

Journal Article

Apostolic Networks in Britain Revisited

Kay, W.K.

This article is published by Brill Academic Publishers. The definitive version of this article is available at:

<http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/journals/10.1163/15700747-03801003>

Recommended citation:

Kay, W.K. (2016), 'Apostolic networks in Britain revisited', *Pneuma*, Vol.38, No.1-2, pp.5-22.
doi: 10.1163/15700747-03801003

Apostolic Networks in Britain Revisited

Abstract

This paper presents an account of the theological ideas that led to the formation of apostolic networks in Britain in the 1970s. It takes note of the function of theology as a driver of ecclesiastical innovation and offers the thesis that, while theology provides ideas and arguments, society is the receptacle into which these ideas are poured. Consequently similar ideas will be expressed in different social forms as society changes. The changes within apostolic networks in the last 15 years are commented upon and the appearance of meta-networks is noted. Equally the emergence of networks within denominational settings is flagged up.

Key words: networks, apostles, dual identity, internet, Toronto blessing

Background

The charismatic movement has been viewed as an outcome or offshoot of the Pentecostal movement and, although this is not the only way of viewing the historical development of the two movements, it is one that has considerable credibility. According to this scheme, the Pentecostal movement originated after a series of start-of-century revivals in the period before 1910.¹ These scattered revivals – in Wales, Azusa Street, Mukti, and Pyongyang – eventually culminated in the formation of Pentecostal denominations which could be conceived of as attempting to perpetuate the revivals by organising their converts and by retaining within the new denominations a style of church life that was perpetually revivalist.² So, just as the revivals allowed spontaneous utterances within the meetings, accepted a fluid order of service and the prominent contributions of women, so the Pentecostal churches did the same although with the added stability provided by their recognition of a doctrine of glossolalia in respect of baptism within the Holy Spirit.³

The Pentecostal churches grew in the first part of the 20th century and survived the wars, upheaval and persecution that many of them experienced in Europe and Asia.⁴ When the charismatic movement began in the early 1960s, the spiritual outpouring, sometimes called the second wave, on the mainline churches produced renewal within these churches and a fresh burst of spiritual life.⁵ Suddenly Baptists, Anglicans, Methodist or Roman Catholics might be speaking with tongues, meeting together in homes, listening to tapes and cassettes of Spirit-filled preachers, learning about prophecy, prayer for the sick, and a raft of other topics that quickly entered the charismatic culture.⁶ Yet the charismatics, because of their moorings within traditional Trinitarian churches, retained many of the doctrinal features of these churches including an acceptance of the Trinity (thus the charismatic churches produced in this way were not Oneness) and a respect for the rudiments of church order.

¹ G. B. McGee, "Power from on high" and Disagreements among the saints", in *People of the Spirit: the Assemblies of God* (Springfield, MI: GPH, 2004). G.B. McGee, *Miracles, Missions, & American Pentecostalism* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2010).

² W. K. Kay, *Pentecostalism: core text* (London: SCM, 2009).

³ J. W. Hayford and S. D. Moore, *The Charismatic Century: the enduring impact of the Azusa Street revival* (New York: Warner Faith, 2006).

⁴ W. K. Kay and A. E. Dyer, eds, *European Pentecostalism* (Leiden: Brill).

⁵ V. Synan, "Charismatic renewal enters the mainline churches", V. Synan, ed., *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 years of Pentecostal and charismatic renewal* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson).

⁶ T. Smail, "A Renewal Recalled", T. Smail, A. Walker and N. Wright, eds, *Charismatic Renewal* (London: SPCK).

The charismatic movement within the traditional denominations also led some believers to become impatient with what they saw as the dampening effect of denominational hierarchies. There was a willingness to break out of the denominational churches and to form new ones. It is not clear exactly what sort of numbers of people were involved in this more radical step and it may be that their influence was out of proportion to their numbers – at least in Nonconformist circles. Thus the neo-charismatic congregations were assembled out of Brethren, Baptist, Anglican and other breakaways who preferred to start afresh rather than to migrate across town to the old-style and often old-fashioned Pentecostal churches. The neo-charismatics, or as they were first called ‘house churches’ and as they later became to be known ‘apostolic networks’, were consequently the most radical Christians on the scene – at least they were in the UK.⁷ They largely comprised laypeople, often in business or teaching, who were frustrated by the caution and feebleness of mainline ordained clergy. The summer Bible Weeks attracted growing numbers; one network of the 12 or so in existence attracted over 20,000 people in 1986.⁸ The vision of the radicals was fresh and eschatologically confident with an expectation of the coming kingdom of God, and they had enthusiasm and money. They came to be known as the third wave.

