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A Critical Analysis of the Restoration Movement and its Impact on the Modern Church

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Dedication

I dedicate this work firstly to the contemporary and future Church, especially in the church of Christ segment of His Kingdom. Secondly do I dedicate this research to my family; my wife Alfrieda, and my two sons Micah and Neo. May this thesis and its consequences be a blessing to His Church and our family for years to come.

Summary

In 19th Century America a movement arose that grew exponentially in line with the rapid growth of a new nation. Amidst the diversity of Christian groups present at the time a group of Christian leaders sought the need to create a unified church based only on the ideal of the 1st Century Church. These leaders believed that if the churches simply restored the Early Church in their time there would be unity between all Christians and denominationalism would cease. This movement became known as the Restoration Movement. The Idea was noble. In fact every church generation should always calibrate its contemporary ecclesiology with that of the 1st Century Church. But it is easier said than done. In hindsight, the Restoration Movement became schismatic, sectarian and fractured. Nevertheless, there are numerous lessons to be drawn from the movement that can benefit the quest of the Modern Church. Not only does the developmental and progression issues of the movement add insight to modern ecclesiology and missiology, but the principles projected by the Restoration Movement are also invaluable. To make the study relevant to the contemporary ecclesial situation it is also necessary to explore the Modern Church. Three particular movements grab the attention of this research. Firstly, there is the Emerging Church movement taking root from the West. Secondly, there is Fresh Expressions flowering from Anglicanism in Europe. And thirdly there is the House Church Movement taking shape globally. The correlation between these three movements reveal contemporary trends shaped primarily by postmodernism. These trends, curiously enough, seem to progress by default into a direction of “restorationism”. What we find therefore is a movement in early America seeking to consciously restore early Christianity, and a global ecclesial trend in the early 21st Century unconsciously restoring early Christianity. It is within this reality that we ask the “so what” question and extract lessons from the American Restoration Movement that can add value to the current quest of the Modern Church. In this way the restoration of the Early Church in the 21st Century might just be more successful as it heeds mistakes previously made on a similar quest.

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Chapter 1: Research Introduction

It is only appropriate to start this project with the research problem I wish to address. In a nutshell, it will be a descriptive query on how the Restoration Movement can add value to the Modern Church on its quest to transform irrelevant traditional churches. To strengthen the relevance of this study, I will briefly describe the importance of the study followed by a summary of the literature that will form the basis of my investigation. Most importantly, I will move on to point out step by step how I propose to achieve my research objective. In order to bring focus to the thesis statement I will show how I wish to tie the Early Church, the Restoration Movement and the Modern Church together into a coherent whole that will exemplify my research objective. A section on delimiting the research scope will then be provided to ensure the study remains within the relevant contours of the enquiry. This first chapter serves therefore as an introduction to my study. It explains the reasons for this endeavour and describes the process through which I desire to achieve my objective.

1. Research Problem

The contemporary church is facing a predicament that is becoming increasingly difficult for the traditional churches to ignore. The problem can be encapsulated in one term: relevance. Traditional churches have become progressively more irrelevant with the rise of the new millennium. The evidence of this, among other factors, is seen primarily by the decrease in church membership numbers¹. The problem has been lurking for decades, but over the last thirty years or more has become a topic of discussion and action that cannot be disregarded. Rick Warren, Pastor of the Mega Church Saddleback Church in Orange County California, stated that a church becomes irrelevant “*when the speed of change in society/culture is faster than the speed of change in the church*”. He also noted that everything is changing faster and therefore the tendency of the church to become irrelevant is faster (TEDx Talk, 2012). Before the advent of internet, information was doubling every 200 years. Today the amount of information doubles every 18 months. The consequences of such an information overload in society are seen in the fact that it provides more choices and creates a cynical society in general

¹ Much research evidences this. One example is research done by the Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development which found that membership in the church had dropped by 10% in the 1980's, 12% in the 1990's with some denominations reporting a 40% drop in membership during the same period. And the decline continues up to date. (© 2007 (research from 1998 to 2006) R. J. Krejcir Ph.D. *Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development* www.churchleadership.org)

(Ford, 2008:25). Postmodern society questions everything. As Kevin Ford puts it: “*In the rush of overwhelming information and new friends, old loyalties break down*”. This new generation resists conformity (Ford, 2008:26). The new generation is not loyal to old church traditions anymore. And in the process the church is losing touch with ‘normal people’ with the result being that unchurched people are rarely getting connected to traditional churches (McLaren, 2011:4). The writing is therefore on the wall that if churches don’t change, if they don’t transform, they will die (Ford, 2008:19). Some churches, and some individuals, have taken these changes in society to heart and made pro-active attempts at countering the rising problem. Various movements, aimed at recreating traditional churches or creating new churches, both with the aim of being relevant again in the changing tide of post-millennial culture, have developed and made a prominent appearance over the last thirty years. This period of church history will be termed the ‘Modern Church’ in this research effort. The Modern Church therefore refers to the changing church over the last thirty years with specific reference to the movements that emerged during this time frame. The three key movements that have contributed particularly to the Modern Church the most are: The Emerging Church, Fresh Expressions and the House Church Movement.

The Emerging Church is a movement sweeping across America, the UK and other parts of the world. To stipulate and define an accurate and all-encompassing description of the movement is not quite possible since it is currently amorphous (Carson, 2005:12). But in its widest form, Eddie Gibbs describes the Emerging Church as follows: *Communities that practice the way of Jesus within postmodern cultures* (Gibbs & Bolger, 2005:44). This definition encapsulates two fairly simplistic views of describing the essence of the Emerging Church. Firstly, consider the notion of “postmodern cultures”. Core to the movement’s motivation lies the idea that changes in culture signal that a new church is emerging. Christian leaders must therefore adapt to this emerging church or ‘die’. Those who do not take this truth seriously are “blind to the cultural accretions that hide the Gospel behind forms of thought and modes of expression that no longer communicate with the new generation”, the emerging generation; the post millennial generation (Carson, 2005:12). Bolger & Gibbs (2005:18) gives a good description of the problem between culture and church. They claim that an understanding of outside culture is not that critical to the church if the culture is static. But in a time when culture is undergoing rapid change, the church cannot afford to be ignorant of the changes. As stated previously, the rapid changes in culture have caused the church to drastically review its ways. When the church remains distant from these factors she becomes irrelevant and finds herself increasingly

marginalised (Bolger & Gibbs, 2005:18). Secondly, consider the notion of “communities that practice the way of Jesus”. D.A. Carson (2005:15) describes the Emerging Church as a “moving from absolute to authentic”. In his writing he quotes the conviction of Spencer Burke, previous mega church pastor, after he moved from a mega church mentality to a more community based type of ministry: “I’ve come to realize that my discontent was never with Mariners (the mega church he served in) as a church, but contemporary Christianity as an Institution”. Traditional churches operate on absolutes, communities operate authentically. Postmodern culture seeks authenticity, and therefore community. Emerging Churches have three core practices: Identifying with the life of Jesus, transforming secular space and commitment to community as a way of life (Bolger & Gibbs, 2005:235). In summary, Emerging Churches therefore oppose the dualisms of modernity, seek to take Jesus into the far reaches of culture, and promote “church” to be a way of life, movement, community and rhythm instead of a place, a meeting or a time (Bolger & Gibbs, 2005:236).

The Fresh Expressions movement is the most recent contemporary church movement and has been more clearly defined. A widely accepted definition of a fresh expression of church came from the joint work of the Church of England and the British Methodist Church in 2006: *A fresh expression is a form of church for our changing culture established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church.* A fresh expression, simply put, is a new form of church for the new world in which we live (Collins, 2015: 55). Similar to the Emerging Church, Fresh Expressions is also motivated by the factor of culture change. But Fresh Expressions have the primary aim of focusing on “form”. It suggests that the “form of church” needs to change in order to engage the current culture. The percentage of Americans who call themselves Christians have decreased between 2007 and 2014². The ‘irrelevant’ church is at fault here; the form of church is detached from the expressional needs of people in the postmodern culture. Missiologist, Alan Hirsch, suggested that only 40-50% of the American population is reachable by church as we know it, and this number is decreasing. This means that 50-60% of people around us are not going to come to our churches as we know them, no matter how well we do things (Collins, 2015: 28). The goal of Fresh Expressions is to counter this probable statistic. Its aim is to find ways of engaging people who seem unlikely to connect with church in its current form. Fresh Expressions is assisting established

² The 2015 Pew Research stated that the percentage of Americans who describe themselves as Christians fell about 8 points – from 78.4 to 70.6 percent – between 2007 and 2014 (Collins, 2015: 28).

congregations to find new ways to invest themselves in God's mission to a changing world (Collins, 2015: 41). The key word is "mission". Fresh Expressions is about 'kingdom' more than 'church'. Goodhew, Roberts & Volland (2012: 79) states in description of the movement: *"There has always been an urgency in the Gospel message that will not permit us to wait for people to come to us – we have to go to them. We have to pioneer new ways of connecting with people if they are to connect with Jesus"*. To place the work of the movement in practical terms; a fresh expression of church is a "new gathering or network that engages mainly with people who have never been to church". There is no rigid model of doing this, but the objective is to create a form of church suited for the context of a particular culture, instead of cloning something that works elsewhere. In summary, Fresh Expressions of church serve those outside the church; listen to people and enter their context; make discipleship a priority; journey with people to Jesus; and form church (Cray, 2016: Fresh Expressions Conference).

The house church movement requires less defining and is perhaps the oldest and most undocumented movement of the four movements discussed in this research. Christians have been practicing a form of house church from New Testament times (Acts 5:42; Rom. 16:5; Col. 4:15 etc.). But of recent, it has been practiced and supported more widely. It is large and growing. According to Barna research, there are about 11 million people involved with house churches in the USA, with approximately 70 million having experimented with it (Cloud, 2012: 27). There is thus no doubt that the movement is real and is making an impact in postmodern culture. The house church movement promotes the notion that Christianity is a way of life, and not a series of religious meetings. It stands in opposition to the Cathagogue System³. The emphasis on house churches has been described as the "third reformation". The first reformation occurred when Luther reformed theology through his rediscovery of the Gospel of salvation by faith and grace alone. The second reformation occurred when the pietistic movements of the 17th Century recovered a new intimacy with God leading to a reformation of spirituality. And finally, in Wolfgang Simson's own words: "Now God is touching the wine skins, initiating a third reformation, a reformation of structure" (Simson, 2009:106). The house church movement is therefore a movement away from the institutional church into the homes where people live life. It is a movement from church houses to house churches. That is why

³ The "Cathagogue System" is described by Wolfgang Simson as the religious system adopted by the historic Orthodox and Catholic Church which entailed the combination of two elements: A Christian version of the Old Testament Temple (the cathedral) and a worship pattern styled after the Jewish synagogue. "Cathagogue" therefore refers to linking the house-of-God mentality with the synagogue (Simson, 2009: xiv)

the movement has also been associated with the descriptive terms “simple church”, “open church”, “integrated church”, “micro church” and “organic church” (Cloud, 2012: 27). It is a movement away from organised religion to organic Christianity (Simson, 2001: xx). In summary, the goal of the house church movement is to create a less religious, less structured and informal church experience.

A brief overview of these three movements illustrates that at the heart of the Modern Church lies the promotion of the deinstitutionalisation of the church, a cry for unity through ecclesial simplicity, the normal Christian’s need to experience true community and the worshipper’s desire to express him/herself authentically in a meaningful atmosphere and relevant form.

Upon the inspection of these movements and the problems faced by the contemporary church, it has become evident that there are many characteristics of the trend that are not foreign or new to church history. It is not the first time that traditional forms of church have been opposed or challenged, or that the increased availability of new information has made an impact on society which in turn brought challenges to the church (One can here refer to the repercussions of the advent of the printing press), or that the church was grappling with the effectiveness of its mission, or that some have sought simple Christianity outside the confines of the institutional church, or that disillusionment regarding sectarianism and denominationalism has driven some to seek ecumenical alternatives. The Restoration Movement⁴ is a movement in church history that is not often discussed in South African church history or even church history in general. Yet, it can be argued that it was inspired by similar motives and surrounded by similar societal factors as the Modern Church. Even though it has made little impact on the church, or at least on the church outside of America it can serve as a valuable source of reflection in church history for the movement of the Modern Church in post millennial society. The similarities between the movements are noteworthy: Among other factors both seek ecumenical ideals; both directly and indirectly work towards the deconstruction of the institutional church; both came to life through societal and ecclesial challenges and both consciously or subconsciously support simple Biblical Christianity. It is thus possible that the Modern Church can learn from the successes and failures of the Restoration Movement (RM).

⁴ An American Christian movement that started in the late 18th Century characterised with an attempt at restoring or recreating early Christianity in the modern world (Hughes, 2008: xiii).

The RM is therefore a relevant source of history for the contemporary church to reflect on and learn from.

The original ideal of the Restoration Movement was to restore the early church, the church of the apostolic era, the 1st Century Church. It is for this reason that much of the writings on the RM would refer to the notion of “primitive” Christianity. This descriptive term points to the fact that the RM leaders were seeking a way to recreate the early church in a modern culture – very much the same as the modern church movements are attempting today. This would mean the abandonment of creeds, traditions, man-made church names and doctrines. The movement was ecumenical at heart and its theology was designed reactively against the many denominations of the day. It was this “reactive theology”⁵ which made the movement divisive. In hindsight one sees that the movement was influenced more by societal factors and thinking patterns of the day than by sound biblical theology, yet sound biblical theology was the starting point of all the positions the RM held. Core to the movement was the belief that, simple first century Christianity without the man-made additions that were brought along with time, would be the true way of church. Returning to the Bible and only the Bible was at the heart of the movement. Key slogans were gradually formulated to circumscribe many of the characteristics of the emerging movement. One of the most frequently quoted was: “*Speak where the Bible speaks, be silent where the Bible is silent*”. This goal was noble. But soon all its noble efforts caused more harm than good. A spirit of exclusivism and sectarianism developed. Hermeneutical debates ensued. Arguments over petty doctrines started to characterise the movement. Dogmatic debates caused division. Over time the movement split into three branches. Without realising it at the time, the movement simply created a new institutional movement that basically became what the movement sought to oppose originally.

Both the Restoration Movement and the Modern Church in essence reacted against the institutional church. These movements indicate to us that anthropogenic Christianity is really a move away from authentic Christianity. It was so in the reformation era, it was so in the 18th and 19th Century during the RM and it still is today. The RM believed that an exact imitation of Early Christianity is the answer to creating church at its best. Such an ideal was noble and possibly correct. The Modern Church is working towards the global reshaping of how to do church in postmodern culture. How to achieve this goal is still being debated. It seems like the

⁵ A phrase I use in this paper to refer to the Restoration Movement’s emergence as a reaction against the plurality of denominations in early America.

Modern Church trend is seeking the “how to do church” answer from sociological factors rather than from sound biblical theology. The RM was also influenced by societal factors, without really acknowledging it. The goal has good intentions, but the approach to meeting the goal is partly erroneous. This is seen in the results of the RM. Even though RM leaders claimed to take their position from Biblical Theology, they didn’t realise how much of their thinking were influenced by the society of the day (Increased denominationalism, Scottish Realism, Baconianism, and political factors surrounding the American frontier in the 18th Century for example). Allowing culture, society and the issues of the day to shape ecclesiology is effective today, but creates problems for tomorrow. Ecclesiologies shaped in time by the influence of culture becomes concretised and with new generations outdated. The new generation then has to go through another uncomfortable transformational change to reshape that ecclesiology to suit the new culture. Anthropogenic efforts at creating church lead to the formation of concretised ecclesiologies that sooner or later hinder the health of the church. Therefore, a study of the early church is necessary. The way of the early church is, not in its elements situated in the culture of the day, but in its non-institutional elements not time-bound and therefore relevant and effective in every age of time to produce meaningful Christian life for all Christians.

