

Are we Going Back to our Roots? The Restoration of Early Church Ecclesiology in the Modern Church Today

Jerry Pillay

University of Pretoria

jerry.pillay@up.ac.za

Machiel Greyling

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5950-3169>

Abstract

A movement, known as the Restoration Movement, developed on the early American frontier (19th century) to unite the various denominations that followed migrants from Europe and to bring them back to the ideals of the early church. The means to fulfil this quest was done through the belief that the early church could be “restored” in the 19th century. It was asserted that if all denominations simply read the Bible only and rejected all human creeds and traditions that came along with the centuries, there would be one church, total unity and an exact replica of the 1st century church. The methodology was correct, but unfortunately the intellectual paradigms of the day led the restoration leaders to formulate a wanting ecclesiology which ended in more schism than unity. This article sets out to establish that when one considers the modern church trends today and the true nature of the early church, there is clear evidence that contemporary ecclesiologies are being shaped more accurately into the shape of the early church. This is happening by default and spontaneously. Postmodernism is the catalyst that is slowly but surely influencing the natural restoration of the early church in contemporary society.

Keywords: Early church; ecclesiology; postmodernism; Restoration Movement; Fresh Expressions of Church; Emerging Churches; House Church Movement

Introduction

This article aims to show that the developing church of the 21st century is restoring the 1st century church by default. Whereas the American Restoration Movement (RM) deliberately pursued early church restoration in the 19th century, the modern church ecclesiologies are being shaped by the cultural reality of postmodernism. To demonstrate this reality, this article first sets out the social and ecclesial milieu of the 19th century in which the notion of



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“restorationism” took shape. It will be followed by a brief summary of what early church ecclesiology looked like. Such a brief summary of early church ecclesiology can then be used to show the shortcomings of the RM and the similarities with modern church trends. The remainder of the article will then focus on the modern church trends. Three modern church movements (Emerging Church, Fresh Expressions of Church, House Church Movement) will be described and the trends they have in common will be identified and correlated with the early church.

The American Restoration Movement

The notion of “restoring the early church” was formulated by a number of 19th century evangelists in America. With the discovery of the new world, European immigrants flocked to the Americas since it was a land with new possibilities. Together with the influx of diverse peoples came a plurality of religious movements. The Reformation corrected a once eschewed Roman Catholic establishment, but also paved the way for the birthing of numerous denominations in Europe. When the American continent was colonised the various denominations with their creeds were simply transferred from the old world to the new (Hines 2014, 106). Statistics of 1830 reveal that the major denominations in antebellum America were Roman Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Congregational, Lutheran and Episcopalian (Hines 2014, 106). Many immigrants found such diversity strange, since each country in Europe had a dominant church: Lutheranism in Germany, Anglicanism in England, Reformed in Switzerland, and so forth (North 1994, 4). The great question that arose in this scenario was whether the European sects would simply be transplanted and remain in the new world with its European identity, or if Christians would make use of the opportunity to make a fresh start and strive to bring a church into existence that could appeal to all people on the American frontier.

It was the latter that took shape. Men like Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone were inspired to unite the denominations and establish a tradition-free church relevant to the American context. They suggested that there would only be one way to do it. They were to “restore the ancient order of things” (Derry 2014, 9). The restoration of the early church in the 19th century would be the only means to unite all denominations. The leaders of the movement came to realise that the church of their time had allowed anthropogenic elements to divide the body of Christ. The only way to restore the early church and eliminate all creeds and traditions brought about by men in history was to rely solely on the authority of the Bible (Derry 2014, 8). Through the intellectual paradigms of the day, restoration leaders established hermeneutical cues to extract from Scripture the exact contours of the early church. Before long these leaders believed they had identified the early church structures, doctrines, and practices perfectly and that all who submitted to these would be part of the true church, the one church of Scripture, an exact replica of the early church in 19th century America (Hughes 2008, 24). The movement took shape and grew rapidly. But in hindsight, much of its ecclesiology still perpetuated and created anthropogenic elements. The Restoration Movement did indeed restore much of the early church in regard to its organisational structures, but not in regard to its spontaneous and organic church life.