These three groups (Pentecostal, charismatic and neo-charismatic or apostolic network) coexisted from the early 1970s onwards. I observed the scene within the UK, obtained an AHRC⁹ grant to study what was going on, conducted interviews, surveyed 12 of the new groups by questionnaire and published *Apostolic Networks in Britain* in 2007.¹⁰ Much of the rest of this paper will concern reflection upon these networks and will bring their story up-to-date as well as providing additional analysis. Before this, however, it is worth pointing out that the temporal scheme outlined above is based on the assumption that the three waves occur in sequence and that the last wave pushes churchgoers out of the charismatic movement and deposits them into new network structures. Such a conception is not accurate in every part of the world and it is possible that the waves may break almost simultaneously so that the charismatics and neo-charismatics come into existence without any transition from one to the other. Nevertheless within the UK the waves followed in order, as an examination of the dates of the registry on the Charity Commission website of the apostolic network trusts shows.¹¹ In each case they came about ten years after the first flowerings of the charismatic movement evidenced by the tongues-speaking of the Episcopalian Dennis Bennett in 1959¹² who was followed in this three years later by the man who might be seen as his UK equivalent, Michael Harper.

Theological drive...

The charismatic movement of the 1960s and the apostolic networks of the 1970s (and then in their larger mutation in the 1990s, which will be mentioned later) are valuable materials for sociological theory. The social forms that emerged in the 1960s and the 1970s (and later in the 1990s) constitute the raw material for the testing and formulation of sociological theory but the contention of this paper is that the actors within the unfolding narrative were

⁷ A. Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom: the radical Christianity of the House Church movement* (Guildford, UK: Eagle, 1998).

⁸ *Restoration* (Nov/Dec, 1986), p. 14.

⁹ Arts and Humanities Research Council, see <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Pages/Home.aspx>

¹⁰ W. K. Kay, *Apostolic Networks in Britain: new ways of being church* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007).

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission>. Individual charities can be search for by name or number.

¹² D.J. Bennett, *Nine o'clock in the morning* (London: Coverdale, 1971) 68, 69.

driven by theological ideas and values. In other words, theology functions as a source of theoretical justification, of morality, of intellectual concepts, of conceiving the future and provides the basis for personal decision-making. This functional notion of theology is rather different from the notion of theology that may be advanced by theologians themselves who might see their conclusions and publications as the exploration of the biblical text, church history, or culturally relevant philosophical notions – indeed as the natural advancement of their academic discipline. Yet, it seems to me that the role of theology in the lives of those caught up in the Western stream of Pentecostalism and charismatic activity is often overlooked. And, indeed, one might argue for a more general thesis: theology always provides motivation and values while the social nexus provides the choice of forms into which religious organisations pour themselves.

This general thesis might be seen in the comparison between the forms available in the 19th century and those in the 20th century. In the 19th century with a clearly demarcated set of social strata from aristocratic landowners down to servants and landless artisans, the established church mapped itself onto this structure so that, in the UK at any rate, bishops could be drawn from the same social elite as landowners and speak on equal terms with them and each rank within the church paralleled ranks within society so that the local vicar, perhaps on speaking terms with the local squire or land owner, came at the lower end of the gentry. In short, stratified society and stratified church matched. In Europe after 1945 the social strata began to lose salience and definition and, in any case, by the 1960s social mobility was seen as a virtue. The neo-charismatic churches coming into existence in the 1970s reflected the new classless social order.

There is certainly evidence that the first stirrings of the neo-charismatic or apostolic networks in Britain came about through theological engagement. The best documented source occurs in the writings of Arthur Wallis (1923-88) who grew up with a Brethren background and was therefore in any case opposed to classical denominational structures and procedures. After a powerful experience of the Holy Spirit in 1951, Wallis combined a Brethren ecclesiology with a belief in charismatic gifts and the Ephesians 4 gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelist, pastors and teachers.¹³ By 1956 Wallis had written a classic book on revival and by the end of the decade was beginning to circulate his ideas to others.¹⁴ Together with David Lillie (who may well have been the driving force) he held a conference with an unmistakable ecclesiological focus for about 25 people in May 1958, and gradually his vision gained traction over the following years.¹⁵

At its inception British Pentecostalism tied the restoration of apostles and prophets to the restoration of spiritual gifts. From 1910 onwards, when the first Pentecostal church building was erected in England, belief in modern-day apostles was advanced by W. O. Hutchinson (1864-1928) with the result that the Apostolic Church was founded (probably taking the name from that used by W. J. Seymour in Azusa Street but without any other connection). After an early split, the main body of the Apostolic Church settled down as a largely Welsh-speaking cluster of congregations from 1916 onwards. It implemented church governance through the combined ministries of apostles and prophets functioning under the yoke of a constitutional document that laid down unbreakable rules for the scope of their ministries.