Therefore, this study attempts to show that the Restoration Movements’ answer on “how to do church” was the right answer. Early Christianity has the answer for the church. Early Christianity is the answer for the church of every age. Early Christianity is communal not institutional. Community never gets outdated, but institutions do. This study also seeks to show the importance that societal factors play in shaping ecclesiologies and the importance of carefully evaluating these factors as churches reform. The questions that need to be considered therefore are: Can a re-awakening of the Restoration Plea bring a valuable contribution to the mission of the Modern Church in the 21st Century? If the Restoration Movement didn’t get diverted from its original intentions, how would it have impacted the Modern Church? Exactly what separated the Early Church from the RM and how does the Early Church differ from the Modern Church? Can the Early Church model work in modern culture? Why is it so difficult for the church to let go of its anthropogenic elements? What can the Modern Church learn from the Restoration Movement? What exactly are the similarities and differences between the RM and the Modern Church?

2. Importance of Study

The Restoration Movement is not a part of Church History that has been studied much in South Africa among theological academics. Perhaps it is so because it was primarily an American movement that has made little impact on the South African context. The Restoration Churches in South Africa are few in number, but are nevertheless present with a heritage that is quite honourable in light of the motives of the Modern Church movements. This study will thus bring into view a part of church history that has been fairly unknown and primarily unnoticed. Not only will an unnoticed era of church history be brought into the light with this study, but it will serve as a legitimate source of reflection for modern church movements to consider. As already noted, the Restoration Movement and the Modern Church share the common goal of the deinstitutionalisation of the church. The RM has tried to reach this goal before; failing in some ways and seeing victory in others. The factors that influenced its successes and failures will be valuable to the Modern Church which is taking on this quest anew. Commentators on the Emerging Church suggest that the movement is still finding its feet; its progress and end-goal is still open-ended. The Modern church is still being defined and shaped. It is currently still a conversation⁶. Hence the lessons from the RM need to be considered in this conversation. There are valuable insights from this history that can give shape to the life of the Modern Church and help lead the church into simple early Christianity that is relevant to any culture in time, community oriented, simple in worship, organic in nature and Christ-centred in confession.

3. Review of Literature

This research will centre around a confluence of three primary categorical fields of church history: The Restoration Movement, Modern Church Movements (emphasis on the Emerging Church, Fresh Expressions and House Churches), and the Early Church. The essential literature that will be engaged with in regard to each field are the following:

Restoration Movement. Ample literature is available in regard to the historiography of the RM. Under the recommendation of Dr. Doug Foster, Professor of Church History at Abilene Christian University (Abilene, Texas), the two best histories of the RM globally are *The Encyclopaedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (2012) Douglas Foster and *The Stone-*

⁶ Most sources on the Emerging Church describe the movement with the buzzword “conversation” which points to the fact that the movement has no formal statement of beliefs or organizational structure. It is still being shaped and therefore not a complete project yet.

Campbell Movement: A Global History (2013) Newell Williams. The first of these could be obtained and will be used as a primary guiding source on the history of the movement. The challenging aspect of this research is that there is no research that have been done in which the RM is compared to the modern church movements. Therefore, this research is a new endeavour as far as it has been searched. There are however sources that will assist in this endeavour, sources that evaluate the RM from a critical perspective and engage with its intentions, achievements and failures together with modern applications of such a reflection. The primary literature in this scope will be: *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of the Churches of Christ in America* (2008), Richard Hughes. *In Search of Christian Unity: A History of the Restoration Movement* (2014) Henry Webb. *Joined in Discipleship: The Maturing of An American Movement* (1997) Mark Toulouse. *History of the Restoration Movement* (2014), Michael Hines. *Union in Truth: An Interpretive History of the Restoration Movement* (1994), James B. North. There are other sources that will be explored to find input regarding RM churches and Modern Churches: *Hope for the Future: Contemporary Values of the Restoration Movement* (2014) Hope International University Professors. *Evangelicalism & The Stone-Campbell Movement* (2002) edited by William R. Baker. *The Churches of Christ in the 20th Century* (2000). David Edwin Harrell.

Modern Church Movements. The literature on modern church movements will simply be evaluated in order to find its most basic motivations, points of origin and central belief systems. The literature does not need to deal with a certain segment within the movements, but must simply give an overview and explanation of the core issues related to the movement. In regard to the Emerging Church the works of Tony Jones will be evaluated as central since he plays a significant leading role as an emergent leader. These are: *The Church is Flat: The Relational Ecclesiology of the Emerging Church* (2011) and *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emerging Frontier* (2008). Phyllis Tickle has also produced reflective and accurate work on the Emerging Church Movement which will be evaluated for the purpose of this research. The source used will be *The Great Emergence* (2008). Two other primary sources which will provide a good basis for an accurate explanation of the movement are *Evangelicalism and the Emerging Church: A congregational Study of a Vineyard Church* (2009), Cory Labanow, and the work by D.A Carson entitled *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (2005). In regard to Fresh Expressions, the writings of Phil Potter and the lectures of Fresh Expressions leaders at the 2016 Fresh Expressions Conference (Cape Town) will take a central place. Phil Potter's *Pioneering a New future: A Guide to Shaping Change and Changing the Shape of the*

Church (2015), together with the lectures of Bishop Graham Cray, Nelus Niemandt, Michael Moynagh and Jerry Pillay will provide the most contemporary substance of the movement for this research. And finally, in regard to house churches, it has been noted that the most contemporary author writing about the house church movement is Wolfgang Simson. His work: *Houses that Change the World: The Return of the House Church* (1999) will serve as the primary literature to evaluate on the house church movement. Additionally, Rad Zdero's "*The Global House Church Movement*", and *Home Cell Groups and House Churches* (1987) Hadaway, DuBose & Wright will be used.

Early Church. The goal of investigating the early church is to find out exactly how the early church operated and what particular ecclesiology the Apostles projected. This investigation therefore has to be an objective interpretation of the Biblical text together with a historical analysis of church life in the 1st Century. The most systematic evaluation of Apostolic Ecclesiology is the work of E. Ferguson entitled "*The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today*" (1996). Contributory to this central source I will make use of *Paul's idea of Community: The Early House Churches in their Cultural Setting* (1994), by Robert, J. Banks. Ferguson will provide a systematic framework of the 1st Century Church whilst Banks will provide a sociological perspective of early church life and practice. Various other sources, too numerous to mention here, will be used to strengthen or question the extrapolations of these two sources.

4. Research Methodology

The proposed study falls in the field of Church History. It's main objective being one that seeks to identify how a particular movement in church history (Restoration Movement) can add value to the most significant contemporary church movements (Modern Church). The Research Question for this study can therefore be stated as follows: How can the Restoration Movement provide valuable insight to the quest of the Modern Church? To achieve this objective, the study will broadly require five steps. Firstly, a 1st Century Ecclesiology will be provided. Secondly, the Restoration Movement will be defined historiographically and theologically in context. Thirdly, the origins, practices and objectives of the Modern Church movements will be defined and correlated with each other. Fourthly, the Restoration Movement will be critiqued, particularly in light of the 1st Century Church. And finally, the Restoration Movement will be correlated with the Modern Church in order to extract principles which will add value to the quest of the Modern Church to be faithful to 1st Century Ecclesiology without

losing site of 21st Century society. The study will be of a solely literary nature. There is ample literary material available on all three church movements which will be analysed and used.

The central segment of church history in this research is the Restoration Movement. The central plea of the Restoration Movement was the restoration of the Early Church. The central objective of this research is to ask how this movement with its plea can benefit the Modern Church. The overarching methodology to reach this objective is to bring these three movements in church history together, and then separate them again through a sieving process. This process of “sieving” will reveal points of contact between the three movements which will form a basis to correlate. A step by step process is needed.

Firstly, a 1st Century ecclesiology will be provided. Fundamental to the Restoration Movement is its desire to “restore” the Early Church. But the early church cannot be restored unless the early church has been clearly understood and described. The RM leaders therefore sought to clearly outline 1st Century Christianity, and they believed they did so objectively and correctly. They did not realise however that their hermeneutic was informed and shaped by the thinking of the day⁷ which left their interpretation of Scripture imprecise. The proposal of this study is that the Modern Church is also indirectly attempting to restore the early Church. It is of fundamental importance therefore to explore the practices and nature of the early Church for the purpose of this study. The goal of this step is to produce an objective as possible description of the life, practices and nature of the early church. It needs to be noted that the New Testament provides an Apostolic witness and theology of the Early Church. Much of this witness and theology has been debated over the centuries. In order to avoid controversial elements, this research will focus only on the generally agreed upon facts of this witness and the accompanied apostolic theologies. The goal is to create an objective as possible picture of New Testament Ecclesiology. The investigation will start with a description of the early church’s effectiveness in its surrounding society. A second worthy aspect that will be considered is the evaluation of the term “ekklesia” which will shed light on the meaning of ‘church’ in the 1st Century. It will move on to an outline of the theology of church and the metaphors that have been used to describe such a theology. These symbolic descriptions will also provide clarity on the role and

⁷ “Campbell was a rationalist who based Christian union on adherence to the New Testament as a kind of scientific blueprint for the Church. Central to Campbell’s thought was his dependence on Enlightenment philosophy especially the thought of John Locke and the perspectives of the “Baconian” School of Scottish Common Sense Realism” (Hughes, 2008:12).

purpose of the church. Fourthly, the Church as community will be evaluated in the light of its strong familial nature and the Apostolic Theology that so strongly suggests the church as community. Fifthly, the simple practices of the early church as witnessed by the Apostles will be compiled. It is important to evaluate the practices of the early church since it was the physical church that came into contact with society. The reason for this approach lies in the very reason for this study which is an attempt at answering how the church could be relevant in society. Society does not come in contact with deep church theology; it comes in contact with the corporeal church. Three particular areas of church practice will be evaluated: The church's communal life, the practices of the early church in corporate worship and the leadership structure of the early church. All three these factors have a bearing on the church's ability to reach the "unchurched" and therefore earn a place in this research. A fundamental exploration here would be to determine the institutional nature of the early church, if there was such and to what extent. Once an objective as possible New Testament ecclesiology has been outlined it can be contrasted with the ecclesiology the RM promoted and the Modern Church seeks to create.

Secondly, the Restoration Movement will be defined historiographically and theologically in context with a briefly summarised critique. It was a fundamental RM belief that the church up to its time had deviated from the pure Apostolic church of the 1st Century. It will be important to show how this deviation took place over time from the gradual establishment of the papacy to the religious plurality created by the Reformation. Such an investigation will place the birth of the RM in context and provide a rationale for the origination of such a movement. A simple historiography of the movement, its key leaders and the key events in the movement, will be outlined. There will be a brief focus on various leaders who came to the same conclusions and quests independently, individuals who promoted a return to the New Testament Church. This is necessary to be done since it indicates the role of the paraclete in the shaping of a movement relevant in its time. Focus will then be placed on specific spear-heading leaders in the movement; Thomas & Alexander Campbell together with Barton W. Stone. These leaders will be evaluated more extensively because they were the great influencers in the movement for years to come. Their thinking and ecclesiologies shaped the churches of the RM. They essentially concretised what the RM stood for. They outlined the principles of the RM. These principles will be neatly outlined under the headings of key restoration slogans that have and still partly do dominate restoration thought. These slogans form a neat means of summarising what the RM particularly promoted. Placing these principles under scrutiny through the eyes

of contemporary church leaders will bring this research down to the grassroots level of its significance. Evaluating a movement in church history entails its position in history, a historiography and also the theology it created. A fourth aspect that is of particular importance to evaluate in such an endeavour is the birthing context of the movement. Here special emphases will be placed on the social milieu of antebellum America together with the intellectual premises of the day. These two factors will be important to evaluate since it sheds light on how sociopolitical factors and common contextual intellectual principles contribute to the shaping of a new movement in church history. The evaluation of these two factors will indicate why the RM was relevant in its time. The purpose of this second step in the research process is to extract the unique theological principles of the RM, to show how movements led by the paraclete emerge, and to indicate how movements generally have a lifespan. These three factors will later in the research be transplanted into the evaluation of the Modern Church movements. The Modern Church can learn from the RM what to expect in its developing process. It can learn from the RM how to best allow pneumatological influence to shape the movement. And it can possibly find inspiration and possible application through the unique RM theological principles. The final segment of this second step in the research process would be to provide a very brief critique of the movement which will be further extrapolated in the final chapter. The purpose here would be to point out the strengths and weaknesses of the movement. In this research it has been emphasised that the RM is serving as an educator for the Modern Church. The Modern Church in many aspects is still in its infancy. The RM has a formal age of 217 years in 2016. It has a lifespan of great achievement, but also great failure. The factors that created these need to be stipulated as teaching material for the last step in this research endeavour.

Thirdly, the origins, practices and objectives of the Modern Church movements will be defined and correlated in order to extract a common trend. The primary focus will rest on three particular movements namely the Emerging Church, Fresh Expressions and the House Church Movement. To start off with, it will be necessary to evaluate all three movements separately. Each one of the three movements will be evaluated on the same criteria. The criteria have been set predominantly by the RM. These will be a general historiography, central theology and birthing context. The greater purpose of this exploration will be to answer the basic questions of: What is this movement? Why did this movement emerge? How did this movement emerge? What does this movement promote? Essentially, the Modern Church in this research is a postmodern trend made visible by three particular movements. These three movements are not

identical, but it is the proposal of this research that there are common denominators between them. Once these three movements have been placed side by side under the evaluation of the same criteria it will become more evident what these common denominators are. The goal here is to find the underlying trend in the Modern Church. Some trends have already been proposed: a return to organic Christianity and an aversion to institutional Christianity. These could be true in its broadest form, but deeper clarity is necessary and will be provided through the extrapolation of these three movements in correlation.

Fourthly, the Restoration Movement will be critiqued in two particular areas. Firstly, it needs to be established if the premises and consequences of the movement were what it intended to be. Essentially, the movement itself needs to be evaluated on the basis of its influence in church history, especially in early America. Is there validity in its ecclesiological quest? The purpose of such an investigation is to establish a point of reference to compare with the Modern Church. The RM can possibly signal elements of religious movements (positive or negative) that can have a bearing on the Modern Church. These need to be extracted. Secondly, the RM needs to be correlated with the 1st Century Church. This forms a fundamental part of the critique because the quest of the RM was to restore the Early Church. It does involve however a dual investigation. Firstly, it will be a correlation between the practices of the RM churches and the Early Church. Secondly, it will correlate the RM's interpretation of the Apostolic Witness of the Church with the ecclesiology proposed in the second chapter of this research. This step seeks to bring a valuable calibration to existing RM churches which could inspire a greater spirit of unity, humility and effectiveness in contemporary society.