Early Church Ecclesiology

A very basic analysis of the early church shows that it was community oriented. The early church was not an institution but a family: kisses were shared, possessions were shared, homes were shared, meals were shared. The early church practised a relational ecclesiology, it was a one-another religion (George 1991, 129–131). It operated naturally and organically. The ecclesia was also not confined to a date, time and place. Worship was a way of life for this faith community, not an expression in a cultic meeting once a week. And when meetings occurred, they were marked more by spontaneity and flexibility than liturgical form and structure. Early churches had leadership based on purpose and role and not on hierarchy. Elders were to shepherd the flock; deacons were to serve the physical needs of the people; and evangelists preached the Word. Churches were autonomous and thereby free from para-institutional structures and organisations. The early church was a grassroots movement that lived itself out in everyday society (Banks 1994, 92). It was a mission-filled community. The logical results of such a dynamic and organic movement led to exponential growth (Harrison 1985, 178).

Modern Church Movements

The few identifying marks of early church ecclesiology mentioned above were neglected by the Restoration Movement, and its significance was reduced. However, curiously enough, the modern church trend seems to be moving into exactly this type of ecclesiology without proactively seeking to “restore the early church.” It seems to be a natural outflow of ecclesial development brought on by postmodernism.

For example, three of the key modern church movements illustrate this. Firstly, there is the Emerging Church Movement. It is a phenomenon that began in the late 1990s “when a group of Christian leaders began conversation about how postmodernism was affecting the church” (Jones 2008, 41). Carson (2005, 14) claims the movement is characterised by protest. Most emergent leaders with their stories of change began in one thing and emerged into another. The emergence originated in evangelicalism and developed in many ways as a protest against evangelicalism. The primary reason for this shift came about as some leaders noticed how typical evangelicalism became irrelevant to postmodern culture (Labanow 2009). To define the movement is challenging, since the concrete nature of definitions defies the spirit that postmodernism typically rejects. Also, the movement is amorphous and its boundaries are ill-defined (Carson 2005, 12). It is best to suggest some emergent positions to serve as boundary points in painting a picture of the essence of the movement. Firstly, the movement is stimulated by a shift from modernism to postmodernism. The shift is one of moving from absolutism to relativism; from focus on theoretical truth to focus on relationship; from establishing consumer driven mega-churches to establishing smaller meaningful communities; from discovering truth through monologue to discovering truth through communal dialogue (Carson 2005, 37). Secondly, the movement is progressive. It is a movement that aims at moving out of the church growth and seeker-sensitive initiatives produced by evangelicalism (Carson 2005, 37). Part of the emerging ideals is the rejection of

the institutionalism of the inherited churches. Both the seeker-sensitive church flavours of consumerism and institutionalism have become obsolete in the church's quest for mission. The Emerging Church has become aware of this and is exploring mission anew to make progress with the spread of the Gospel.

Thirdly, the Emerging Church Movement promotes an anti-hierarchical leadership structure. It states that typical hierarchies contradict the free and spontaneous mind-set of the postmodern person and ecclesologically creates a less effective faith environment. The postmodern person favours participation over individualism (Carson 2005, 29), leans toward team ministry and decentralised leadership (Labanow 2009, 4) and prefers low-profile situational leadership over high-profile celebrity-type leadership (Gibbs 2009, 61). Fourthly, the Emerging Church has a generous orthodoxy. Jones (2008, 8) notes: "Emergents find little importance in the discreet differences between the various flavours of Christianity. Instead, they practice a generous orthodoxy that appreciates the contributions of all Christian movements." This labels the movement as being theologically liberal (Gibbs 2009, 61) and gives it the character of being inclusive over being exclusive (Carson 2005, 20). Fifthly, the Emerging Church practises a relational ecclesiology. Tony Jones evaluated eight Emerging Churches and concluded the following: Communion was practised more frequently than in most evangelical churches, worship was more informal, preaching was done through communal hermeneutics, and fellowship was done extensively online (Jones 2011, 1). Emergents agree that "church" refers to a people rather than a place, and a congregation represents not just a weekly gathering that people are a part of, but a community in which each person actively belongs, receives support, and is encouraged to make his or her own distinctive contribution (Gibbs 2009, 54–55). These are factors the Restoration Movement did not consider as important, but which formed the heart of the early church.