¹³ P. D. Hocken, "Baptised in the Spirit: the origins and early development of the charismatic movement in Great Britain" (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 1984) 16.

¹⁴ A. Wallis, *In the Day of Thy Power* (Arlesford: Christian Literature Crusade, 1956).

¹⁵ Hocken, *Baptised in the Spirit*, 18.

The thinking developed by Arthur Wallis was certainly supplemented by Cecil Cousen (1913-89) who had returned from Canada after being touched by the Latter Rain movement that was sparked into life in 1948.¹⁶ After his return to England, Cousen, who was expelled from the Apostolic Church in 1953, met with Wallis. The upshot of this is that Cousen must have influenced some of Wallis's thinking and some of Cousen's thinking must have been influenced by the Latter Rain revival so that, indirectly, the neo-charismatics in Britain have a link with an earlier line of tradition.

At the time, any earlier links were downplayed or forgotten since it was possible to reach conclusions about the role of apostles and prophets by close examination of the text of the New Testament and this, over next few years, is broadly what happened. Apostolic and prophetic roles were rediscovered without ransacking Pentecostal history, evangelical commentaries or Puritan writings. The theological groundwork that led to the new conception of apostles and prophets can usefully be followed in the writings of two magazines published by neo-charismatics, *Fulness* [sic] (founded c. 1972) and *Restoration* (founded 1975). But this is to jump ahead in the story.

The prior question that needs to be asked is why charismatics decided to leave their existing denominational traditions, and to this there is a variety of answers. First, for those who came straight to the Bible fresh from a spiritual experience of the Holy Spirit, it was difficult to discover similarity between the church in the book of Acts and the modern day church. The one appeared simple, direct, effective and endowed with a miraculous capacity and the other appeared to be formal, ceremonial, without miracles or dynamism. Of course one could argue that the new charismatics were sorely ignorant of church history but most of them did not see this as a failing since their attitudes were resolutely directed towards the eschatological future. Second, at some point in the 1970s within the charismatic movement, there was emphatic preaching upon the subject of 'the kingdom'. This turned out to be an ambiguous term. Reference to the kingdom could be seen as a way of speaking about the common ground on which all Christians stood, and they stood there because Jesus in the gospels had preached about the kingdom more than he had spoken about the church. There were preachers who argued that denominational labels had no place in the kingdom. *Forgive Us Our Denominations* (c. 1971) is the title given to a pamphlet that summarized the mood.¹⁷ Indeed it was argued from exegesis of John 17.23 that, as soon as Christians gave up denominational allegiances, the world would notice what happened and flock to the new unified church ('so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me'). The local church is 'the entire redeemed community living in the worldly community in a given area' and not arbitrarily broken up by the accidents of church tradition.¹⁸

But the kingdom might also refer to social justice and humanitarian activity. So the kingdom became a moral basis for inter-church cooperation and godly authority. It became a necessary and exemplary religious entity pointing to the end of the age. 'Jesus is delegating his government to men so that the local church becomes a microcosm of the kingdom of heaven on earth'.¹⁹ This note of authority became increasingly insistent and received support from the shepherding movement in the United States although, even without such assistance, interpretations of apostleship discovered an implicit reference to authority

¹⁶ P. D. Hocken "Cecil Cousen" in S.M. Burgess and E. M. van der Maas, eds., *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, 564.

¹⁷ Kay, *Apostolic Networks*, 36

¹⁸ George Tarleton, *Fulness*, 11 (nd): 12.

¹⁹ John Noble, *Fulness* 11 (nd): 7.

within the term. That there were connections between the shepherding movement in the USA and the neo-charismatic movement in the United Kingdom became evident as discussion took place between members of the Fort Lauderdale Five and neo-charismatic leaders.²⁰ Although the British found the Americans helpful and impressive, it appears that the Fort Lauderdale Five wanted to subsume the British neo-charismatics within and under the authoritative structure they were devising. The British were having none of it and the two sets of people went their separate ways.

A cynical interpretation of events might suggest that power-hungry alpha males were simply seeking biblical justification for their own ambitions, and there may well have been carnality behind what was preached. At the time, nothing was so clear. The promotion of the doctrine of contemporary apostleship went hand-in-hand with the doctrine of the kingdom, and the doctrine of the kingdom, however it was interpreted, pointed to a positive future and away from the premillennial worries of classic Pentecostals. Apostles, as the pages of the two new-charismatic magazines showed, were first seen as church-planters but, when the metaphor of 'master builder' (1 Co 3.10), was emphasised, this could open up the possibility that apostles were also destroyers since they needed to clear the ground before any new building might be erected. So apostles were there to get rid of all the clutter and lumber of accumulated church tradition in order to prepare ground for new buildings. There was undoubtedly a misuse of authority and even bullying by those who claimed apostleship (Bryn Jones was seen as the culprit here) and, when a belief in apostolic authority was combined with leanings towards the prosperity gospel, the results could be toxic. Money was demanded for 'apostolic covering'. At the same time, it was argued that apostles were also a source of unity and that by 'relationship' with apostles a new and genuine unity might be achieved – not the unity of denominational bylaws, committees and conference votes – but the unity of honest personal relations and friendships. All these notions could be found in the New Testament picture of the early church.