Fifthly, the Restoration Movement and the Modern Church will be correlated. This step in the research process is original work. A comparison between the RM and the Modern Church movements has not been done before, or at least not in the South African context. The comparison will thus be done by using all the information acquired in the first four steps of this study. At this point of the study both the Restoration Movement and Modern Church has been described. Both have been evaluated theologically, contextually and historiographically. Both had/has a profound impact in its time. Both was/is pneumatologically inspired. Both were/are influenced by a social milieu, intellectual thought and religious pluralism. At this point there would be emergent differences and similarities between the two movements that would assist in drawing parallelisms. It is necessary to do this correlation since it will extract relevant similarities and exclude irrelevant dissimilarities. Even though the RM as a movement in

history can serve as an educator it needs to be indicated that it cannot provide a template of its 19th Century experiences to be readily applied in the 21st Century. This correlation will therefore serve as a means to sift out “what” of the 19th Century RM can truly be applied in the Modern Church in the 21st Century. The essential quest of this final step is to point out “restoration principles” which are timelessly applicable. Since this research is primarily an investigation into historical ecclesiologies, it will be those principles only which contribute to creating a healthy, relevant and biblical ecclesiology in every generation. In order to show the timelessness of these principles they will also be situated in the apostolic ecclesiology. Not only will theological RM applications be suggested to the Modern Church, but also practical applications. The RM was a movement that passionately promoted ecumenism through biblical compliance. The aim was noble, and the intentions good, but the practical outflow of it over time became increasingly fragmented. Since the Modern Church is still in its infancy it will do well to heed the warnings RM history can put on the table. A few factors will need to be pointed out that contributed to the schisms that took place in the movement over its lifespan. These factors will be indicated as potholes which the Modern Church will do well to avoid if it seeks to be a unifying and relevant movement in its time. A summary of the whole research objective in closing will be provided. It will be an extrapolation of the following: The RM believed seeing the church in their time through the lenses of the apostolic witness would make the church in their time effective. This research suggests that the Modern Church will do well to look at the church in its time through the lenses of the RM and the apostolic church. This final chapter will show “what can be seen” today by looking back at what can benefit the contemporary church.

5. Chapter Outline

5.1. Chapter 1. *Introduction.* The introduction will present the research problem and the research plan.

5.2. Chapter 2. *The Witness and Theology of Apostolic Ecclesiology.* An outline of the theological and practical nature of the early church from a possible objective perspective.

5.3. Chapter 3. *Overview of the Restoration Movement.* The history, objectives, principles and results of the Restoration Movement.

5.4. Chapter 4. *Overview of the Modern Church.* An analysis of the movements and their objectives in the Modern Church.

5.5. Chapter 5. *The Restoration Movement critiqued to provide answers for Modern Church struggles.* Extracting from the above chapters, this chapter attempts to bring the essential points together to fulfil the research objectives.

6. Delimiting Research Scope

6.1. RM Hermeneutics. A central aspect of the RM is its approach to interpreting Scripture. The movement identified three interpretive methods in order to extract from Scripture binding doctrines. These are *Necessary Inference*, *Apostolic Example* and *Direct Command*. To extrapolate on these interpretive methods and their impact on the movement would need a whole dissertation on its own. Even though RM hermeneutics play a vital role in understanding the nature of the movement, only necessary and minor energy will be spent on this topic.

6.2. The three church branches created by the RM. The RM produced one church movement which eventually flowed into three: Churches of Christ, Unaffiliated Churches of Christ and Christian Churches. The differences between these branches of the movement will not be handled in detail in this research since it is also a wide and intricate study that flows into a whole host of complexities which are unnecessary to explore for the purpose of this study.

6.3. RM Dogmatics. Books have been written and debates have transpired about the doctrinal positions held by the RM and the churches which grew from it. These doctrines are built on and surrounded by numerous variables that go too far to discuss in this research. RM dogmatics obviously have a part in the RM, which will be mentioned, but to a minimum and as necessary.

6.4. RM History. The Restoration Movement has a rich heritage and history of more than 200 years. Much can be said about this period. At the heart of the movement, however, lie the original thought processes, worldviews and influences of the two primary leaders who made their mark in the beginning phases of the movement. This study will include a broad perspective of the whole movement, but will specifically zoom in to the period of origin of the movement which essentially cover the period of influence when Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone were alive.

6.5. Modern Church Criticism. To give a critique on the Modern Church movements, could mean that it can extend over books. The debates are far and wide. It is not the primary objective to critique the modern church in general, but rather to critique it in the areas in which

the RM failed. The critique will therefore be more about the RM than the Modern Church since the goal in this research is to sift out lessons from the RM that can benefit the quest for relevance of the Modern Church.

7. Defining Terms

7.1. Early Church. The Church during the Apostolic Era, in other words the First Century Church.

7.2. Modern Church. The church as seen over the past 30 years.

7.3. Campbellism. A name given to the movement started by Thomas and Alexander Campbell, recognised more commonly as the Restoration Movement. The movement is also referred to as the Stone-Campbell Movement. The RM has also been referred to as the 19th Century Reformation.

7.4. Institutional Church – The church defined by its organisation, rituals, creeds and traditions.

7.5. Inherited Church. The church established in previous generations which simply became the adopted church by default of the current generation.

7.6. Anthropogenic Church. The church with specific reference to its man-made elements.

7.7. Reactive Theology. A theology created in reaction to external elements such as RM theology which was a reaction against the many ecclesiologies of the day.

7.8. Postmodernism. In its broadest form, postmodernism is a relativistic system of observation and thought that denies absolutes and objectivity (Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry). It is a late 20th Century movement characterised by broad skepticism, subjectivism, or relativism and a general suspicion of reason. Postmodernism puts everything into question.

7.9. Sectarianism. The belief that one's own church or denomination is the total body of Christ.

7.10. Denominationalism. The belief that one's own church or denomination is a part of the larger body of Christ.

7.11. Legalism. The theological practice focusing on law more than grace.

7.12. Antebellum America. The period between the American Civil War and after the war of 1812.

8. Abbreviations

8.1. RM - Restoration Movement.

Chapter 2: The Witness and Theology of Apostolic Ecclesiology

Although this study serves primarily as a critical analysis of the Restoration Movement, it carries complementarily the objective of providing insight and perspective to the Modern Church on its quest to impact its current society. Early Christianity stands at the junction of these two objectives. The early church effectively engaged its society and grew exponentially – here the Modern Church can draw insight from. In terms of the RM, its fundamental aim was to reproduce the early church in its own generation. The RM formed its ecclesiological cues through its viewpoints of the Early Church. The best place for any church movement of any time to start its ecclesiological development should be at the feet of the Early Church. Since the RM placed its emphases on a perceived-to-be exact imitation of early Christianity, and since every church in every age should reflect on the Early Church on its quest to be church – inclusive particularly here the Modern Church, it is only appropriate to dedicate the second chapter of this research to an analysis of the Early Church. A study on the Early Church will reveal discrepancies and correspondences with the RM whilst at the same time providing insight for the Modern Church.

Joel Barker states: “*When a paradigm shifts, everyone goes back to zero*”. It might be true in the corporate world which Barker refers to, but it is particularly true of the church in every generation. When theological confusion sets in, or ecclesiological disorientation takes its course, returning to the sources (*Ad fontes*) is most commonly understood as the course of correction. As Wright (1992:341) points out, many have laboured long and found it hard to understand what had happened in the Early Church and what the contours of the Early Church looked like. It was in this time period that the crucial moves of Christianity were made, a generation in which the church trampled the world with the Gospel of Christ. It was the time of the birthing of Christianity. If we were seeking the “perfect” church, the 1st Century Church would be it. That is what the RM believed, and many others throughout church history. There are however two complications with this notion.

Firstly, the Early Church was not the model of perfection for every generation to imitate. Wright (1992:452) calls the common understanding of the “perfect” Early Church the “myth of Christian origins” and the “Big Bang” theory of church origins. According to him it is a “Christian fiction” that there was a “pure” period when everyone believed exactly the same thing, lived in a community without problems and quarrels, and hammered out True Doctrine for the coming Great Church. Pointing only at the Book of Acts (not to even mention

Corinthians) it becomes quickly evident that the early church was not perfect: the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, the dispute between Hebrews and Hellenists, the vacillating of Peter, the major division over circumcision, the fierce quarrel between Paul and Barnabas – even the heroes of Acts are shown emphatically to have feet of clay. It doesn't seem like the idea of uniformity and stability is so clear in the Biblical record (Wright, 1992:452).

Secondly, the essence and contours of the Early Church are not as clear as we would have liked it to be. Greer (1986:93) points out that reconstructing the life of the Early Church is a kind of science fiction. He equates such a quest to a paleontologist who takes a few bones and teeth to draw a picture of a dinosaur. Our information about the Early Church is similarly less than we would expect. Archaeological finds are limited (Wright 1992:341) and the minor literary evidence that are available are derived from the upper classes, which makes it hard to understand what life was like for the masses (Greer, 1986:93). It is important to tread carefully in a quest to study the Early church since one could fall victim to unacknowledged speculation and probable remythologisation which serves as the invention of stories about the past aimed at sustaining a certain view of the present (Wright: 1992:341). Wright (1992:343) goes even so far as to suggest that it is possible to know more about Jesus than about the Early Church. The fact that information on the Early Church is scarce does not negate the fact that there is information and that this information is sufficient enough to draw value from. And, the conception that the Early Church was not perfect does not negate the fact that the canon of Scripture is sufficiently reliable and theologically competent enough to lead the church in every generation to faithful worship to God and effective service to the world.

I submit in this paper the same sentiment as Von Dobschutz (1904) that the most accurate information we have is basically what we find in the New Testament. Bearing this in mind, we still come to face a challenging dilemma. If we are to examine the Early Church, which one would it be? Much can be extrapolated from the early churches, whether it is the seven churches of Revelation, the Corinthian Church, or even the Macedonian churches. It is necessary therefore to narrow down the scope of this research, and to define the contours of exploration on the topic. Perhaps the best way to move forward is to consider the Jerusalem Church as described through the Acts of the Apostles as the prime source of consideration. FF Bruce calls the Jerusalem Church the “mother-church” of Christendom⁸. The Book of Acts illustrates that

⁸ Bruce, F.F. Commentary on the Book of Acts. New International commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1954. P 53-79.

the church was first established in Jerusalem and spread out from there in a fairly orderly fashion (Callan,1987:18). The best known Apostles died in the 60's. These were Peter, James and Paul. All three these men exerted perhaps the most influential leadership over the Early Church (Brown,1984:14). To consider Apostolic ecclesiological cues would thus be wise in order to form a fairly accurate picture of the Early Church. Apart from the text itself in terms of the historical church and the Apostolic view of the Church, it will also be wise to place part value on other historical sources outside the canon which could shed light on the nature and practices of the Early Church.

This particular study on the Early Church is very similar to the attempt Mckinion (2001) made with his work "*Life and Practice in the Early Church*". Its main aim is not to serve as a survey of theology, but rather a survey of how theology was lived and played out by the community of faith in the 1st Century. It is about how believers did church (Mckinion, 2001:1). As Barrett (1985:78) puts it "the church is a visible thing – at least, part of it will always be visible". A fundamental goal of this study is to observe the church of the 1st Century in its visibility. The reason for this approach lies in the fact that the world comes into contact with the visible church. Mission is all about the church connecting with society. And since a fundamental concern of this paper deals with the relevance of the church in society it is necessary to take this approach. The visible church is the hands and feet of Christ. Society does not come in contact with deep theology, but with practical Christian service. That does not mean the aim of this research is only on the practical church. Johnston (1943:59) states "Life precedes theology, yet in its experience finds the necessity for reflection". The practice of the early church was informed by a deep theological understanding of God's purposes with His people. Theology moved them to do. Therefore, even though I will observe as much as possible the life and practices of the early church, it will also be necessary to reflect on the abstract components of Biblical Ecclesiology as written by the Apostles, especially Paul. But first, let us consider the missiological success of the Early Church.

1. Early Church Effectiveness

The desire of every church today is to grow. The challenge of church growth is relevance, the ability of the church to connect and communicate effectively with its surrounding society. Somehow, the Early Church got this right. It might have been imperfect, stained with sin, and bewildered by division and conflict; but it grew steadily and widely. The success of the Early Church places great value for us in exploring its ways. There is no doubt that the Early Church

was a missional church, evangelism was its lifeblood. Luke continuously indicates the growth of the Jerusalem church in round numbers. In the Gospels Jesus mentors twelve men. According to Luke in Acts there are 120 people gathering in a room in Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit falls on them during Pentecost (Acts 1:15). At the preaching of the Apostles we read of 3000 people responding to the Gospel and being added to the church through baptism (2:41). A few months later we read of the church measuring 5000 men (4:4). This is just men and if we take into account their families we can assume about 10 000 converts⁹. The Acts account continues to make general statements that the number of disciples are increasing (5:14; 6:1, 7). Much later in the same text James could point to the fact that believing Jews (perhaps those in the Jerusalem vicinity) could be reckoned in terms of myriads (21:12). The church was literally born in a day and grew steadily ever since (Harrison 1985:185). From 12, to 120, to 3000, to 10 000, to many thousands indicates surreal growth. Some¹⁰ have suggested less surreal growth, but most scholars agree about the trustworthiness of Luke's account.

Despite the growth in Jerusalem we see that from the death of Jesus (30-32 CE) until the so called Apostolic Council (48 CE) the church spread rapidly and widely. From Jerusalem the church spread to Samaria (Acts 8:4-25), Ethiopia (8:26-39), Damascus (9:2), the towns of Judea (8:40; 32-10:48), Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch (11:19). From the missionary efforts of the church in Antioch the church spread to the cities of Asia Minor, primarily Psidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe (Acts 13-14) (Callan, 1986:17). A striking text in Colossians 1:23b states "*This is the Gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant*" (NIV). Paul most probably wrote the Book of Colossians during his first imprisonment in Rome which would date the writing of this statement around 60 CE (Lincoln, 2000: 580). When Paul viewed the spread of the Gospel message from the perspective of his Roman prison cell, it certainly looked so impressive that he would claim everyone had heard of Jesus in the known world as he understood it.

For Wright (1992:359) the most striking thing about early Christianity is also its speed of growth. In 25 CE there is no such thing as Christianity, only a young hermit living in the

⁹ We can make the calculation roughly based on the situation described in John 6:10.

¹⁰ Consider for example Rodney Stark's comment: "I shall assume that there were 1000 Christians in the year 40 CE...40% per decade (or 3.42% per year) seems to be the most plausible estimate of the rate at which Christianity grew during the first few centuries" – in *The Rise of Christianity*, pg. 5 (Crossan, 1998:19)

wilderness dressed with camel hair and partnering with his somewhat younger cousin who dreams, dreams and sees visions. One century later the Roman Emperor has established an official policy in relation to the punishment of Christians; Polycarp has already been a Christian in Smyrna for half a century; Aristides is confronting the Emperor Hadrian with the news that there are four races in the world – Barbarians, Greeks, Jews and Christians; and a young pagan called Justin is beginning his philosophical quest which will take him through the greatest of pagan thinkers and lead him, still unsatisfied to Christ; and eventually martyrdom in Christ's name (Wright, 1992:359). It didn't take long for the church to have recruits in high society. As early as the middle of the 2nd Century the church was dreaming of a day when the Emperor himself would be converted (Chadwick, 2001:1).

The great question is: How did the Church manage to spread and grow so rapidly and effectively? It didn't happen magically. Perhaps it was the right time for Christianity to emerge, the world was ripe and ready. It might be partially true, but upon consideration of the social reality it seems unlikely. Early Christianity was counter-cultural in its time: It challenged pagans to consider torture and death upon allegiance to Christ, it advocated a love that cut across racial boundaries that were particularly eccentric at the time, it sternly forbade sexual immorality that formed the heart of early pagan worship and life. If Jews became converts, they faced the possibility of being considered traitors. Even slavery together with torture seemed to be part of being a Christian. One picture is clear, being a Christian was often equated with suffering in the 1st Century. Considering all these notions, it seems very strange that such a movement could grow as it did (Wright, 1992:260). Perhaps it was because of these very factors that the church grew. Tertullian said "*the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church*". Martyrdom typically and ironically produced an increase in the community (Mckionion, 2001:116 & Chadwick, 2001:1).