A second modern church movement to consider is the Fresh Expressions Movement. It is a movement that originated in the Church of England, and which sought to address the challenges facing it in a changing context, particularly in the United Kingdom society (James 2012). The movement was stimulated by the reality of its struggle to communicate with its society. In 2003 the Anglican Church mandated a working group in the denomination to produce a visionary report on church planting. This report was released in 2004 as the Mission-Shaped Church Report (Gibbs 2009, 64–65). It coined the phrase "Fresh Expressions" and spearheaded the birth of this contemporary pioneer movement. A widely-accepted definition is: "A Fresh Expression of Church is a form of church for our changing culture established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church" (freshexpressions.org.uk). It entails the idea of thinking afresh what it means to be church in the world of today, to be relevant in the world today (Pillay 2016, International Fresh Expressions Conference [IFEC]). In a nutshell, Fresh Expressions of Church serve those outside the church; listen to people and enter their context; make discipleship a priority—journeying with people to Jesus; and lastly it forms church.¹ The best way to describe the essence of the movement is to extrapolate on the four elements mentioned in the

¹ freshexpressions.org.uk/about/what-is (accessed 10 November 2016).

latter sentence, together with an additional element added by Nelus Niemandt.² Firstly, Fresh Expressions of Church are *missional*. The fundamental aim of the movement is to reach those who are outside the reach of the existing church (Cray 2016, IFEC). It is a movement concerned more with the “go” word than the “come” word (Potter 2016, IFEC). It holds the view that if the people don’t come to the church then the church will go to the people. Secondly, Fresh Expressions of Church are contextual. The idea here is that the church is shaped both by the Gospel and the culture it is trying to reach. The church should not be shaped by the character of its members but by those of the secular society it is trying to reach (Cray 2016, IFEC). The more explanatory word to use here is *incarnational*, Fresh Expressions of Church strive to be incarnational in their missional efforts at reaching the lost. Thirdly, Fresh Expressions of Church are *formational*. One of the faults of the traditional church is its emphasis on the effectiveness of regular church service attendance. People don’t just become disciples by regularly showing up at church. It is for this reason that Fresh Expressions of Church are intentional from the beginning to place discipleship as a priority (Cray 2016, IFEC). It is not, therefore, just another social meeting or a worship assembly, rather it is a community formed into a true disciple formation. Fourthly, a Fresh Expressions of Church is an attempt to be *fully church*; it is not a stepping stone (Potter 2016, IFEC). It is a church plant, a new congregation. The mission is not the cloning of the mother church, but the establishing of a new and unique church in its context (Gibbs 2009, 66). It needs to be noted here that Fresh Expressions of Church are additions to the inherited church and not the dismantling of the inherited church (Potter 2015, 140). And lastly, Fresh Expressions of Church are *relational*. The “Fresh Expressions” values of listening to people and connecting through networks suggest a relational movement. Nelus Niemandt (2016, IFEC) states that the ultimate reality is not substance but relationship. Faith is relational since we experience God in the other. Truth is relational—truth is a person, not a principle.

And thirdly, there is the House Church Movement. The practice of house churches has been around from the 1st century (Simson 1999, xxx–xxxii). Christians have been worshipping in homes in one way or another since the time of Christ (Hadaway, DuBose and Wright 1987, 11). Although house churches have operated worldwide significantly over the past 50 years, the movement has made tremendous strides in the West (Payne 2008, 1). A precursor to the Emerging Church Movement consisted of house churches, in which small groups met to experiment alternative ways of being church (Gibbs 2009, 58). Despite the inherent need for community, many have started to see discrepancies with ecclesiological institutionalism. Zdero (2004, 14) calls the House Church Movement a fledgling house church trend due to its lack of formal organisation. In fact, the very essence of the emergence of the House Church Movement ideal centres around “de-institutionalisation.” The house church ideal stimulates community centeredness, but also inspires effective mission. The house church method of reaching the lost can fit any culture, since it is designed to meet universal human and spiritual needs (Hadaway et al. 1987, 19). Research on missionary work around the globe confirms that the most rapidly growing church planting and evangelistic movement today utilises

² Niemandt, N. 2016. *Relationships in the Future Church*. Delivered at International Fresh Expressions of Church Conference, Cape Town: 16–18 February 2016.

house church concepts (Zdero 2004, 1). House churches are “total churches” operating independently from “mother churches” and are laity led (Payne 2008, 13). But how does this practically function? House churches are smaller groups meeting all over the city (15–20 people) (Simson 1999, xviii) with strong evangelistic undertones. When meetings occur they are participatory, a family-type gathering where everybody can contribute. In this setting there is no need for buildings, professional clergy, highly polished services, or expensive programmes. These house churches meet together in larger gatherings on regular intervals. There are mobile workers who circulate regularly and the leaders of the house churches meet together frequently to pray, exchange resources and to coordinate. House churches are thus fully functioning churches in themselves with the freedom to partake of the Lord’s Supper, baptise, marry, bury, exercise discipline, and chart their own course. They are volunteer-led and operate cooperatively with peer networks for health and growth. Consequently, house churches can be explained by the principle that “*church is small groups*” (Zdero 2004, 3–4). It is a trend of moving away from the institutional church into the homes where people live life: *A movement from church houses to house churches*. This was the trend in the early church, but not the quest of the Restoration Movement.