Those charismatics who wished to leave mainline denominations came to be called 'restorationists' while those who remained were 'renewalists'. There were mediating attempts to bring the parties together and written debate in 1974 within the pages of *Renewal* magazine edited by Michael Harper who allowed the topic to be discussed within his journal.²¹ Arthur Wallis put the case for the restorationists while David Watson spoke for the renewalists. Wallis had come to see denominations as a positive hindrance to Christian unity. Watson noticed Jesus continued to attend the synagogue even while bringing in all the blessings of the new covenant. In 1966 Martyn Lloyd-Jones had spoken to the Evangelical Alliance and called for a new pan-evangelical grouping made up of all those evangelicals scattered in mixed denominations. John Stott opposed him by invoking the repetitious cycles of church history and by pointing to the doctrine of the remnant, the faithful few, who loyally remained within the faithless nation. There was a sense in which the dispute between Wallis and Watson was a re-run of the dispute between Lloyd-Jones and Stott. Coming out or staying in is a perennial issue at a time of change but the point made here is that the arguments in both directions were almost entirely theological, not sociological.

In arguing that denominations were at the root of Christian disunity, restorationists had to defend themselves from self-contradiction by insisting that they were not intending to create anything resembling new denominations. Of course, the argument revolved around

²⁰ Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom*, 97, 99, 101. Two of the British preachers flew to Fort Lauderdale and at least two of the Americans preached at British events and were well received. So the relationship was not simply about accepting authority.

²¹ August/September, p. 52 and passim.

the precise definition of the word 'denomination'. This, perhaps, was where the argument deviated from its theological beginnings. For the restorationists, denominations were made up of church structures and mechanisms that were nowhere to be found in the Bible. The denomination was riddled with committees, votes, legalism and the quest for status. The new entities that the restorationists saw themselves as creating avoided all these pitfalls. Committees and voting were an anathema to restorationism and, to this day, remain outside the restorationist mode of action. The question of legalism is more interesting.

Restorationists found an implicit legalism within evangelicalism that many of them were leaving behind. This might be the legalism of dress codes, disapproval of sporting activities, rules about drinking alcohol, going to the cinema, and so on, or it might be about an unconscious constraint on the individual's relationship with God which was somehow blighted by an image of a legalistic tyrant rather than a loving father. Gerald Coates wrote a pamphlet, *Not Under Law* (1975), while Terry Virgo, another restorationist leader, made preaching about grace central to his ministry.²² Everything that Christians did in church and in society ought to be a manifestation of divine grace and legalism simply had no part in this.

...Social forms

Once a sufficient number of people had decided to leave the established denominations, the neo-charismatic groups were ready to start out on their own.²³ The theological rationale was in place although the feature that became most important in the setting up of the new networks concerned the recognition that contemporary apostles had the power to ordain elders. The link between the apostle and elders allowed networks to be held together by a strong relational bond. Although there was much talk and preaching about 'relationships' and although relationships were seen as more flexible and authentic than the official connections between churches within traditional denominations, there was a special importance in the apostolic power to ordain. The apostle had the ability to empower people by giving them a particular status within the congregation.

The neo-charismatic groups coming into existence in the 1970s and 1980s were all pre-internet. This meant that the scattered groups of Christians that at first came together needed to be visited, usually by car – and this limited the geographical scope of connections. The actual building of the network happened in several ways. Sometimes a group of charismatic Christians had left a traditional church, and this was relatively easy to do if the congregation was organised into home groups. The home group was itself a discrete entity. At other times Christians came to the contemporary apostle in person to ask him (in every case it was a man²⁴) to take them on. And once the process had started, it became possible for whole groupings within an existing denomination to move out. There was, for instance, a Baptist Revival Fellowship that comprised a like-minded set of believers for whom the message of the neo-charismatics was attractive, and some of them found it easy to exit the Baptist Union.

So the first base for the new grouping was the home. This immediately says something about the social status of these Christians since most of them were property owning. A number of large congregations could trace their beginnings to a dozen people meeting in a home and then, once they outgrew this, they would hire local premises, usually a school but

²² T. Virgo, *God's Lavish Grace* (Eastbourne: Monarch, 2004).