I agree with Wright (1992:360) in his view that Christianity spread because Christians believed what they have found to be true for the whole world. They were not hesitant or confused about mission. The canonical writings are filled with mission. The story of Acts is a story of Christian mission. World mission was therefore the first and most obvious feature of Early Christianity (Wright, 1992:361). Even sources outside of Scripture confirms the zealotness of Christians to share their faith. Justin tells of his meeting with an old man who talked to him about Jesus. Pliny speaks of the "poison" of Christianity spreading into villages and the countryside. Ignatius finds churches wherever he goes throughout Asia Minor (Wright, 1992:360). We do

not read of evangelistic teams moving out of Judea during the earliest days of the Jerusalem church. Nevertheless, growth happened through word-of-mouth proclamation between friends, neighbours and families. Christianity spread organically. As people left Jerusalem after Pentecost returning home, or later on because of persecution, they spread the message as far as they traveled (Harrison, 1985:178). The church grew in a purely voluntary fashion which resulted in the multiplication of churches, with sentinels everywhere (Von Dobschutz, 1904:369). Greer (1986:94-95) suggests that one of the reasons why their mission was so successful was because of traveling being fairly easy in the Roman Empire. The roads didn't have many twists and turns. They went everywhere, and there was a system of imperial stations where accommodation and provisions for a journey were readily made available to travelers.

In summary, the early church grew because it had a passion to spread the news of Jesus. The passion was made evident by a willingness to be tortured or even martyred. The movement became a flame in the sense that the more opponents tried to blow it out the fiercer it spread. Persecution fueled the movement. Racial, religious and cultural issues didn't cause the movement to stumble, instead it provided an opportunity to practically represent the inclusive nature of Christ's work on the cross. The Restoration Movement also experienced rapid growth which will be a discussion for chapter 3. Similarly, the Modern Church is experiencing growth. All three movements experience growth because they effectively engaged their immediate society and were driven by passionate mission.

2. Ekklesia

In the attempt to describe a 1st Century ecclesiology it will be helpful to consider the formulation of a definition of what constitutes "the church". The difficulty lies in the fact that there is no such agreed formal definition. Even the Reformation could not come to an agreed characterisation and ended in a number of competing assertions (Giles, 1995:1). In order to avoid a biased definition, it will be most valuable and objectively accurate to rather consider the primary Greek word that refers to the notion of church as the 1st Century Church understood it. The English word "church" does not provide a truly Biblical understanding. The term "church" is derived from the Greek adjective "the Lord's" (*Kyriakos*). It has been held that the word entered Northern European languages from the Goths who heard it and applied it to church buildings ("the Lord's house") and appropriated the word in their language. We have thus in Germany "*Kirche*" and in Scotland "*Kirk*". Therefore, the word "church" in reference to a building is proper in English but is not true for the Greek word it translates (Ferguson,

1996:129). It is true that one should be careful to form an ecclesiology on the basis of the Greek word alone. The reason for this is that *ekklesia* has been used in the New Testament invariably. One could be tempted to impose a particular meaning of the word to suite one's particular view of the church (Giles, 1995:7). The term *ekklesia* does however, in its variety of uses, provide us with cues that can assist us in drawing a picture of the Early Church's self-understanding.

Ekklesia is used 114 times in the New Testament (Trebilco, 2012:164), three times in the Gospel of Matthew, 39 times in Romans, 1& 2 Corinthians and Galatians (Barrett, 1985:9). In fact, Paul used the term more than 60 times in his letters (Banks, 1980:34). It is a collective term that cannot be used for an individual and so the concept of *ekklesia* is thoroughly corporate (Trebilco, 2012:207). If Paul used this particular expression, it must mean that it was an appropriate term useful and worthy to be descriptive of the church. But Paul borrowed it from earlier sources, particularly the Septuagint in which *ekklesia* occurs about 100 times. It refers predominantly to Israel's meetings before God (Banks, 1980:35). The equivalent Hebrew word that was used is *qahal* which was also translated "synagogue" which is mostly translated to mean congregation (*edah*). As the Jewish and Christian faiths gradually separated and developed "synagogue" became the Jewish word and *ekklesia* the Christian word for the gathered people. But in an early Jewish Christian context both words could be used without difference of meaning (See James 2:2, 5:14) (Ferguson, 1996:130, 132).

The correlation between the Jewish and Christian contexts in terms of the usage of the word is noteworthy. The origin of the use of the term can be traced back to the Hellenists in Jerusalem and, its use aligned the Jesus movement with the coveted tradition of Israel as the people of God (Trebilco, 2012:206). When Christians used the word *ekklesia* they were claiming to be true Israel (Giles, 1995:24). K.L. Schmidt's¹¹ contribution to the study of the *ekklesia* lies mainly in the realm of a linguistic approach. He made connections with the Aramaic equivalents and concluded that the word indicates fellowship in the local sense. From a Jewish perspective early Christianity could well be looked at as a small, reluctant sect within Judaism. But from the perspective of Jesus the word could readily convey the essential idea of the *remnant* (Harrison, 1985:103). From these technical linguistic comparisons, we can draw the

¹¹ Schmidt, "Ekklesia", in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1964-76), 4:676.

conclusion that the church indeed was seen as the continuation of the Jewish nation as the people of God, the remnant that have been set apart by God. One can understand why many Jews sneered at the Christian movement.

Ekklesia is most commonly associated with its Greek societal background. It was used from the 5th Century onwards for the political assembly of citizens of the polis who met to make a range of decisions affecting their common life. In this sense the word signifies the meeting more than the body of people meeting together (Trebilco, 2012:165). The word was used as an abstract noun that spoke of those actually gathered. When the people went home, the *ekklesia* ceased (Giles, 1995:24). The secular Greek usage is employed by Luke in his account of the riot at Ephesus in Acts 19:21-41. The mob gathered in the theatre called *ekklesia* (19:32, 40). The city clerk contrasted that irregular gathering with the “regular assembly” which was the lawful, duly called meeting of the citizens (19:39). *Ekklesia* was thus a noble word from its political use in Greek civic life, and this made its adoption by Jews appropriate for their religious assemblies (Ferguson, 1996:32).

A very traditional manner to circumscribe a meaning of *ekklesia* is a dissection of the word itself. At the root of the word we find the common etymology of *ek* + *kaleo* where *ek* is translated “out of” and *kaleo* “calling”. From this perspective the word means “to come out of” or “the called out”. The church is called to come out of some place – material and spiritual – in the world. The church feels herself called by God’s initiative and God’s power; she understands herself to be brought together and established in unity under one Name (Bovon, 2003:135). Such a definition makes sense in light of various Scriptures which calls the church to be separate from the world, because God has called them to a new life. One can easily draw a parallelism between Israel and the church, both as the people of God...distinct from the nations of the world. Yet there is also a difference. In the older dispensation the accent is more heavily on lack of contact with surrounding peoples so as to avoid contamination, whereas the church must maintain positive contact with the world in order to reach it with the Gospel (Harrison, 1985:100). There is thus a reasonableness in referring to the church as the “called out”. But Ferguson (1996:132) says such a definition is not supported by the actual usage of the word. He holds that the emphases were on the concrete act of assembly, not separation from others. *Ekklesia* was used of any assembly, whether religious or not. One instance where it is used in a religious sense is Acts 7:38 where it is used in reference to Israel in the wilderness. This is a significant instance since it indicates that the force of the word is not strictly to

designate a “called out body” as distinct from others who are not called; no others were in the area when Israel met as a body in the wilderness. It is possible that the “out” factor simply goes back to the element of summons, as when citizens of Athens were called out of their homes to attend the *ekklesia* of the city state. When Jesus prophetically referred to the establishment of the church he spoke of it as “my church”. This phrase in context enables us to note that the idea of the *ekklesia* is not unique, but only the particular assembly of which He spoke (Harrison, 1985:100).

How *ekklesia* is actually used in the New Testament should reveal the Apostolic perception of the word. The understanding of *ekklesia* as the town meeting of free male citizens of a Greek city seems to be mimicked in Pauline writings. He addressed the “*ekklesia* of the Thessalonians or the Laodicians (1 Thess. 1:2, 2 Thess. 1:1, Col. 4:16). Or when all in a given town “come together in *ekklesia*” (1 Cor. 11:18, cf. 14:19, 23, 28, 35). Meeks (2001:108) claims that *ekklesia* names not just the occasional gathering, but the group itself. Moreover, it names all Christian groups everywhere, considered either severally or as a whole. Paul can speak of the *ekklesiae* (plural) of a province – Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, Judea (1 Cor. 16:1, 16:19, Gal. 1:2, 2 Cor. 8:1, 1 Thess. 2:15). But also of “all the *ekklesia* of the Gentiles (Rom. 16:4 and “all the *ekklesia* of Christ” (Rom. 16:16) or “of God” (1 Cor. 11:16) (Meeks, 2001:108). So *ekklesia* was used by Paul to refer to an actual assembly of Christians (1 Cor. 11:18, 14:19, 14:34) in some instances, and at other times he refers to those people who assemble, whether it is the whole church at Corinth (1 Cor. 14:23) or a smaller group such as a house church (Rom. 16:5, Phil. 2). From this perspective it was natural to use *ekklesia* for the people, whether assembled or not. The widest use of the word refers to the local assembly, but there are instances where it is used in reference to the global Christian community (Matt. 16:18, Eph. 1:22, Col. 1:18) (Ferguson, 1996:131-132). In Acts the word is also used in this dualistic nature referring to the universal and the particular. Bultman¹² is probably correct in his claim that the local use of the term *ekklesia* springs from the conviction that the individual church (congregation) manifests the one church, of which it is representative (Harrison, 1985:101).

Without extrapolating the complexities of the meaning of *ekklesia* further, let me draw a summary understanding. How can we make sense of this word that is used so widely and interchangeably? Giles (1995:120) suggests we must give the word the most appropriate

¹² Bultman, Theology of the New Testament, trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Schribner's, 1951), 1:93-94.

English equivalent. Translating *ekklesia* in the singular is a challenge. If we translate it ‘church’ we are in danger of projecting into 1st Century Christianity legal and institutional categories that were absent at the time (Bovon, 2003:135). One also would then advocate the common miss-applied understanding in Christian circles that the church is a building. Ferguson (1996:132) reminds us that when *ekklesia* is translated “assembly” it must refer to what was done and not to where it was done. According to Giles (1995:120) the word “community” best corresponds with the Greek word. Community suggests a people who have something in common. Bovon (2003:135) objects to this notion because he fears one might miss the universality of the one church. Giles, however, offers an understanding which can incorporate a universal perspective. Community can refer to a nuclear family as a household community, or of all the people who live in one area as the Johannesburg community, of all South Africans as the South African community and even of all men and woman as the human community. In Paul’s mind there was only one Christian community. Sometimes he thought of it as all the believers in the Empire, at other times all Christians in a city and at other times only of those in a particular house church. Believers were the *ekklesia* by definition because they shared a common life in Christ. No doubt that Paul expected those in Christ to meet together to express communal life, but assembling together did not make them church. It is for this reason that a translation “assembly” is not adequate (Giles, 1995:120-121). An *ekklesia* is an assembly, but not only an assembly. Trebilco (2012:205) suggests we can talk of “the community which assembles”.

The idea of community undergirds the “one another” and relational nature of Christianity. This community is also the remnant and the people called out of the world by God. It is a global community which is represented in every local community and household to pledge allegiance to the Name of Christ. The church does not belong to the people to whom it is constituted, nor to the district to which they belonged but rather to the one who has brought it into existence (that is God) or through the one whom this has taken place (that is Christ). This means that the *ekklesia* is not merely a human association, a gathering of like-minded individuals for a religious purpose, but a divinely created affair (Banks, 1980:37). Perhaps Luke could succinctly and in closing bring rest to our exploration of the *ekklesia*. He uses the term *ekklesia* only once (Acts 5:11) prior to the stoning of Stephen. Luke decided to rather use other descriptive terms in the place of *ekklesia*. Perhaps it was because he wanted to give the people of God a deeper and more adequate description? Sometimes he spoke of the disciples (6:1, 9:1, 11:26). A disciple is a “follower” in its simplest definition. Jesus called his disciples, they left

their lives (nets and boats etc.) and followed him. In this descriptive term used by Luke we see an association with the notion of *ekklesia* being the “called out”. In other instances Luke calls the church brethren (6:3, 11:1). This idea stems from the Old Testament which used the term to designate one who was a member of the same family, or a neighbour, or a member of the nation of Israel. One can obviously make a full comparison here with the *ekklesia* idea of community – locally and globally. Luke also uses “the Saints” (9:13) which designates an appeal to live a life of godliness, once again a reference to be separate and called out of the world of pagan immorality. We also read of “the fellowship” (2:42). This description can be translated as the “community-spirit”. It is more than a feeling, it included the participation in the things that bound the group together – a common faith, the Lord’s Supper, a community of goods, and a common witness (Harrison, 1985:103-104). Once again we see the notion of community, but here it is represented in an actual assembly. The *ekklesia* is a community (globally and locally) which assembles locally in the Name of Christ. The term *ekklesia* enables us to abandon anthropogenic understandings of church.

3. Images of the Church

It has already been noted that, defining the church, is a daunting task. I would say describing the church is almost like describing a person. It is difficult to encapsulate a person in one word, or even with one phrase. And so it is with the church, it is a living organism with a living creator with many living abstracts and dynamic attributes. Perhaps this was the reason why some of the Apostles used descriptive images of the church. Minear (1960:22-25) spent extensive energy on the exploration of the images of the Church we find in the New Testament. In his quest he came to realise why such images were so effective. Firstly, it serves as tools of rhetoric, designed to help men describe and convey an impression, concerning something that is already adequately known. Secondly, it serves as a mode for perceiving a given reality especially where this reality is of such a nature as not to be amenable to objective visibility or measurement. Thirdly, it advances self-understanding, whether by individual or society. The re-use of the biblical images from generation to generation has been one way by which the church has tried to learn what the church truly is in order to calibrate its own actions and paradigms. Images might be more effective than formal dogmatic assertions for evoking this kind of self-knowledge. It is possibly the reason why the New Testament does not legislate any particular definitions of the church and why Christian theology has never agreed upon any such

definitions (Minear, 1960:22-25). It will therefore be worth the while to have a brief look at five of the most striking and predominant images of the church as described by the Apostles.

A first great image worthy of deeper extrapolation is that of the church being the “*household of God*” (1 Tim. 3:15 & Eph. 2:19). In the Ephesian letter Paul proposes that this household is founded upon the Apostles and prophets and Jesus is the cornerstone which keeps the household strong and secure (Brown, 1984:48). One could deduce from this that the church remains stable by relying on the Scriptures (Apostles and Prophets) and resting in Christ. We see Paul further encouraging the familial theme in his mentorship of Timothy where he inspires Timothy to treat older men as fathers (1 Tim. 5:1), older woman as mothers and younger women as sisters (1 Tim. 5:2). The term “household” implies family, the church is the family of God. It vividly expresses what early Christians experienced. Many of them had no place to belong to. We read in the Scriptures about widows and orphans coming under the protection of the church (Acts 6:1, 1 Tim. 5:3, James 1:27). For those who had no family the church supplied protection and nurture they would have lacked otherwise (Greer, 1986:99).