The Modern Church Trends Encapsulated

The three movements that have been evaluated give us a good understanding of what the common trends are in the contemporary progressive church. They are not identical in all aspects. One can here highlight the fact that both the House Church Movement and the Emerging Church Movement were birthed spontaneously over time, but Fresh Expressions of Church were initiated through the Church of England and its “Mission-Shaped Church” report (Gibbs 2009, 64–65). Whereas the first two movements “emerged” spontaneously, Fresh Expressions of Church were more of a planned movement. Fresh Expressions of Church also differ from the other two movements regarding loyalties to the institutional church. Fresh Expressions of Church are expressions of church in addition to the inherited church. House churches operate independently of the inherited church, and the Emerging Church Movement strives towards the transformation of the inherited church itself. Fresh Expressions of Church continue to seek the preservation of the institutional church alongside the creation of new forms of church. Fresh expressions of Church are also a more structured and a more organised movement than the other two. It is more clearly defined and controlled, or documented. All three movements have emerged in different contexts: Fresh Expressions of Church in Britain; the Emerging Church in the USA; and the House Church Movement worldwide, but particularly in correlation with this article, in the West. Despite these differences, which are actually quite insignificant, there are six broad similarities between the three movements that can be used as coordinates to draft a map of the contemporary church trend.

Mission

All three movements tie back to mission and are driven by mission. The Emerging Church Movement came into existence out of grappling with ideas on how the church can reach postmodern people. The Fresh Expressions of Church Movement was birthed out of a report

which sought to evaluate how the Church of England can reach the un-churched people of British society. A strong part of the House Church Movement is being able to reach segments of society that larger institutional churches cannot reach. Small groups are the most effective means to evangelise a large city in a complex, diverse set of cultures. These movements are thus thoroughly missional.

Cultural Sensitivity

The key factor that separates the Emerging Church Movement from the churches it emerged from, is the fact that it is culturally sensitive. People who lead in the Emerging Church Movement are people who have become acutely aware of the changes in culture and have come to realise that some of the ways of the inherited church are insufficient in staying relevant in the new culture (Carson 2005, 12). All three movements in some way or another are aware of one of the elements of postmodernism. The Emerging Church embraces the paradoxes and relativism of postmodernism; thereby it is particularly regarded as centres for the key paradigm shifts that post-moderns operate under. Fresh Expressions of Church literature does not often use the term “postmodern” but mentions key elements of postmodernism such as networking and a need for relationality. These are mentioned primarily in practical associations. Fresh Expressions are churches in contemporary forms, and therefore practically engage postmodern ideas. The House Church Movement has embraced, among other things, the postmodern notions of distrusting authoritarianism and an aversion to rigidity (Simson 1999, xviii–xix). All three movements, therefore, proactively formulate ways to meet their culture in context.

Ecclesial Fluidity

The Emerging Church was birthed out of evangelicalism and can therefore be characterised as post-evangelical. In this sense, it is a protest against consumerism that infiltrated evangelicalism together with its intuitionism that was strongly organised. Evangelicalism has often been fundamentalist³ and absolutist. Both these ideas oppose the postmodern mind. The postmodern culture promotes relativism. As noted previously, relativism is the chemotherapy for the cancer of absolutism. In this sense the Emerging Church has embraced paradoxes, and it promotes the asking of questions. It suggests a healthy suspicion of propositional truth. With regard to doctrine, there is thus fluidity, and regarding practice, these churches have great fluidity and flexibility in ways of worship. Fresh Expressions of Church are based on the notions of “enculturation,” “incarnational mission,” “contextualisation” and “variety” (Potter 2015, 139–140). These terms all reflect the “Fresh Expressions” ideal of listening to people in their context and in so doing, entering their context where church is established. The obvious outflow of such a missional method is that church expressions will be of a wide variety. In order to make this work, there needs to be flexibility and fluidity, at least in form. House churches are informal gatherings characterised by spontaneous fellowship. A key word often mentioned in house church literature is

3 A theological approach which claims that the Bible is inerrant and infallible, that it has to be literally interpreted, and that everything in it is authoritative and therefore has to be obeyed (Kritzinger 2004, 77).