²³ There were good numbers of Anglican charismatics who stayed within the Anglican Church but some joined the New Wine network which had the capacity to sustain charismatic parishes even in the face of a non-charismatic bishop. See <http://www.new-wine.org> (accessed 8 Sept 2015).

²⁴ Though there was one case where a husband and wife worked together equally as a team.

sometimes a community centre and then, perhaps five years later, seek to buy their own property. So the social forms into which these neo-charismatic groups fitted were put together from private property and rentable locations and joined together by biblically justified relationships with the apostle. His own ministry might be initially funded from the larger congregation with which he was originally connected. Indeed his own congregation, which might have been built up by him, saw him less and less as he embarked on his travels. This pattern with variants occurred many times. And then, once a set of home groups or start-up congregations were in place, they might then be brought together annually for showcase celebratory events. Between these events local 'leaders' - the term was non-biblical but could cover everyone from elders to housegroup conveners - had opportunities for more frequent meetings with the apostle. At the annual events, restorationist speakers preached powerfully before large crowds, set out visions for the future and sold recordings of their sermons.

In short, the neo-charismatic networks founded in the 1970s were relatively cheap to run at first because they were situated in homes. Once they began to move to rental property and to pay their ministers and the travel of the itinerant apostle, costs gradually climbed. To meet these commitments and to establish themselves on a firmer financial footing, they drew up trust deeds and registered with the Charity Commission in the UK. This allowed them to claim money from the tax authorities, thereby increasing the value of gifts by about 22%. The actual structures of the new organisations were simple and flexible, local and congregational. Indeed, New Frontiers, one of the most successful of the networks, argued against the setting up or support of parachurch agencies. Everything should come from the local congregation because this ensured accountability to the local leadership – and a biblical justification could be given for this since there were no parachurches in the New Testament. Consequently, mission began to be conducted differently.

The desire to grow, and the experience of rapid successful growth in the UK, was translated into overseas mission. Whereas denominational missionary societies had procedures for the accreditation of missionaries and budgets for committees which oversaw strategy, the new networks allowed most missionary activity to burst out of local congregation often incentivised by spiritual gifts. Short-term mission became popular and was enthusiastically supported from larger congregations who sent their own leaders to needy areas of the world, perhaps, for instance, to Eastern Europe. When eventually the question of church-planting overseas occurred, it was obvious that the main church planter ought to be the apostle. In other words, the person at the top of the organisation took responsibility for church planting and, in this way, the old method of doing mission was turned on its head. For, in the old way of doing mission, the people of the top of the organisation stayed comfortably at home while the missionary foot soldiers were posted overseas to all the insecurities and discomforts of a foreign culture. Now, the apostle employed his gifts in other parts of the world just as he had originally done in the UK. The most successful networks conceived of mission as designed to assist church-planting rather than to give more general aid to the indigenous church. Moreover, again in the most successful networks, as a consequence of prophetic utterance the disparity in wealth between the north and the global south was used to advantage: money raised in the richer north was given to church-plants in the poorer south.²⁵

Although there is no direct connection between apostolic networks and politics, it is undoubtedly true that the first networks were planted in the context of economic stagnation. Britain's industrial performance lagged behind much of continental Europe and,

²⁵ Kay, *Apostolic Networks*, 75.

during 1974, electricity had to be rationed by a series of planned power cuts brought about by militant striking workers at power stations or in coal mines. During the 'winter of discontent' uncollected rubbish littered the streets and there were unburied dead as council workers struck.²⁶ This paralysis was broken by the election of Mrs Thatcher in 1979. She was a 'conviction politician' whose childhood was shaped by Methodism and she was determined to resist the encroachments of European bureaucracy abroad and militant unionism at home.²⁷ By the time the 1980s were in full swing, Britain's economic performance was rising and people had money in their pockets. This new entrepreneurial culture and the finance it released assisted the networks that benefited from generous giving and a fresh acceptance of the importance of the market.

The UK networks quantified

Persistent attempts to quantify church membership and attendance within the UK have been made by Peter Brierley whose research over more than 40 years has been recognised by government statistical bodies like the Office for National Statistics and by well-funded websites like British Religion in Numbers (<http://www.brin.ac.uk>). It was to Brierley I turned when making a survey of apostolic networks in the year 2004. Taking figures from the *Religious Trends no 3* (Brierley, 2001), there are 2,094 New Churches in the UK with 2,385 leaders but, closer inspection of these figures, revealed a more complicated and less solid picture. Correspondence with Brierley and the networks in 2004 reduced these figures to 647 congregations. In 2014, Brierley in *UK Church Statistics no 2: 2010 to 2020* reported 781 new church congregations which may be compared with a figure of 765 gleaned from current websites.²⁸