Closely associated and complementarily applied is the Petrine notion of the “*People of God*”. Petrine ecclesiology places the church as the family of God against the backdrop of the people of Israel as God’s people. The notion of the people of God is most fittingly described in 1 Peter 2:9-10. This image places the church within the setting of the long story of God’s dealings with His chosen people. The church is referred to as Israel, as a chosen race, and a holy nation, the twelve tribes, the patriarchs, the circumcision, Abraham’s sons, the exodus, his kingdom, the remnant and the elect and finally *his house* (Minear, 1960:66-104). The churches to whom Peter wrote had dual issues: Alienation and ostracism. In the backwoods area of northern Asia Minor those who had become Christians felt themselves cut off from surrounding society. To many pagans the “pilgrims” looked like a curious and secretive sect which caused them to be considered outcasts. Peter counteracts the alienation by encouraging his hearers with the assurance that in Christianity gentile converts had found a new family, a new home, a new status that made them special people with an imperishable inheritance. The strength of such an ecclesiology rests in the real benefits that are gained from belonging (Brown, 1984:76-79). When people find benefit from being members of a community, that community will survive. We see this with Israel since Israel continued on as God’s people even after Moses and Joshua disappeared from the scene. The people of God in the New Testament would and did also continue along after Peter and the other Apostles have disappeared from the scene. “*The more*

poorly defined the family or social context from which new members come into a community, the more deeply they will be attracted by encountering a loving care that gives them a new identity or dignity” (Brown, 1984:76-79). In practice therefore the church lived up to, in many ways, to being the family of God. The church opens up its arms with spiritual hospitality that flows over into practical love and service to those who are destitute and abandoned.

Perhaps the most meaningful and inspiring image of the church is that of “*the bride of Christ*”. Paul had great concern and passion for the church because he wanted to present her to Christ as a “pure virgin” (2 Cor. 11:2). In his writing to the Ephesian church he expanded the bridal image. In the course of describing the love between husband and wife Paul illustrates how this love should be by referring to Christ “who loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (Eph. 5:21-33). In verse 27 we see the image of the bride coming out to meet Jesus. She is “radiant, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, she is holy and blameless” (NIV) (Brown, 1984:50-51). One would object by saying no church is so pure. Of all people Paul knew about the fallibility of the church. He knew the church had sin, but still described the church as holy and without spot or blemish. His appreciation of the church was not naive romanticism but rather mystical vision. It is Christ who makes the church holy. The two become one (5:31-32) so that the holiness of Christ may be seen in the church. The bride of Christ imagery personalises the church and encourages our love for it in the imitation of the love that Christ has for the bride. One practical outflow of this theology is the following: The church being presented to Christ as holy and without spot or blemish inspires the church to continually strive towards holiness and to live up to the expectations of Christ, her groom. The picture of holiness enables the church to survive. Sinful scandal imperils the survival of the church (Brown, 1984:53-55).

The most common image of the church is “*the body of Christ*” image. It operates around three aspects: Body, Members and Head. It is the body of Christ, the church is the hands and feet of Jesus on Earth. A body moves which indicates mission. Each body has different members and so the different individuals of the church have different gifts and talents. The head is Christ, without whom the body cannot operate. This image is only found in the Pauline letters (Minear, 1960:173). Originally Paul used the diversity of bodily parts to justify the difference in charisms practiced by the Corinthian Christians. As Paul continues his theology of the “body” through the letters of Ephesians and Colossians it deepens considerably. In his body of flesh by his death Christ reconciled those who were estranged (Col. 1:21), and they have been called

into one body (3:15). That body is now identified as the church, and Christ is its head (Col. 1:18, 24; Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23). A corporate understanding of the church seems to emerge when one considers Paul's reference to the Christians as being members of a real body that suffered, died and rose. It might be perceived as corporate but the church is definitely not seen by Paul as a corporation. Rather the church is a growing entity, living with the life of Christ himself. The body is built up in love to the head (Eph. 4:15-16) and received life from the head (Col. 2:19) (Brown, 1984:51).

A final image is that of "*the Kingdom*". The church can be identified with the kingdom of God's Son. Colossians equates the kingdom with the church quite extensively. The Father "has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved son in whom we have redemption and the forgiveness of sin" (Col. 1:13-14). The church, free of darkness of which Christians are members, is the kingdom of God's Son in which "they share the inheritance of the holy ones in the light" (1:12). The holy ones probably refer to angelic beings. Therefore, the image of the church being the kingdom places an eschatological slant on church theology. The existing church on Earth possesses an already realised place in the heavenly kingdom. The church thus has two dimensions, the one earthly and the other heavenly (Brown 1984:51-52). This theological truth makes the church more than an earthly community, a heavenly reality.

These images, although not examined extensively, give helpful insight into Apostolic ecclesiology. The church is called to be a family, but is also a nationality – a nation in service of God as the people of God. The church is a bride, she is beautiful and worthy of sacrifice. Christ is the groom waiting for her. The image speaks a warning: Do not meddle with another man's future wife and preserve her purity. The church is the body of Christ. It must move, fulfil its function and be the representative of Christ on Earth. And finally the church is the kingdom, it falls under an "out of this world" rulership. The church exists in the heavenly realms and what is bound on Earth is bound in heaven.

4. Early Church as Community

Roy Baumeister and Mark Leary (1995) claims that the need to belong is a fundamental human need to form and maintain at least a minimum amount of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships. In order to satisfy this inherent need one needs to experience frequent, positive interactions with the same individuals and engage in these interactions within

a framework of long-term, stable care and concern¹³. It is a psychological fact that no man is an island. Humans are “pack animals”. We need each other. Nelus Niemandt vividly describes the church as a community and not a meeting. He says the ultimate reality is not substance, but relationship. The church is relational because God is relational. He also makes a profound prediction about the future church: *It will become bigger and smaller at the same time*¹⁴. The last statement indirectly confirms the findings of the psychologists, as people sense the need to belong they will be drawn more to smaller communities of faith. One can see the truth of these statements by observing the movements in the church today. Large churches are desperately trying to create “small groups” or “cell groups” because an assembly centred church doesn’t seem to meet the needs of people, such a community is too big to inspire interpersonal relationships. What would the example of the early church say to this modern predicament? The purpose of this section is to discover how the early church formed community and remained community. There are deep theological components on this theme, but also very practical elements which will be pointed out.

4.1. The Theology of Community

Christianity is an “one another” religion. There are approximately 59 “one another” verses of Scripture in the New Testament¹⁵. According to Paul’s theology the Gospel bounds individuals to one another as to God. We are to “accept one another as Christ accepted us” (Rom. 15:7), and reconciliation with others entails reconciliation with God (Phil. 4:2-3). The Gospel is not merely a personal (vertical) matter, it has a social dimension (horizontal), it is a communal affair. To embrace the Gospel is to enter into community (Banks, 1980:33). We can see the practical outplay of this in Acts 2:41 as “those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day” (NIV). Gospel obedience reconciles one with God, but adds one to the community of faith too.

It is only in community that we find identity. God’s mission is not just to save individuals, but to gather people and so create community. Saving individuals requires the social wholeness of a reconciled community (Ferguson, 1996:76-77). In two passages of Scripture (2 Cor. 13:13 &

¹³ Baumeister R. F., & Leary M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117, 497-529.

¹⁴ Comments were made by Prof. Niemandt during his lecture entitled “*Relationships in the Future Church*” during the Fresh Expressions International Conference, Cape Town, 16-18 February 2016.

¹⁵ From Carl F. George, *Prepare Your Church for the Future* (Tarrytown: Revell, 1991), 129-131.

Phil. 2:1) we read the phrase: “communion (fellowship) of the Holy Spirit” (Ferguson, 1996:103). Consider for a moment the original term for “fellowship”. *Koinonia* is the Greek equivalent. In its simplest form it means “to have something in common”. It comes from the same root of *koinos* which means ‘common’. How the word ‘community’ is developed is quite evident. It wasn’t a word preserved for the Christian community, it was used in all areas of life whether legal, civil or recreational. It basically carries the idea that one has fellowship with someone when you have something in common with that person (Ferguson, 1996:369). Particularly in relation to the ekklesia the one thing everyone has in common is the paraclete. 2 Cor. 13:13 & Phil. 2:1 ordinarily would mean “participation in the Holy Spirit”. The idea Paul seeks to establish is that fellowship is originated by the Holy Spirit. In a theological sense it is the Holy Spirit that creates community, for the common participation in the *pneuma* brings people together in unity. The Church is a Spirit-filled community. The common life of the body of Christ is the life of His Spirit. Human communities may be created through common experiences, interests or shared principles. It needs to be noted however that where there is personal interest the tie is no stronger than the human spirit. The bond may be strong and the community may survive in relational difficulties because they have something in common. But the church is different, it is a community and fellowship through the divine Spirit. Hence, in its very essence it is a divine creation, not a human product. The New Covenant which the church now experiences are bound up with the working of the paraclete which creates a new heart and spirit in His people (Is. 59:20-21, Ezek. 36:25-27). This is an important aspect to mention because the change in heart will form the new community (Ferguson, 1996:103-104).

The Spirit operated in both Testaments, but differently. The Old Testament had Spirit-filled leaders, but no Spirit-filled community. The Spirit came to some, but not all, yet in the Christian Age God gave His spirit to all people (Acts 2:38-39). What Moses wished for (Num. 11:26-29) and Joel predicted (Joel (2:28-29) was declared to be fulfilled in Acts 2:16ff.: God poured forth His Spirit on all flesh. Another distinction between the two covenants was that in the Old individuals received the Spirit temporarily, but under the New permanently. The Spirit abides in the individual to empower her to live according to God’s way permanently (Rom. 8). Without the Spirit, the church is dead, there is no community (Ferguson, 1996:104-108).

Banks (1980:111-112) extrapolates even further on the fellowship in community theology by demonstrating the unique nature of the church’s communal assemblies in relation to other religious associations at the time. He notes that the Jewish religious associations (Qumran &

Pharisees for example) centred primarily around a *code*, as embodied in the Torah. It was the blessings, readings, expositions, confessions and prayers that formed the content of the synagogue services which were all based on Torah content. For the members of the Hellenistic religious associations, participation in the fraternity centred primarily around a *cult*, with dramatic rituals and processions, as well as mystical overtones. The RM unfortunately embraced such religious community formulated by a *code* centering around *cult*. But when one considers the church in relation to Paul's understanding, participation in the community centred primarily around fellowship, expressed in word and deed, of the members with God and one another. This means that the focal point of reference was neither a book nor a rite but a set of relationships. God communicated Himself to them not primarily through the written Word and tradition, or through mystical experience or cultic activity, rather He communicated Himself to them through "one another". The Early Church didn't place a book or a rite in the centre of activities, but placed God and one another there (Banks, 1980:111-112).

Ekklesia, as has already been determined, can accurately be translated as the "assembly of the community" (Banks, 1980:15). The assembly of the community plays a vital role since it is an opportunity for individuals to minister to each other. In community there is strength because individual weaknesses are overcome through the encouragement of others. People need one another. For this reason, the author of Hebrews calls on Christians in the community to "not neglect" the meeting together of the community (Heb. 10:25). Forsaking the assembly is not a sin against an institution, but against the brothers and sisters to whom we owe mutual edification and fellowship (Ferguson, 1996:233).

4.2. Community as Family

One could point to the size of the church in Jerusalem as numbered by Luke in Acts to support the existence of "megachurches". It has already been noted that the numbers are most probably accurate. So was it a megachurch? And if it was, how could it operate as a community? Where was the building situated? Banks (1980:41) says "not until the third century do we have evidence of special buildings being constructed for Christian gatherings". The Early Church was large in number, many were converted, but most of the church's life happened in homes. Jones (2013:26) suggests that the megachurch of Jerusalem didn't stay that way for long because God dispersed them all. He holds that the Jerusalem church slightly faded into the background nearing the end of Acts while the focus shifted to the smaller, nondescript churches that were springing up in the most remote parts of the map. Even though focus shifted from the

major Jerusalem church to the minor dispersed churches in the known world, it doesn't mean the church in Jerusalem shrunk.

It has already been noted that the Jerusalem church grew continuously. Perhaps the Jerusalem church was large yet small. It had two foci – the Temple, where preaching and teaching were carried out, and the homes of the Saints, where communal meals were enjoyed (Acts 2:46). No doubt, the church met occasionally, perhaps even every Sunday. But the canonical information tells us that “community” happened in the homes of the saints (Harrison, 1985:148). In four places of the Pauline writings specific congregations are described by the phrase *hē kat' oikon ekklēsia* which can be translated as “the assembly at Q's household”. There was a house church in Collosse (Col. 1:2) and one in Laodicea (Col. 4:15). One can point to many other passages of Scripture which gives evidence to the practice of house churches: 1 Cor. 1:11, 16, 16:15, 19, Rom. 16:10, 14, Phil. 2, 4:22, Col. 4:15 etc. (Meeks, 1987:75).

In the Graeco-Roman world there were basically two types of communities. *Politeia* – the public life of the city or the nation state to which people belonged and *oikonomia* – the household order into which they were born or to which they were attached (Banks, 1980:15). Harrison (1985:148) touches on the same idea when he references that in the Old Testament; the basic unit of society is the family followed by the clan, then the tribe and then the nation. We pick up here the probability that the church adopted these structures in the sense that the nucleus of the church was often an existing household. The household was much broader than the family in modern Western societies and included not only immediate relatives but also slaves, freedmen, hired workers and sometimes tenants and partners in trade and craft. Meeks (1987:76) points out that “*the adaptation of the Christian group households had certain implications both for the internal structure of the group and for their relationship to the larger society. The new group was thus inserted into or superimposed upon an existing network of relationships, both internal – kinship, clientele, and subordination – and external – ties of friendship and perhaps of occupation*” (Meeks, 1987:75). Church growth happened through typical “relational evangelism”.

The notion of house churches implies two particular ideas: “Early Church churches” were small and they shared a deep sense of intimacy and genuineness. Meeting in homes obviously puts a limit on the number that can attend. Houses were generally small unless one were wealthy. It is possible that Priscilla and Aquila were wealthy, and so was Gaius (Rom. 16:23) (Barrett, 1985:36). It has been suggested that the entertainment room in a moderately well to do

household could hold about 30 people comfortably and another 15 in an emergency. The house in which Paul met with the church in Troas was large enough so Eutychus could use a window for a seat, and it was a double story (Acts 20:9). It is unlikely that the churches exceeded 40-45 people. This would compare to the number of people who belonged to a voluntary association. Though there could be as few as ten (the smallest number of men to found a synagogue) and as many as 100, the average membership was around 30 people (Banks, 1980:41,44). One can already point out here that this particular 1st Century church practice was not identified and applied by the restoration churches since they continued to gather in large numbers and pursued the construction of church buildings.

Meeting in a house afforded some privacy, a degree of intimacy, and stability of place (Meeks, 1987:76). A home as meeting place opposed to a public setting would naturally foster close-knit relationships and encourage the formation of friendships (Harrison, 1985:148). Sitting in a lounge facing each other would facilitate informal sharing, mutual care for one another, and interactive ministry (Giles, 1995:92). George C. Homan gives a representative definition of Early Church community meetings: “a number of persons, or members, each of whom, while the group is meeting, interacts with every other, or is able to do so, or can at least take personal cognizance of every other” (Meeks, 2001:74). Once again the theme of the church being a “family” in practical ways emerges. The family was a central institution in ancient society, including both Jewish and Roman society. The church reflects a fictive kinship with God as father (Knowles, 2012:5). Paul often used familial language when he spoke to the churches he mentored. They were children of God and also of the Apostle. They are brothers and sisters and refer to one another as “beloved” (See Rom. 1:7 as example) (Meeks, 1987:86). Believers are “sons of God”, “children of the heavenly Father”, “brothers of Christ” (Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:11, 17) and together they constitute a “brotherhood” (1 Pet. 2:17, 5:9). The word family only occurs once in the New Testament (Eph. 3:15), but the words house and household appear several times (Harrison 1985:148). Family indicates genetic attachment whereas household indicates relational attachment or life attachment. A family interacts because “blood is thicker than water”. A household interacts because “they share life”. The early church was a family, the blood of Jesus united them. But they were also a household because as they did life in a wicked world, they did it together.

