to move forward into His unfolding plans for the on-going effectiveness of the movement. The leader, together with the churches that relate to them, will need courage to walk in obedience to the ‘prophetic voice’, constantly allowing the Holy Spirit to give life and

direction to the movement. “Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint” (Prov 29:18, NIV).

In many movements of the past, the danger has been for the movement to ‘settle down’. Its people stopped listening for the prophetic voice of God required to take them on to another level of spiritual growth and development. A key in this process, according to Daniel (2004:27), is for the movement to remain flexible and to embrace the God-inspired, Spirit-directed adjustments that will keep the movement focussed on its essential calling.

- **Being committed to the Word of God as the ‘only rule of faith’**

For apostolic movements to stay free of the above-mentioned traps and to continue their effective ministry, it is imperative for leaders to stay committed to the Scriptures as the plumbline of truth. Everything must be measured by that rule. Coupled with this is the necessity for leaders to remain open to the Holy Spirit in order to live in the truth (John 16:13). An ongoing challenge that leaders face is to have the courage and conviction to reject practices that do not measure up to scripture. Such practices hamper the church in its witness to the world. Leaders need to embrace the admonishment of Christ to listen constantly to “what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev 3:6).

- **The importance of meaningful relationships**

Relationships based on genuine friendship and not merely function are a key to maintaining the spiritual health of a movement. It is vital that apostolic teams function in their task of establishing and strengthening churches on strong relationships. The process for facilitating healthy, meaningful relationships between the apostolic teams and pastors of churches needs to be a priority. The challenge is to maintain those structures that promote regular contact amongst relating pastors and the apostolic teams of the movement.

7. Conclusion

In our examination of three earlier movements, namely, the Methodists, Brethren, and Pentecostals, we have observed that each movement, in its own way, returned to an expression of apostolic Christianity. Each movement

enjoyed a refreshing of the Holy Spirit that empowered and ignited it with a passion to glorify Jesus Christ by advancing the kingdom of God through the preaching of the Word. This in turn motivated each group to preach the gospel “to the ends of the earth”. Each movement had a high regard for scripture and sought to emulate biblical patterns in their life and ministry.

We have further observed that there is a current trend among many movements around the world that are seeking to emulate apostolic Christianity. Among these movements, we have made observations regarding the vision and values of New Covenant Ministries International.

Although each of the earlier movements had its own unique strengths, there were a number of common factors that stood out in each. Each had a desire to glorify Jesus in all that it did. Each was strongly missionary minded. Each had a renewed reverence for the Word of God and desired, to the best of its ability, to pattern their life and ministry on the Word of God. Each experienced the power of the Holy Spirit in various ways. All experienced significant growth in numbers and impacted the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Methodists, the Brethren and the Pentecostals each lost their initial fervour, impetuous and effectiveness. This was due to a number of factors. These included becoming institutional, bureaucratic, over organised, ‘professional’ and allowing tradition to rob them of their spiritual vitality.

A number of measures can be implemented to prevent current apostolic movements, such as New Covenant Ministries International, losing their initial passion and zeal. First, they must allow the Holy Spirit to renew and refresh the leaders and their people. Second, leaders need to ensure that the movement has flexible structures that do not inhibit the fresh outpouring of the “new wine of the Spirit”. It is vital that leaders ensure they have strong, dependable friendships among themselves and their people. To be effective and relevant, they need to stay committed to the scriptures as the only rule of faith. They must stay focussed on the main calling of the church, namely, to be an agent of advancing the kingdom of God in the world and seek to fulfil the great commission of Jesus Christ to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19) by planting New Testament churches throughout the world. Perhaps one of the greatest challenges that the apostolic movements face is to posture themselves

to listen to the prophetic leading of the Holy Spirit, making known the mind of Christ as it charts its way into the future of being an effective instrument in the hands of God to reach all nations with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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