Insert table 1 about here

These figures are volatile as a consequence of the relational nature of the networks. There is not the same central organisation as is found in denominations. Ministerial and church membership is less fixed and there is a tendency for some of the networks to shift and refocus. Those that have maintained a consistent theology and philosophy of church planting and resisted the temptation to metamorphose into parachurch service agencies have either grown or held their ground. Others, sometimes with an ecumenical motive, have raised humanitarian activities up the agenda. For example Pioneer has been active in giving help to those with AIDS while others have undergone internal reorientation by acceptance of G12 philosophy and then rejection or modification of it (e.g. Kensington Temple).²⁹

The comparison between the 2001 and 2014 figures demonstrates overall growth in the sector although it is also evident that some networks have been badly damaged. For instance c.net's leading apostle was involved in moral failure with the result that a large number of associated congregations were 'released'. It shrunk back to a large central congregation with a penumbra of satellite congregations. Kingdom Faith which was always inclined to regard itself as network that congregations might voluntarily join has also been depleted. Others, like Ichthus, have suffered defections and yet others (Salt and Light, New Frontiers) have reoriented themselves with the retirement of their main apostle.

²⁶ D. Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun: the battle for Britain, 1974-1979*. Kindle edition, loc 234 and passim.

²⁷ John Campbell, *Margaret Thatcher: grocer's daughter to iron lady* (London: Vintage, 2009) 12, 18.

²⁸ P. Brierley, *UK Church Statistics no 2: 2010 to 2020* (Tonbridge, Kent: ADBC Publishers) tables 7.1.1 to 7.4.1

²⁹ "KT", accessed Nov 21, 2014, <http://www.kt.org/model12cellchurch12/>

This balance between flexibility and stability is important to an understanding of the future choices church leaders will need to make. It is also, as we shall see, complicated by the possibility of dual membership. Yet, as the contrast between early and recent statistics for the apostolic networks implies, one of their fundamental challenges is to find a way of transitioning from the first leader to the second generation of leaders. This is a problem that was early recognised; what has been less well appreciated is that denominational structures, heavily criticised by network preachers in the 1970s, have the advantage of providing a rational method by which leadership is transferred from one person or group to others. The voting at denominational general conferences allows a new leader to emerge from the rising cohort. Within the networks the transfer of authority can only take place by the direct handover from the founding apostle to the second-generation leader. This can occur smoothly provided that the founding apostle is prepared to step down after anointing a successor. It can also lead to complexities when younger men, seeking to prove their apostolic credentials, covertly or unconsciously enter into competition with each other in an attempt to grasp the mantle of leadership. In the case of New Frontiers, the largest of the groups, the unity of the network has been sacrificed or dispersed by breaking the network into a number of 'spheres' each led by its own apostolic ministry. About five new spheres have emerged in the UK each with approximately 50 churches in them. The spheres are roughly circumscribed geographically although, overseas, there is the potential for competition between them. In most of the spheres the apostle is based in the UK and works both at home and overseas but some of the spheres are based outside the UK and then direct their mission into it.

Repeating cycles in the digital age

Once established the apostolic networks were boosted by the arrival of the digital age. Personal computers became popular in the 1980s, Windows-based machines started to be plentiful in the early 1990s and the first website was created in 1991. The new networks were able to project their presence internationally at a tiny cost and, as further digital media became available, recordings of live events could be either streamed or placed on websites for later downloading.³⁰

Social commentators noticed what was happening in the secular world. Three volumes on *The Rise of the Network Society* were published in 2000.³¹ Castells noticed that the vertical bureaucracies of the past had shifted into horizontal corporations that were characterised by organisation around process rather than task, team management, maximal contact between suppliers and customers and the frequent offer of re-training to employees at all levels. The network is flat in the sense that it emphasises a multiplicity of lateral rather than vertical connections and so localises decision-making. At least two of these emphases – local decision-making through elders and multiple lateral connections – fitted the emerging structures of the apostolic networks. It would be wrong, however, to argue that the networks shaped themselves to the digital landscape since their features pre-existed the internet but they were early adopters of internet technology, desktop publishing and electronic ministry. There were also, within the apostolic networks, inherent options for multiplication and subdivision by the potential for creating networks of networks or sub-networks inside larger systems, and these options mirrored what was possible digitally.

Within business the network society assists the flow of capital investment and the dissemination of information. The network itself is a set of interconnected nodes, where the node is a point of intersection. This creates a highly dynamic open system that enables 'a

³⁰ T.L. Friedman, *The World is Flat* (London: Allen Lane/Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2005).