The centrality of the household in early church life suggests a strong tradition of hospitality. When Paul wrote to the churches in Rome he passed on the greeting of Gaius “whose

hospitality I and the whole church enjoy” (Rom. 16:23). Not only was the house a meeting place for the church, but it was also the launching place for hospitality – for the whole church. Peter was a guest of Simon the tanner at Joppa (Acts 9:43) and then Cornelius (10:23, 48). The practice of hospitality was a boon to traveling servants of the Lord and doubtlessly provided mutual blessing. One such example might be the account of when Paul came to Corinth and stayed with Priscilla and Aquila who were also tent-makers (Acts 18:3) (Harrison, 1985:148-149). The logical outflow of hospitality is that the church often ate together. Communion (Eucharist) was actually a proper meal. Crossan (1998:428-429) presents a picture of what early community life might have looked like in the town centres in the 1st Century. He notes that people of the early cities lived compactly in tenements and insulae which were up to five stories’ high. On the street level of these buildings were commercial establishments and artisans’ workshops. Many of these insulae had no kitchens. People did not eat or live in them or cook and defecate in them. They simply slept and stored in them. The real life of the family took place outside the home in community life. The shops that bordered almost every street, together with the lack of kitchens in the homes suggests that the shops supplied food and drink. Such a city life was obviously deeply communal since life was shared in the streets. It seems possible that the communal meals took place in this setting. Each brought what he or she had to the common meal (Crossan, 1998:428-429). This format of communal meals could find support in the Eucharistic incident handled by Paul in relation to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 11:17ff). A profound effect of such a communal life by the church is situated in the reality that the early church fellowship was in public and not hidden behind closed doors. One truth of the church in Acts is that the Jerusalem society definitely knew about the church (See Acts 5:13). Perhaps because the church practiced their faith in community in the larger community. And if this was not so, it would still be difficult to live ecclesial community in seclusion. The Early Church shared life, whether it was in homes or in the streets. Sharing life was not confined to one meeting a week on a specific time and at a specific place. The Early Church was an everyday and everywhere church.

The exchange of kisses in Early church community life seems to have been the status quo. With this action the bond between each member of the community was given real, and not merely symbolic expression. Evidence suggests that the exchange of kisses was part of everyday life in eastern societies. It was practiced especially among relatives, friends, and those giving and receiving hospitality (See Luke 7:45). In the mysteries it signified the type of relationship that existed between the initiate and the mystagogue (the one who initiates another into a mystery

cult) and between the individual initiate and other members of the cult. In Greek society this eastern practice was similarly practiced. It is only the significance attached to it that differentiates its Christian use. One specific difference is the communal character of the action compared to the individualised exercise in the mysteries. In the church the members all greet one another with a holy kiss. What makes the kiss so much more significant is the breadth of the relationship to which it gives expression. It is the kiss of Christ's peace among people of different races, classes and families (Banks, 1980:88).

Early Church community love was intense. Von Dobschutz (1904) took on the project of comparing the notes of Aristides addressed to the Emperor regarding Christians towards the end of the primitive Christian era with the Scriptures. He takes some of the notes of Aristides and then journey's through the New Testament churches to see whether what he says about the church could be true and realistic. He ends the book in the positive. He quotes Aristides quite extensively, but I will only quote those sections I believe to be relevant in relation to the life of the Early Church: *"They honor their father and mother, they do good to their neighbors. Those who grieve them they comfort, and make them their friends, they do good to their enemies, if any of them have bondmen, bondwoman, or children, they persuade these to become Christians for the love they have towards them; and when they become so they call them without distinction brethren. They love one another. From the widows they do not turn away their countenance; they rescue the orphan from him who does him violence, he who has gives to him who has not. When one of their poor passes away from the world, and any of them sees it, then he provides for his burial according to his ability; and if they hear that any of their number is imprisoned or oppressed for the name of their Messiah, all of them provide for his needs, and if it is possible they deliver him. If there is among them someone who is poor or needy, and they have not an abundance of necessaries, they fast two or three days that they may supply his want with necessary food"* (Von Dobschutz, 1904: XXV-XXVI).

This description of the early Christians is phenomenal and shows a community with intense commitment and love to each other and the world. Perhaps this is why the Pauline letters are so rich in emotional language – joy and rejoicing, anxiety, longing (Meeks, 1987:86). One wonders why the incident of disfellowship in Corinth would be so intense for the banned individual from the church community (1 Cor. 5 & 2 Cor. 2:7). We see in the latter verse that the expelled individual should be re-established in the community in order to prevent him from being "overwhelmed by excessive sorrow". It is this disciplinarian nature of the early Church

that teaches us much about the early Christian community. Being a member of the community was intense since the church became your family, source of identity, new found hope in a broken world. It became love made visible. That is why exclusion from the community would be so severe, one would immediately feel lost and alone. The personal loss would be so great that it would give pause to any who challenged the authority of the church. (Harrison, 1985: 174-175).

In summary, it should be noted that the early church operated naturally and organically. The strong sense of community it fostered from its Jewish heritage met the needs of those who had come to Christ. This was a warm community where kissing was common and meals were shared. “Church” happened in homes and in the streets. The ekklesia was not confined to a time, date and a place. It lived out its beliefs every day. It was a one another religion. It was a family. It was split in smaller groupings and through this format grew the fastest that the church has ever grown. The preservation of the community entailed the discipline of those who sinned through the punishment of exclusion from the community. The fact that this was a severe punishment indicates to us just how effective, intimate and intense the bond between community members were.

5. Corporate Worship

A general consensus worldwide among Christians is that the assembly of the saints should take place every Sunday (except obviously for denominations like the 7th Day Adventists who gather on the Sabbath). In many instances it is a time of ritualistic practices and a set of ordered elements of worship in which the assembly is engaged with. Some are very formal, while others are very spontaneous. Some are entertaining, while others are quite dull. How would the Early Church, corporate practices and sacraments, compare to the wide array of contemporary church trends? The purpose of this section is to evaluate the theology of worship in the Early Church, together with the elements and conditions of their actual worship assemblies, and finally the role of sacraments in the ancient Christian Church.

5.1. Theology of New Testament Worship

The New Testament contains various Greek words to describe worship. One of the most common words is *proskyneo* (to prostrate oneself) which means to bow down or fall down before an object of reverence. This could be done before humans of a higher rank than one self, or before an angel, or before God. *Leitourgia* is where the term “liturgy” comes from and it

refers to public service used in Jewish and Christian literature of the early Christian era, predominantly for religious services (Rom. 15:16 for example). In the Septuagint the word commonly refers to the Jewish Temple service (Luke 1:23, Heb. 9:21; 10; 11). *Latreuo* is an associated word used in the New Testament to mean “to perform religious service” or “to carry out cultic duties”. It is also used to refer to pagan worship (Acts 7:42, rom. 1:25), but it properly belongs to God alone (Matt. 4:10). *Threskeia* is used occasionally to refer to “religious service” or “cult” – the external expression of worship. *Sebomai* carried the meaning of worshipping in the sense of showing reverence and respect for someone. *Eusebia* is a general term for religion, piety, or devotion and could also be used in reference to worship (Ferguson, 1996:208-210). *Proskyneo* is always used as a verb and never as a noun. *Letreia* appears 21 times in the verb form (*latreuo*). The strong accent on the verbal use of these terms indicates that in the New Testament worship was treated not so much as a concept but rather as an activity. Worship in its purest and most exalted sense refers to the soul’s preoccupation with the Almighty in attitude and adoration (Harrison, 1985:131).

Although these words used in the New Testament Scriptures are derived from the ritual actions of the Greco-Roman world, especially the Temple services of both pagans and Jews, they are used differently. A pattern emerges from the New Testament use of these words that indicates them being attributed more to the life of the Church than the cultic practices of the church. Instead of using them to refer to ritual or ceremonial activities, the language of cult is applied to the Christian life, especially its moral conduct and good deeds. The sacrifice of Christ has been offered once and for all (Heb. 7:27, 9:12, 10:10), therefore the ancient cultic language, permeated with the language of sacrifice, was in early Christian usage “spiritualised” and shifted to the horizon of the Christian’s moral life. A cultic or priestly understanding of Christian worship is thus out of the question because cultic terminology in the New Testament is used metaphorically. So the New Testament usage of the expressions for worship is much broader. It includes acts of service on behalf of people and efforts in the Christian’s moral life (Ferguson, 1996:211).

In Paul’s mind worship entailed more than going to church once a week. His exhortation in Romans 12:1 promotes the instruction that worship is an everyday behavioural element of Christian life. Banks (1980:92) comments on this text: “So worship involves the whole of one’s life, every word and action, and knows no special place or time”. In the same chapter Paul exhorts his readers on how to behave in social circles and on the political level (12:3-13:4)

because all places and all times have now become a venue for worship. Paul does not often speak about the church meeting distinctively for worship, because they are already doing this in their daily lives (Banks, 1980:91-92). Thompson (1997:127) supports this notion and refers to the fact that Paul chooses to use language such as “edification” and “to build up” as being the purpose of worship as a community instead of technical terminology indicating cultic worship. Along similar lines he suggests that the church is not ultimately a “God worshipping community, but rather a God serving community”.

Worship is a permanent attribute of the Christian living out his life (Thompson, 1997:127). That doesn’t mean that corporate worship is not important and even essential. The individual Christian can live out his worship as he goes about life, but the *ekklesia* is the community meeting together in worship. Community without meeting is a contradiction. It is true that the common meaning of worship today represents a narrowing down of the New Testament meaning of worship. It selects one aspect of worship (Assembly Worship) and applies the word exclusively to that aspect. Worship properly understood covers the Christian life as well as the Christian assembly, all acts and service to God (Ferguson, 1996:226). Paul does not often speak of cultic worship, but this does not mean he didn’t value it. Considering the Corinthian church, it had particular worship assembly issues. These Paul addressed sternly, and through this one comes to see that the assembly of the church was a given. The best source therefore of early Church worship practices are found in 1 Corinthians. It is in this letter that we sense Paul’s vision for worship. It includes the singing of Psalms and hymns, prayers feature, including blessings and thanksgiving in the Spirit, supplications and intercessions (1 Cor. 14:26). Paul assumes a coming together of the church (1 Cor. 11:18, 20) for worship that remembers (1 Cor. 11:24), that proclaims (1 Cor. 11:26) and that is worthy (1 Cor. 11:27-33) (Thompson, 1997:127-128). Much can be discussed in relation to individual daily worship to God, but the thrust of this section is to consider the corporate activities of the church.

5.2. Corporate Worship of the Early Church

It has already been noted that the Jerusalem church met daily, in the streets and in the Temple courts. These were probably informal and spontaneous meetings. Various Scriptures does however indicate that there were also formal meetings in which the church came together for worship. That the Early Churches had fixed days on which they came together is supported by both outside sources and Scripture. By Pliny’s time (111 CE) the Christians in Bithynia seems to have been meeting regularly: “*The Christians were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed*

day before it was light...” (Crossan, 1998:7). The frequency with which the Pauline churches assembled and observed the Eucharist is uncertain, but we can deduce from 1 Corinthians 16:2 that corporate worship regularly happened on Sundays (Thompson 1997:159). We can also refer to Acts 20:7 where the church met on the first day of the week to break bread (Meeks, 1983:143). It is possible that they met twice, once on Saturday evening and then again in the morning on Sunday (Bovon, 2003:136). Banks (1980:40) suggests however that both the Scriptural examples used to support Sunday worship could be slightly inaccurate. The collection of 1 Cor. 16:2 were to be done by individuals and does not necessarily refer to a communal collection, therefore the text may not allude to a weekly meeting. The account of Luke in Acts 20:7 when the church met on the “first day of the week to break bread” does not indicate sufficiently whether this was a weekly occurrence or just a once-off special meeting because the Apostle was in town. Paul is vague in reference to meetings of the whole church, this might suggest that its meetings were less frequent (See 1 Cor. 14:23, 11:33). It might be possible that the larger Christian gatherings followed the frequency of the voluntary and cult associations who met on a monthly basis. The meeting at Troas was at night, it might be that it was Saturday or Sunday night. The time was probably used because people worked. Banks (1980:41) concludes his observation on the topic: “The evidence for the time at which early Christians met is so slender that it would be unwise to make any confident generalizations from the small hints that we possess”. There is no solid example or Divine mandate provided by Scripture that can enforce the notion that the church met every Sunday.

When the church was born in Jerusalem, many Jews (3000) embraced the faith. There is no evidence that such a large group could assemble at a single place. A more accurate pattern is perhaps that of many smaller house churches – separate congregations similar to the Jewish Synagogues (Ladd, 1993:386). We do read however that the Christians continued to worship in the Temple and synagogues (Acts 2:46 “*They went as a body to the Temple every day...*”) (Hinson, 1996:42). For at least three decades Jewish Christians continued to make use of the Temple as a place of prayer and also frequented during national festivals (Acts 20:16). They observed the stated hours of prayer (Acts 3:1) and made use of the Temple courts for teaching and preaching (Acts 5:42) (Harrison, 1985:132). After the dispersion those who stayed behind continued to meet in the Temple despite several warnings from the Sanhedrin to stop (Acts 4:20). Worship happened in the Temple and synagogues of Jerusalem (Acts 6:9-10, 9:29). Synagogues were also frequented in various places throughout the Dispersion (Acts 13:14-15) although persecution and expulsion sometimes followed, as Jesus predicted (John 16:2)

(Harrison, 1985:132). Initially Christianity was simply a sect of Judaism and worshipping continued in very traditional Jewish ways and places. Paul chose synagogues as his point of entry to bring the Gospel to the world. With time, however, the distinctive beliefs of Christians about Jesus also necessitated special gatherings (Hinson, 1996:42).

Paul's letters give us a more accurate picture of where assemblies happened as time progressed. Extensive evidence has already been submitted to support the truth of house churches. Banks, (1980:61) says "for given the family character of the Christian community, the homes of its members provided the most conducive atmosphere in which they could give expression to the bond they had in common". At one point Paul alludes to an occasion when the "whole church" came together (1 Cor. 14:23). Such a scenario could imply that at other times the Christians in Corinth came together in small groups. The reference to various groups in Corinth who owed their existence to the work of different Apostles (Peter, Apollos, Paul – 1 Cor. 1:12-13) may be supportive of this theory. Another similar conclusion can be reached from the text in Romans 16:23 referring to Gaius who was the "host to me and to the whole church". Paul is believed to be writing from Corinth. The Septuagint uses the same expression in reference to the Assembly of Israel. This text must be referring to all the Christians in Corinth. Gaius was probably one of the more prominent men in the city, it is not surprising that his home would be used for a gathering of the whole Christian community (Banks, 1980:38-40). The qualification of "whole" is unnecessary if the Christians of Corinth only met as a single group. It implies rather that smaller groups also existed in the city. Paul's comments in Romans 16 about various Christian groups in the capital also support this theory. Rome was large, there is no evidence that the church ever met there as a whole. Justin remarks a century later that this had still not happened. In Paul's writings to the Corinthians he calls them an *ekklesia*, because all the Christians in Corinth did gather together. But to the Christians in Rome he writes "to all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be Saints" (Rom. 1:7). In Paul's theology *ekklesia* cannot refer to a group of Christians who never meet together, therefore he cannot describe the churches in Rome as *ekklesia*. The Corinthians like the Romans met together in smaller groups in different parts of the city, but the Corinthians also came together as a unit from time to time which the Romans did not do. The "whole church" never assembled in one place as it did in Corinth (Banks, 1980:38-40).