“organic” (Cloud 2012, 27). This term is placed in opposition to “organisation” to reveal the spontaneous and flexible nature that church fellowship, mission and worship should entail.

Priesthood of all Believers

The Emerging Church Movement and the House Church Movement both take strong positions against some of the leadership structures of the inherited church. The Emerging Church takes in such a position simply because leadership hierarchies oppose the free and spontaneous mind-set of the postmodern person. The House Church Movement takes its position primarily from the fact that too many clergy have abused their positions and in so doing brought damage to the Kingdom of God. But another factor that influences both movements is that of participation. 21st century individuals desire dialogue over monologue. People are becoming more averse to spectator-based worship (Simson 1999, Xix). The Emerging Church is creating ways of increasing participation, whereas the participation is built into the church model from beginning to end since groups are small. Fresh Expressions of Church do not make such a big fuss of clergy-dominated leadership (Potter 2016, IFEC). When new Fresh Expressions of Church are established they are already devoid of the clergy-laity idea, since these new churches are flexible and not structurally rigid like the inherited churches. In all three movements, we see a move away from clergy-dominated churches to mutually beneficial relationships.

Relational Ecclesiology

In terms of the Emerging Church Movement we see that relationality is placed at a premium. Relationship takes precedence over ritual. All of Fresh Expressions is about “listening to people” and “entering their context” (Cray 2016, Fresh Expressions Conference). Even in its mission it is relational. The church is a community and not a meeting once a week. This idea is another strong emphasis that the House Church Movement makes. It stands opposed to the traditional idea that Christianity is a time, date, place and building. It promotes the notion that the church is a family—relational! Christianity is a way of life and not a series of meetings. Fellowship is spontaneous because the church operates organically and not organisationally. It carries a strong emphasis on community. The average human being needs community. All three of these movements therefore realise, due to their cultural sensitivity, that relationality needs to be placed high on the list of priorities.

Ecumenicity

All three of these movements originated on the basis of mission. All three of them are fuelled by mission. There is also, however, a natural consequence that has emerged in all three instances. All of them have been catalysts for greater ecumenicity. The intellectual stance of the Emerging Church Movement—that is a product from postmodernism—is the avoidance of the “us-and-them” sectarianism that characterised so much of evangelicalism (Carson 2005, 37). The Emerging Church Movement emphasises inclusivism over exclusivism; it is a church with no walls. In this sense, it has stimulated ecumenism. Fresh Expressions of Church started as an Anglican initiative and soon had the Methodist Church on board. Today various denominations worldwide are partnering with Fresh Expressions initiatives. Mission

is uniting these churches. The very nature of house churches is to deinstitutionalise. House churches throw off all institutional elements, especially definitions and dependencies on church traditions (Simson 1999, 14). The result of this is that they are genuinely non-denominational and therefore a church without boundaries. The House Church Movement is not interested in “us and them” paradigms and its ecclesiology allows the embracing of all people in Christ. All three movements are, therefore, contributing to the unification of Christianity in large parts of the world.

Summary

Central to this article stands the term “restoration.” Every generation should take on the quest of calibrating the dominant ecclesiologies with the life and practices of the early church as seen on the pages of the New Testament. Such a quest would restore the early church anew in every generation. The evangelists of antebellum America did well in recognising the need for a unified church in America, whilst taking into account the social milieu of the day. Restoring the early church was perhaps the most unbiased methodology of uniting the various denominations. The idea of restoring the early church was faultless, but the method used to establish what the early church looked like, was faulty. The early church was interpreted and emphasised structurally and organisationally. The Restoration leaders used the fundamentalist rationale of the day to delineate a 1st century ecclesiology and in the process neglected to identify and implement the spontaneous and relational nature of the early church.

But as we consider a correlation between the modern church trends and the major attributes of the early church, it becomes very evident that the influences of postmodernism are indirectly placing the contemporary church in a space of true restorationism. There is thus a current Restoration Movement taking place. The modern church is by default becoming much more a replica of the early church than any ecclesial generation in history. It is no secret that the notions of society always have a bearing on the church. As the church seeks to engage society it makes use of the predominant societal cues in order to remain relevant to the changing society. In this regard, it is postmodernism primarily that has served as a shaping agent in the current shape of the modern church. But how could this be? We offer the following suggestions.