³¹ M. Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

culture of endless deconstruction and reconstruction'.³² The network society will be compatible with kinship networks by an emphasis on the importance of relationships. Yet networks themselves have the surprising characteristic that they may create the 'small world' phenomenon through highly connected clusters of teams; each team functioning as a node. Imagine a group of five church leaders in the south of the country meeting together regularly and that one of these people knows someone within a team of leaders in the north of the country.³³ This immediately creates a sense in which *all* the leaders in the south have access to *all* leaders in the north through the link person. When you add in to this picture the apostle as an itinerant figure moving between clusters of highly connected leaders, it is possible to see how the apostolic networks enable much richer connections than were common within old-style hierarchical denominations.

At the same time as developments were occurring within the digital world, the Toronto Blessing and associated revivals began to impinge upon the consciousness of many believers, particularly in the west.³⁴ It was feasible to hear stimulating sermons and watch the Blessing fall in faraway meetings. In the UK the Blessing quickly flowed through nearly all the networks although the phenomena were interpreted in various ways. For some it was a renewal of renewal and for others it was an eschatological sign of the end that would eventuate in fiery revival at the end of the millennium. Those who treated the Blessing as a loosening and renewing flow dealt with it pastorally and avoided the risk of disillusionment. And, although the effects of the Blessing was seen in the fruit of an increased incidence in spiritual gifts and charitable action,³⁵ it is also the case that justifications and interpretations of the Blessing functioned like the outpouring of the Spirit in the 1960s to produce a theological driver that would push churches into new social forms.³⁶

The original networks had been created by linking congregations led by elders with an itinerant apostle. Horizontal connections between churches were created when elders connected with the same apostle met each other. But there were also other kinds of sideways extension possible when apostles themselves came into relationship with each other. Thus there might be an apostolic group in England and another one in France and, so long as the two apostolic figures cooperated, it was simple enough to set up networks of two or three networks. It was also possible to introduce a layer over the top if international apostles were accepted by local apostles. The same looseness of connection was to be found but larger international wholes could be brought into existence. We might see this sort of linkage as a meta-network.

³² Castells, *Network Society*, 502

³³ See fuller discussion of this issue in Kay, *Apostolic Networks*, 289-292, where reference is made to P. Ball, *Critical Mass* (London: Arrow Books, 2004) and P. Chambers "Social networks and religious identity: an historical example from Wales" in G. Davie, P. Heelas and L. Woodhead, eds, *Predicting Religion: critical, secular and alternative features* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

³⁴ D. Hilborn, ed., *'Toronto' in Perspective: papers on the new charismatic wave of the mid 1990s* (Carlisle: Acute [An imprint of Paternoster], 2001).

³⁵ M.T.Lee and M. M. Poloma, *A Sociological Study of the Great Commandment in Pentecostalism: the practice of Godly love as benevolent service* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009).

³⁶ In this connection Christopher A Stephenson "Should Pentecostal Theology be Analytic Theology", *Pneuma*, 36.2, (2014): 246-264, is helpful. Non-analytic theology is, or is close to, a form of rhetoric intended to persuade hearers. It is not an entirely rational or systematic discourse full of carefully defined terms arranged together intricately.

Such meta-networks included those associated with the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR), and in this the Toronto church and John Arnott played a role,³⁷ though what is said about the Toronto church might equally be applied to any of the NAR large churches with a similar emphasis and equally intentional global outreach.³⁸ These networks allowed ministers within networks or denominations to belong to, for instance, the Partners in Harvest circle while retaining membership of any other grouping. Such a dual membership option was practically unheard of within denominational circles since people were exclusively Baptists or Methodists or Anglicans, and so on, and could not take out membership of several churches at once. The result of this was that there were churches and individual ministers whose membership was bifurcated. It was not uncommon for such ministers to take what they felt they needed from whichever network or denomination they belonged to. They might attend the General Conference of their denomination *and* the annual conferences either of a local network or of the meta-network and receive teaching material from all sources.

This form of dual membership led to dual identity and, within the UK, had the effect of making it easier to leave the long-established Pentecostal denominations because the church or minister could come out of, for instance, the Assemblies of God and yet not walk into the wilderness but simply embrace more closely the network he or she had already affiliated to and where he or she had friends. Perhaps as a way of meeting this challenge, the traditional denominations began to react by allowing internal groupings to form within their own collections of churches. So, one might now find regional or district groups of Pentecostal churches that were officially recognised by the denomination *as well as* specialised network groupings, perhaps run on an apostolic basis, that crossed over regional lines and created a hybrid between denominational hierarchy and apostolic connectivity. Another way of putting this would be to say that the denominations started to take on some of the characteristics of networks while the networks moved in a variety of directions depending on the theological principles that guided them. In some respects the legacy of the apostolic networks is to be found in the adoption by other Christian groupings of those features of network life or organisation that worked well: the networks, if one can use an analogy, had something of the same relationship to churches as Formula 1 racing has to the domestic car industry – an opportunity for the testing of prototypes.