There is no New Testament mandated order of service, although some have speculatively suggested the existence of some forms of set ritual acts¹⁶. The elements of the service can be extracted from Scripture but there are no specific arrangements nor actual wording of hymns and prayers. This absence of the order of service gives relative unimportance to liturgical forms. The order may not be important, but what is in the order of service is important (Ferguson, 1996:248). Paul has no interest in constructing a fixed liturgy. Anything of this sort will restrict the freedom of the Spirit and lessen the variety of his communication. When a community gathers there will be structure, but this structure will emerge naturally and spontaneously based on the combination of gifts that comes to expression in it and in the order in which they are exercised. This structure will differ from assembly to assembly, and from community to community. While the proper working of the Spirit could not be safeguarded by the creating of a fixed liturgical structure, neither was it maintained by a purely spontaneous exercise of gifts. Order was important for Paul, but it was essentially a byproduct and not a primary concern (Banks, 1980:108-109). Paul envisions a worship that is free, enabled and empowered by an unquenched spirit (1 Thess. 5:19) yet orderly (1 Cor. 14:40) (Thompson, 1997:131). Indeed, as Barrett (1985:35) says “Paul describes the worship of the church as arising not from a liturgical order, but from a spontaneously offered contributions springing from the whole company” (1 Cor. 14:26). The context of the text is about the working of the gifts (*charismata*) in the assembly of the saints. These gifts are initiated and operated by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:11). Every member shares and contributes in a unique way (Barrett, 1985:35). There is thus a diversity and richness in congregational participation. Services were not stereotyped and there was free time when general participation was encouraged. Early Church worship can be described by the term “vitality”. Formalism had not yet set in and laid its restraining and sometimes deadening hand upon the service (Harrison, 1985:135).

Although the order of services would differ from congregation to congregation, it is most probable that some elements were virtually universal (Mckinion, 2001:44). Harrison (1985:132) claims that the early church modelled its own worship substantially after the Jewish

¹⁶ For Paul worship was not just cerebral but worked out in appropriate postures (Kneeling Rom. 14:11, Phil 2:10, Eph. 3:14, Prostration 1 Cor. 14:25, Standing 1 Tim. 2:8) attire (1 Cor. 11:4-16) and ritual acts such as the holy kiss (Rom. 16:16). The Worship assembly could take particular liturgical forms such as the amen (1 Cor. 14:16) uttered in Christ’s name (2 Cor. 1:20) the Maranatha formula (1 Cor. 16:22) the cry “Abba” (Rom. 8:15, Gal 4:6) confession formulae (Rom. 10:10) benedictions (Gal. 6:18) doxologies (Rom 1:25) and the triadic blessing (2 Cor. 13:14) (Thompson, 1997:131)

pattern of the synagogues, having the same basic ingredients of prayer, confession of faith, reading of Scripture, an exposition or homily, and the blessing of the congregation at the end. Paul instructed Timothy to read Scripture in the assembly (1 Tim. 4:13). In the 2nd Century Justin Martyr gives a glimpse of worship in his time, saying that “the memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits”. Adolf Schlatter makes a profound contribution at this point. He says the custom of exchanging the kiss of peace was an outgrowth of the public reading of letters from the Apostles for it is added in the letter at the close of several of them (Rom. 16:16, 1 Cor. 16:20, 2 Cor. 13:12, 1 Thess. 5:26, 1 Pet. 5:14). The kiss was a symbol of the brotherly love and unity that the reading of Scripture promoted as it met the needs of the congregation. The homily probably followed the reading of Scripture (Acts 13:15 & Luke 4:18ff.) In the presence of unbelievers, it would have a strong Christological slant, and if it occurred only among believers something from Scripture would be applied to the lives of the members (Harrison, 1985:133-134).

Singing has always formed a vital part of the worshipping community. Singing in the 1st Century Church flowed over from the synagogue practice of psalmody. Later on, however, other forms of praise were included: “Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” (Eph. 5:19 & Col. 3:16). For this reason, it is more accurate to say early church praise was simply singing, it includes all three forms of praise as described by Paul. According to Paul singing is directed to one another (a form therefore of building community cohesion (Meeks, 1983:145)), whereas the melody in the heart is directed towards God (Harrison, 1985:133-134). It is probable that the Early Church did not make use of musical instruments in their worship assemblies. Both Clement of Alexandria (late 2nd Century to early 3^d Century) and John Chrysostom of Constantinople (late 4th Century) opposed the use of musical instruments in worship claiming that such “entertainments aroused earthly as opposed to heavenly passions”. Basil of Caesarea (4th Century) took the opposite view. Although this topic has been debated (especially in the Restoration Movement) the thrust of Paul’s exhortation is clear: The sincerity of the worshipper is most important (Mckinion, 2001:44). Making music, whether it is with your feet or hands, is not as important as making music in your heart.

An integral aspect of Early Church worship was the aspect of offering. That the Early Church gathered together in fellowship often has already been clearly illustrated. *Koinonia* (fellowship) happens when people give and take, or share what they have in common. The Early Church shared with each other monetarily. Some have called this Christian Communism (Ladd,

1993:388). *Koinonia* is used in reference to the churches giving (2 Cor. 8-9, Rom. 15:26, 12:13, Heb. 13:16) and this particular giving could have happened when the community gathered in assembly (1 Cor. 16:2). Giving is a concrete expression of sharing, and enhances the sense of community. Not only did the Church share life, but they shared common goods (Ferguson, 1996:369-371). We read of Barnabas selling his field and placing the purchase price at the feet of the Apostles to distribute to the poor (Acts 4:37) and so did many others (Acts 4:34-35). A striking text is Acts 4:32 that shows how the notion of giving alms is taken to the next level by the Church as “each one’s possessions belonged to the other”. These Christians had a genuine concern for each other to such an extent that the wealthier Christians did not hesitate to sell their lands and homes in order to provide for the needs of the poor in the Christian community (Greer, 1986:121). The gathering of the Church was at the same time a duty and a pleasure, a material union when possible, and a spiritual convention in any case (Bovon, 2003:136).

There is no doubt that prayer was an integral part of the assembly. Paul instruct Timothy to ensure prayers are made for all people, especially for rulers (1 Tim. 2:1-2) in order that we may lead peaceful lives. Paul also points out that he wants “men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer without anger or disputing” (1 Tim. 2:8). The Book of Acts often refers to the Church praying together. And when prayer occurred in the community it seemed to be spontaneous and not rigid or formalised (Meeks, 1983:147).

The Church in Acts and also the rest of the New Testament presents a church that surpasses time and culture by refusing to provide a model for worship. Instead we see a clear vision of the components every healthy church should have. Scripture is clear about the elements a healthy church practice, but Scripture does not provide a model on how to do a worship service. The Puritans believed the setup of the furniture in a church building preached a nonverbal sermon. The churches before the Reformation had an altar at a central point since it communicated that you needed a priest to mediate between you and God. The Reformers replaced the altar with the pulpit to emphasise the centrality of God’s Word. The only other furniture in the room were the pews set in straight rows, but what that communicated to people is that they were an audience. We see quite a different picture of the assembly in the New Testament. People prayed for each other, they sang songs spontaneously, engaged in the activity of communion as a community, brought words of encouragement to one another, and responded to prophecy among other things. It was a participatory occasion and not an observational meeting (Jones, 2013:187).

The early house churches had a love ethic, meaningful relationships, interpersonal mentorship and a genuine outreach to the world (Cavey, 2012:8). In 111 CE, a number of years after the Apostolic Church, a profound letter was written by Pliny to Emperor Trajan in which he gave a perspective of the Early Church based on his personal observations: *“The Christians were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food – but food of an ordinary and innocent kind. Even this practice, however, they had abandoned after the publication of my edict, by which, according to your orders, I had forbidden political associations. I judged it so much the more necessary to extract the real truth, with the assistance of torture, from two female slaves who were styled deaconesses but I could discover nothing more than depraved and excessive superstition”* (Pliny, Letters 10.96) (Crossan, 1998:7). An outsider paints a very powerful picture of the Early Church here, but still shows a lack of understanding regarding the resurrection of Christ.

In summary, the assembly was a communal gathering where everyone was welcome. Whether you were poor or rich, you had a place in the *ekklesia* (James 2:2) (Giles, 1995:161). The Early Church assemblies were filled with prayer, praise and instruction. The nature of the elements being combined in the assembly was done in a spirit of freedom yet form, unity yet diversity, authority yet mutuality. Gathered worship was not escape from the world where a life of worship is lived, nor an individualist exercise in piety, nor essentially a one-way from the person upfront to the rest of the flock (Thompson, 1997:131). Worship in the Early Church seems to be marked with simplicity (Ladd, 1993:386). At least the practical aspects of worship were simple, natural and easy to administer. The largest New Testament challenge for the 1st Century Christian is that of “heart”. Jesus said: “In vain they worship me with their lips but their hearts are far from me” (Matt. 15:8). What matters to the Biblical authors most is the importance of sincerity of the worshipper. Merely attending worship assemblies out of a sense of duty was useless. Its purpose was to affect a changed life and sincere participation in the assembly produces spiritual benefits that enables one to take on the world in the Name of Christ.

5.3. Sacraments

The term “sacrament” is a Latin word stemming from *sacramentum* which is found in the Latin New Testament. The Greek translation is “*mysterion*”. Its earliest use is found in Eusebius in the 4th Century. What this tells us is that the idea of sacrament was not used in the New Testament (Barrett, 1985:55). Does this mean the Early Church had no practices which could be perceived as sacraments? Well, early Christianity doesn’t seem to be categorised as a religion. E.A. Judges states: “without Temple, cult status or ritual, they lacked the time-honored and reassuring routine of sacrifice that would have been necessary to link them with religion”. Although they practiced more community than ritual; it is also true that there was ritual that contributed to part of the community. Two such rituals are fundamentally presented within the pages of the New Testament: The Eucharist and Baptism (Meeks, 1983:140,0142).

5.3.1. Eucharist

There seems to be a sharp contrast between the importance of worship for the Early Church and the scanty and sporadic character of the surviving evidence of it. Perhaps the Early Church had no desire to impress the world by advertising their conduct of worship. Several scholars suggest the church in fact tried to do the opposite. Joachim Jeremias is one of them. He suggested that the church in the Apostolic age tried to protect its worship (especially the Lord’s Supper) from outside curiosity. He claims this must be the reason why so little is said about it in the New Testament (Harrison, 1985:137). The Biblical text, however, differs substantially from this view. All other aspects of the worship assembly might be scanty on the pages of Scripture, but the mandate and practice of the Lord’s Supper is clear. In fact, it is the most clearly prescribed practice in worship for the Early Church. Jesus commanded it (Matt. 26:26ff, Luke 22:7ff.) and Paul reinforced it (1 Cor. 11:17ff.). Both theologically and sociologically the Lord’s Supper was the central act of the weekly assemblies. We see this evidenced by Paul’s teaching on the Lord’s Supper to the Corinthians and also Paul meeting with the church at Troas to partake of it (Ferguson, 1996:250).

It is true that we don’t know whether the Lord’s Supper accompanied every gathering, or if the church came together for this special purpose. The phrase “when you come together to eat” implies that they possibly came together for that purpose. The word for supper that Paul uses (1 Cor. 11:20) is *deipnon*. When translated it means mostly supper and tells us that for Paul it was not a token meal or part of a meal, but simply the meal itself. It was the normal main

evening meal, the one to which guests were generally invited to. Except the words that accompany the meal it was no different from the customary meal in a Jewish home at which guests were present. The breaking of bread at the commencement of the meal and the drinking of the cup at the end were the usual ways of eating together. Prayers and blessing were attached to both. Ladd (1993:386) sees the meaning of the texts differently. He claims that the wording suggests the same twofold meal which was observed later in the Pauline churches: A common fellowship meal or *agape* (Love Feast) with which the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:20-34) is associated. Common meals played a large role in Jesus's ministry (Matt. 9:10-11, 11:19, Luke 15:1-2, Acts 1:4) and it continued to be an important factor in the religious experience of the church (Ladd, 1993:386).

The descriptions of the church "breaking bread" in Acts 2:42, 46 probably refer to ordinary meals since it was done daily. But considering the list of other practices of which it is part, it could refer to a more religious meal (Harrison, 1985:137). The most logical conclusion would be that the meal spoken of in this context was more of a fellowship meal than a religiously focused Lord's Supper. Ladd (1993:386) is probably correct in asserting there were two different meals spoken of. One being ritualistic and the other being fellowship driven. The reason for this approach is that the Early Church (especially Jews) would not easily reduce this meal to an ordinary meal. Not only was it commanded by Christ, and practiced by Christ in a special way, but this meal was also the outflow of the Jewish background of the Passover, Exodus and the Davidic Kingdom. The great difference is that it wasn't only celebrated once a year, but every week. It tied the life of the Early Church very firmly to the historical life of Israel (Wright, 1992:447-448).

It was meaningful and respected. It was a communal experience and therefore underscored the unity of the church (Harrison, 1985:139). As the community eat and drink their unity becomes visible. The meal is a social occasion and provides the opportunity for unity to take place in reality (Banks, 1980:86). It preserved the centrality of the cross within the community (Harrison, 1985:139). It also expressed the church's expectation of victory over death (Bovon, 2003:136). Here lies a deep eschatological truth associated with the meal. The meal is ended with wine, which is significant because they will drink it anew with Christ in the Kingdom to come. The meal not only reminded them of their relationship with Christ and one another, but actually deepened it as the church bonded together (Banks, 1980:86). There was no magical concept attached to the Lord's Supper for the Early Church. It was simply intended to be a

memorial of Christ, a means of bringing him to active remembrance (1 Cor. 11:25). Believers are to renew their contact with the historic Saviour in his death and resurrection, making it a real communion (Harrison, 1985:140). In summary, whether the Lord's Supper was shared with another meal (Love Feast) or whether it was practiced distinctly from any other meal, one thing is sure, the church made special time to partake of the meal as Christ mandated and Paul reiterated. The church eating together in their homes daily fits the theory of ordinary meals better than the Lord's Supper theory.

5.3.2. Baptism

Inherent in the continued existence of any community is the question of entrance. The rite of entrance for the Christian has always been baptism (Mckinion, 2001:5). The Book of Acts and also the Epistles are saturated with the rite of baptism as the way in which those who have put their faith in Christ are introduced into the church (Acts 2:41, 10:47-48) (Harrison, 1985:122). In actual fact, Luke in Acts infers that baptism was a normal first step for a convert (Barrett, 1985:60). The *ekklesia* welcomes into its fellowship all who accepted the proclamation of Jesus as messiah, repented and received a water baptism (Ladd, 1993:387). It was a means of incorporating people into the church, but it was also considered a crucial moment when one is sealed with the Spirit, consecrated by God and placed in Christ's possession (Bovon, 2003:136). Baptism has been called "the bath of regeneration". Mckinion (2001:6) claims the emphasis of the rite gradually shifted from one of initiation into a community to a symbol of, or even a means of individual salvation. He further notes that baptism was most important because it represented a decision to forsake sinful living, to obey the teachings of Jesus Christ, and to become a faithful member of the Christian community. The canonical inscription, however, does not reduce baptism simply to initiation into community but elevates it to an important act of faith (Mark 16:16), a crucial step in becoming a disciple (Matthew 28:18-20), an important act in obtaining forgiveness and the acquisition of the indwelling Spirit (Acts 2:38).