Firstly, in the area of mission, the modern church has a genuine passion to reach the lost, very similar to the early church. It is true that most of the churches throughout history were missional as well. But what separates modern church missiology from past missiology is its genuine plea for adherence to Christ and not the church. Postmodernism opposes exclusivism and denominationalism, it rejects “party-spirit” (Carson 2005, 37). This attitude provides a fresh missional passion that sparks the kind of creativity we see in reaching the lost of the world. Past ecclesial denominations were often more concerned with converting people to their particular movement. The Restoration Movement took such a stance. The postmodern influence in mission does not allow space for such a sectarian and exclusivist quest.

Secondly, regarding cultural sensitivity there are also valid observations to be made. The Apostle Paul sets the example (1 Cor 9:19–23) in adapting to the dominant culture in order to win those in that culture. His Jewishness enabled him to adequately engage the Jews of his day. His task was, however, in some ways easier than today. The cultural atmosphere of his day was fairly static for a time. But in our postmodern era cultural change is happening faster than ever. The increase of knowledge and the global community stimulated through social media are making cultures change rapidly. The modern church is embracing this rapid change since it has realised that if one step is lagged behind it might not be able to catch up as easily. Postmodernism has, therefore, forced the church to spend necessary energy on interpreting the culture within which it operates. The RM also did that well, but created a static ecclesiology which could not be changed in future generations.

Thirdly, it can be noted in the understanding of ecclesial fluidity and the priesthood of all believers. It is in the postmodern era that human rights and democratic ideals have perhaps been emphasised more than ever. This phenomenon in itself promotes the value of individuals and leads to the deconstruction of typical power structures. Everyone has a say, everyone has something to contribute. It is not necessary to follow the status quo. Being postmodern is also being real, authentic. Rules and structures are questioned by postmodernists, because they have become too acutely aware that structure, rules and hierarchy are often meaningless and are mere means of confining and practising power over others. In such a cultural milieu one can easily understand why there is a growing trend towards the fluid nature and leadership ideals of the modern church.

Fourthly, regarding the relationality of the modern church, much can be said. Due to the rapid advance of technology, specifically regarding social media and the various global communicative platforms, it becomes obvious that people are growing lonely. Humans are relational creatures. Postmodern communities are often more digital than physical; this leaves people with a hunger for face-to-face interaction. People need community, real community. Postmodern technology creates a global community, but in essence is taking away physical interaction. Many are starting to feel the hunger for real relationships in this cultural scenario. Postmodernism creates global networks but in the same breath is indirectly creating a need for people to meet face-to-face. No wonder it has become a hallmark of the modern church.

Regarding ecumenicity, all of the above can be incorporated. Among other factors note can be made of the relativism that postmodernism promotes. Relativism shatters the absolutism that denominations in the past used to create borders and walls that fed its exclusivism. The postmodern dose of relativism has spearheaded the deconstruction of the barriers in denominational circles that absolutism has created. Postmodernism questions everything and takes nothing at face value. The easily available internet has ensured the questioning of what is believed to be fact. Postmodernism has thus stamped many of the previously believed-to-be facts of certain religious bodies as speculative and relative. The consequence of this being that barriers have been taken down and greater ecumenicity has been made possible.

Indeed, the developing church of the 21st century is truly becoming something very similar to the 1st century church. An ecclesiology is developing that is suspicious of power structures, debilitating anthropogenic influences and typical fundamentalist sectarianism. The paraclete is working in our time to restore the true nature of the early church.

Conclusion

In this article, we have highlighted the Restoration Movement as a movement in church history that had a noble quest. As its name suggests, it had the goal of restoring the early church and its practices in 19th century America. In hindsight one witnesses that the church it “restored” was not an accurate representation of the early church. The intellectual paradigms and societal cues of the day established a more structural and organisational understanding of the early church and neglected the organic and spontaneous elements. Postmodernism influences the intellectual paradigms and societal cues of 21st century society. This has a bearing on the modern church and its interpretation of the early church. This article shows that postmodernism is the great influence factor in the restoration of the early church in contemporary society. The influence of postmodernism favours the spontaneous, fluid and organic nature that the early church presents and allows. This is clearly seen in the most contemporary church movements: Emerging Church, Fresh Expressions and House Churches.

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