And yet, to end on a darker note, there are elements of the apostolic networks and their derivatives inside denominations that are a cause for concern. Concerns centre on the moral character and theological understanding of the people who claim apostolic status. First, the word ‘apostle’ may be wrenched from its biblical context and turned into a title rather than a New Testament function. The title ‘apostle’ is applied to someone at the top of an authoritarian hierarchy rather than to someone whose church-planting, healing and pastoral ministry is modelled on the exemplars of the early church.

Second, the doctrine of apostolicity is one which vests huge amounts of authority and putative wisdom in the apostolic claimant. The installation of an apostolic system will often

³⁷ C. Peter Wagner, “Foreword” to Dr. Bill Hamon, *Apostles, Prophets and the Coming Moves of God. God’s End-Time Plans for His Church and Planet Earth* (Santa Rosa, FL: Christian International, 1997). See also ‘Partners in Harvest (PiH) & Friends in Harvest (FiH) is our Church Network of over 500 churches internationally in over 50 Nations’ on <http://catchthefire.com/media/profiles/john-carol-arnott#> (accessed Nov 23, 2014).

³⁸ M.J. Cartledge, “‘Catch the Fire’: revivalist spirituality from Toronto to beyond,” *PentecoStudies* 13.2, (2014): 217-238. Randy Clark, *Lighting Fires: Keeping the Spirit of Revival Alive in Your Heart and the Hearts of Others Around You* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 1998). M. M. Poloma *Main Street Mystics: the Toronto Blessing and reviving Pentecostalism* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2003).

be accompanied by the *removal of any general conference with decisions by voting*. As a result there is no corporate authority since it all now rests in a few 'anointed' individuals who stand above contradiction and beyond any form of correction. Where there is no peer group to administer correction, humility is viewed as a sign of weakness and, worse, apostolicity is defined in terms of the acquisition and exercise of authority: the greater the authority the greater the evidence of apostolic status. This kind of teaching is contrary to the New Testament on a number of fronts. Not only is the virtue of humility ignored in this reading of Scripture but also a bombastic and commandeering attitude is specifically forbidden by Christ himself: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. *Not so with you*" (Mt 20.25, italics added).

Third, connected with an overemphasis on apostolic authority is an unwillingness to allow for financial transparency. Apostles of this kind believe that they have an absolute right to money and are extremely unwilling to allow their financial affairs to be investigated or queried. While they presumably observe the letter of the law and employ reputable accountants or auditors, their treatment of those who actually donate money is frequently nauseating. Whereas the giving of money is an act of grace and generosity, those in 'apostolic' positions may come to regard other people's money as theirs by right. The notions that Christian organisations 'walk in the light' or that giving flows from compassion have been lost.

Fourth, the treatment of doctrine itself is suspect since there are indications that, in some places, business practices supersede theological principles. Indeed, where Christian churches talk about their 'brand' rather than their theology, it is time to ask serious questions about how long such groupings will last. Theology within the networks, as this paper has argued, functions as motivational and value-laden discourse, and loses its traditional normative role; remove normativity and there is nothing beyond pragmatics by which the church guides itself. The concept of the church as the people of God in the presence of God is lost and, instead of a community inspired by the Holy Spirit, we see an agency designed to hit certain targets using inflexible procedures drawn from the worlds of business or management.

It is no surprise that the problems described here reared their ugly heads during the New Testament era and that early Christians started to test the genuineness of apostleship: 'I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false' (Rev 2.2). If apostolic networks proliferate in the 21st century, the same tests will need to be applied today.

Table 1: Apostolic Network congregations in 2001 and 2014

Network	2001 Brierley Revised	2014 Brierley	2014 websites
C.net	50		9 ³⁹
Ground Level	77	105	86 ⁴⁰
Ichthus	45	88	37
Jesus Fellowship ⁴¹	53	42	5
Kensington Temple	54		130
Kingdom Faith	13	5	6
Lifelink	6	20	18
New Frontiers	200	250	279
Together	12	17	16
Spirit Connect /Pioneer	12	73	5
Salt and Light	50	75	70 ⁴²
Vineyard	75	106	104
Total	647	781	765

³⁹ In and around Southampton including small congregations in other languages. Now 'New Community'.

⁴⁰ From 2014 website

⁴¹ Also called the Jesus Army and Multiply Network

⁴² Figure taken from Ewen Robertson, "The Distinctive Missiology of the New Churches: an analysis and evaluation" (PhD diss., University of Wales, 2014) 26.