Baptism, like the Eucharist, had roots and therefore was not a totally unique practice to its time. Although baptism was not practiced in the Old Testament it is clearly illustrated as a cleaning agent in reference to moral and spiritual defilement (Ezek. 36:25; Zech. 13:1). It is possible that Christian baptism is associated with proselyte baptism, but it is more probable that it has common ties with John's baptism. John's baptism (unlike proselyte baptism) was not self-administered and it had eschatological overtones, being a preparation for the coming messianic

age, in view of which the candidate had to repent of sins. It is statements like that of Paul (Rom. 6:3) that makes an official separation between Christian baptism and all other baptisms. The text in question says that baptism is a baptism into Christ's death. Therefore, Christian baptism only took shape after Christ's death. It is also significant that baptism is a direct link to the history of Israel, particularly to the symbol of the Exodus and to the use of that symbol in the claims of a new sect (Wright, 1992:447). Paul makes use of the term "baptized" in relation to Israel and Moses at the Red Sea indicating that it was there where Moses and Israel were put in a special relationship of loyalty and obedience (1 Cor. 10:1-2). In the Greek this text carries the same construction as that which the Apostle uses in referring to baptism "into/unto" Christ (Rom. 6:3). In this sense baptism in the mind of the Apostle seems to be the moment when a person is put in a special covenantal relationship with Christ.

Baptise in Greek is *baptizo* which means "to dip, or immerse" (Mckinion, 2001:56). It was a water bath indicating a spiritual washing. It was done in total immersion and preferably in moving water. It is possible that some were baptised naked. It is very likely that at baptism a confession of faith in Christ was made (Rom. 10:9) (Meeks, 1983:150-152). The term *baptizo* itself indicates that 1st Century baptism was not sprinkling or some ritual performed on infants. Infant baptism also finds no historical foundation in the Book of Acts (Ladd, 1993:387). Water baptism has not been supported without contestation. But the evidence is quite clear. Hebrews 6:2 speaks of "instructions about baptisms" as being elementary teachings of the truth. When Paul wrote to a church he had not yet met (Rome) he felt safe to assume they had all been baptised (Rom. 6:3) and that they were informed of its meaning (do you not know?). Further, the apostle tied great meaning to his own personal baptism (Acts 22:16) (Harrison, 1985:126). Despite the common debates over baptism it is clear that baptism was an inherent practice of the Early Church. The mode was total immersion in water and it was not self-administered. It was believed to be tied to the forgiveness of sins, the receiving of the Holy Spirit and the "sealing" in the Holy spirit until the Day of redemption. Although baptism is important, and an act that every disciple committed to, it was in itself of no value. As Harrison (1985:130) points out: baptism does not promise regeneration apart from faith, which is always the underlying presupposition for submission to the rite. As James Denney has noted: "Baptism and faith are but the outside and inside of the same thing". One could thus say: If you believe, then why not be baptised? Indeed, baptism symbolises a decisive repudiation of one's sins and it serves as a lifelong commitment to Jesus Christ as one's Savior and Lord (Harrison, 1985:130).

Both baptism and the Eucharist tied together continuity with Jewish history (Wright, 1992:447). They both also serve as those parts of Christian practice which the church shares with every other society. You have to get your name on the books somehow (Baptism); and it is very natural for a group of people having the same theme in common, to mark at least some of their meetings with a common meal (Eucharist) (Barrett, 1985:87).

6. Early Church Organization and Leadership

As one considers the success of the Early Church in fulfilling the Great Commission one would imagine there must have been an effective leadership. Meeks (1983:84) states: “In order to persist, a social organization must have boundaries, must maintain structural stability as well as flexibility, and must create a unique culture. The second is concerned largely with leadership, the allocation of power, the differentiation of roles and the management of conflict”. When Jesus announced he was going to build His church (Matt. 18) he did not prescribe an organisational model or physical structure of leadership that would take the church to where it went. How then did the Early Church leadership model come about? As Porter & Westfall (2012:3) puts it: “*All of the elements of organisation and location came about as the church developed and attempted to fulfil its divine mandate*”. There was no prescribed leadership structure handed down to the disciples, they were just told to go and wait in Jerusalem for the Spirit to descend upon them. From then on we see a church being Spirit-led into the far reaches of the world. Amidst this dynamic development there were structural roles performed by individuals that were suited for the time and context. The structure and relationships of churches, together with the leadership models that evolved came about spontaneously which resulted in efficacy. The early churches were autonomous, had a flexible leadership structure, with the Apostles being the foundation and the roles of elders, deacons and evangelists being most prominent. Hierarchy was upside down, those who serve were the greatest. And finally, the community was made up out of equal members, clergy and laity were at the same level, each one with unique gifting.

6.1. Local Church Autonomy

It has already been established that the local church is the “full” church. The *ekklesiai* are not a splitting into parts of the universal *ekklesia* and neither is the *ekklesia* a sum of the *ekklesiai* (Ferguson, 1996:344). There is no suggestion in Paul’s ecclesiology of a visible universal church to which local gatherings are related as a part of the whole (Banks 1980:47). Ladd

(1993:391) explains it well when he states the church is not merely the total number of all local churches or the totality of believers, rather the local congregation is the church in local expression. The church in Ephesus is the church of God, not merely a part of the Church of God. This truth makes each individual church autonomous. Each community of Christ was in full unity with the rest by virtue not of an external superimposed structure but of the whole Christ represented in each of them (Ferguson, 1996:344). All churches felt they belonged to one another because they jointly belonged to Christ. There was a tremendous sense of unity but it was not formally imposed or outwardly sustained, rather it was a reflection in concrete experience of the true nature of the church (Ladd, 1993:391). Paul does not speak of any organisational framework by which the local communities are bound together and he nowhere prescribes an ecclesiastical polity of this kind. The only time he groups churches together it is based on geographical location, “the churches in Galatia” for example (Banks, 1980:47). Religious work in the 1st Century was carried on through the medium of the local church. Whether it was missions (Acts 13:1-3; 14:25-28), charity (Acts 11:28-30), or education (Heb. 10:24-25), each community of believers was sufficient and completely equipped to do its work. There was no need for a larger, overshadowing organisation to oversee the work of the local congregation (Ferguson, 1996:15). This does not mean there was no overshadowing authority for all local congregations. Even though the churches were not bound together by an organisation or through appointed officials, they all stood under the spiritual authority of the Apostles (Ladd, 1993:389).

Autonomy does not suggest that links between the various local churches were absent. Autonomy does not mean isolation (Ferguson, 1996:345). Paul encouraged and initiated fellowship between them, but it was based on enduring personal relationships rather than institutional systems. This happened through letters from the Apostles (2 Cor. 4:16) the visits of individuals from one group to another (Rom. 16:1), the sending of financial aid during time of need (2 Cor. 8:11-13) the burden of prayer on each others behalf (2 Cor. 8:14) and the passing on of news and greetings through intermediaries (1 Cor. 16:9, 2 Cor. 13:13 etc.). Unity between the scattered churches was not fashioned through corporate, organisational elements but rather through a network of personal contacts between people who regarded themselves as members of the same Christian family (Banks, 1980:48).

Autonomy does however not negate the occasional influence of local churches over others. The Church in Jerusalem certainly practiced a sense of authority or influence over the other

churches. When the Gentile churches faced the issue of circumcision it was taken to the Church in Jerusalem (Acts 15). The meeting that took place in Jerusalem has often been termed the first church council. This meeting does establish the precedent of meetings between representative communities to discuss problems and plan a common course of action, but this ad hoc meeting set no precedent for continuing or permanent conciliar or synodical bodies. No continuing organisation was created. As already noted, the only extra-congregational supervision of the Christian bodies that emerged was the Apostles (Acts 18:14, 11:29). It is the testimony and witness of the Apostles that forms the foundation of the church, and they remain the ambassadors through whom the will of the Lord is known. It is important to note that when they anticipated their absence from a congregation, they did not appoint personal successors to continue the supervision of the churches but only local leaders who were “entrusted to the Lord” (Acts 14:23) and commended “to God and to the message of his grace” (Acts 20:32). Such independence describes the nature of autonomy in the local church. Each congregation was self-governing. Autonomy is probably not the best word theologically because in regard to faith and practice the church is a monarchy, subject to its Lord. But in matters of opinion, expediency, and human judgment; each church is independent and a self-governing unit. The latter idea fits the description of autonomy well (Ferguson, 1996:345). Congregations were not independent, but rather interdependent.

6.2. Leadership Structure

The Church in Jerusalem seems to have been led by three men: James, Cephas and John. They were regarded as pillars since they seemed to have exercised decisive authority in matters of faith and practice in the church. Among these three it is very likely that James was the leader (Brandon, 1981:5). Jerusalem was fairly close to the Qumran Community (Essenes) where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. In the many attempts that have been made by scholars to compare and contrast the Early Church with this community, it has been suggested that there might be a leadership structure similarity. In terms of polity Qumran had a council of twelve plus three priests as leaders of the community. Perhaps James, Cephas and John fulfilled such a role since Paul calls them the “three pillars” (Gal. 2:9). The unlikelihood of this being such lies in the notion that the latter three individuals were not considered priests (Harrison, 1985:109). Hinson (1996:43) makes a strong case for the correlation by asserting that the number of correspondence is too great to be considered coincidence. Follow-up history however, does

not indicate the perpetual structure of such polity which makes it unlikely that such a form, even if initially promoted, of polity was structurally followed (Brandon, 1981:5).

It is probable that formal leadership positions within the Early Church communities were absent. The varied and imprecise terminology of church offices, its comparatively infrequent and emphatic occurrence in Paul's letters and the thrust of the remarks that qualify them ensures the fact (Banks, 1980:150). Acts and the Pauline letters do not mention any formal offices. The New Testament writers do not use the word *archē* in the sense of "office", nor its synonyms. This does not mean however that there were not unique leadership roles that developed (Meeks, 1983:134). Harrison (1985:108) mentions an important aspect that gives direction to Early Church polity. He claims that in the apostolic age there was ample room for voluntary, spontaneous leadership on the part of those who saw the need and moved to meet it. Instead of Paul rebuking this sort of thing as being a threat to the structure of the church, Paul commended it. He rejoiced in spiritual leadership, even when it was devoid of any official status (see 1 Cor. 16:15-16). This notion suggests the Early Church embraced a functional leadership. The goal of leadership was not for individuals to carry office or for the church to have some form of structure, rather it existed to fulfil a purpose that would benefit the church. Consider the Apostle for example. Meeks, (1983:131) says apostleship was a key leadership role but it wasn't an office but rather a function in the missionary activities of the time based on a direct missional revelation from God. Ladd (1993:388) similarly says the church's only leaders in the form of the Apostles were spiritual and not legal.

It is particularly interesting to note how absent hierarchical leadership is in the New Testament. Paul did not vest authority in one man, or in a group of men, over the remaining members who merely had to receive and submit. On the other hand, his communities were not egalitarian either. Paul did not vest authority in all equally. And the communities did not select or call certain people to act on their behalf in some democratic function. Paul's communities were theocratic in structure. Since God gave each individual in the community some attribute to benefit the church, there exists a strong democratic tone – everyone participates authoritatively in its activities (Banks, 1980:150). On this note it is worthy to relate the Jerusalem church's decision-making process. Some have called the Jerusalem Christian community a "guided democracy". A problem arises, the apostles come up with the answer, the church endorses it, and then is involved in its implementation (Acts 1:15-25, 6:1-6). It seems like this communal leadership is eventually taken over by a group of elders who are first introduced in Acts 11:30,

when they accept the gift for the poor on behalf of their whole community (Giles, 1995:96). The significant people in Paul's communities comes from the ministry discharged by them in the community, not from their status outside it or their position within it, and certainly not as an unchallengeable possession. Banks (1980:151) summarises it well: "In a real sense therefore the church is a participator society in which authority is dispersed throughout the whole membership".

So what we find in the Pauline churches is that all members were equal. There was no hierarchy, but there were some who were outstanding. They obtained leadership status because of the social reality of identification and not necessarily because of election. A good example might be 1 Thess. 5:11-14 where Paul exhorts the church to recognise those who labour among them. No official titles are supplied to these people, they were simply some of those whom the community could recognise as standing out (Barrett, 1985:37). Meeks, (1983:134) notes three parallel participles here that don't name three roles, but three functions of one role. This is someone who labours, admonishes and watches over... The fact that the text speaks to individuals in the plural suggests that there was a plurality of members who stood out in the community with this type of service. It is possible that the owners of the homes where Christians met took on leadership roles. The reason for this is because they were also naturally leaders of the nucleus of that family. It is possible that such leaders were called overseers (*episkopoi*) and their assistants (*diakonoi*). The first having a spiritual responsibility to the flock and the latter a physical responsibility (benevolence) (Phil. 1:1). In this theory it needs to be noted that leaders were identified and not appointed. As John Maxwell says: "The position doesn't make the leader, the leader makes the position". The leadership structure that emerges is the picture of a small house church where there was some formal leadership, but participation by everyone present was a possibility (Giles, 1995:121-122).

6.3. Apostles

There is no doubt that at the top of the Early Church polity stood the Apostles. These took over from Jesus and then lead the inception of the church. The term "apostle" occurs but once in the Septuagint (1 Kings 14:6) and in Hebrew (*shaluach*) simply means "one sent". In the Gospel period the disciples were rarely called Apostles. Only when they were sent on specific missions did the term emerge (Mark 6:7, 30) (Harrison, 1985:104-105). Jones (2013:39) points out that there were two groups of apostles: Those who walked with Jesus and those who were simply sent into the world. The *shaliach* (one sent – Apostle) in Judaism did not have a permanent

office. His standing pertained only to the specific mission in which he was engaged. The disciples were called to participate in the permanent mission of taking the Gospel into the world. They had a specific mission to fulfil in the 1st Century. But how was their role perpetuated? Apostolic succession cannot be grounded on New Testament data. Mattathias as successor of Judas was a special case. When James, the brother of John, was killed no provision was made for a successor (Acts 12:2). Only in the 2nd Century does the term apostle occur in the sense of “missionary” (Harrison, 1985:106). For the first 300 years of the church’s existence there were Apostles operating in the mission of the Church. Eusebius notes how many evangelists followed the role of the apostles and went into other regions of the world (Jones, 2013:39). The 1st Century apostle however had a permanent mission that would be unique. He had walked with Jesus for three years, testified as an eye-witness of Jesus’s death, burial and resurrection. For this reason, he had special authority and spiritual ability to lead the Early Church and take the role of “foundation” to the church. Apart from the special leadership role of the Apostles, the church leadership of the 1st century consisted out of elders, deacons and evangelists (Ferguson, 1996:319).

6.4. Elders

The leadership role of eldership cannot be denied on the pages of Scripture. Three particular passages (1 Pet. 5:1-2, Acts 20:17, 28 & Tit. 1:5-7) identify three titles for leaders with the same role. There are four Greek words used: *Presbuteros* (elder, older person, “senior man” (Banks, 1980:149)), *episkopos* (overseer, supervisor), *poimen* (shepherd, herder of sheep) and *oikonomos* (steward of the sty) (Ferguson, 1996:320). These terms should not be seen as “title” or “office” terms but rather as “functional” terms (Banks, 1980:150). The role of eldership is also extrapolated in various other texts (1 Tim. 5:17 & James 5:14). Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every town where they planted churches on their first missionary journey (Acts 14:23). We see the Church in Ephesus have elders, how they came to be we don’t know, but their existence confirms the central leadership structure the early church held dear (Harrison, 1985:108).

The term “overseer” was widely used in the Hellenistic age in reference to general superintendence. It is used once in reference to Christ (1 Pet. 2:25). It also appears in Acts 20:28, but curiously the same men who are designated as elders are also referred to as overseers. This seems to indicate that these terms are used interchangeably (Harrison, 1985:107). The role of overseer in Hellenistic Greek was used for various kinds of managers, foremen, supervisors

and inspectors. In the religious sense it could be used of the gods who exercised providence and watched over compacts. Secularly, it could refer to state officials with civic functions, supervisors at sanctuaries, construction foremen, tutors in an educational context or even a scout or watchman. Elder emphasised the age, experience and judiciousness of leaders, but overseers emphasised the more active side in work like managing affairs, guarding the group, and directing activities. The term “steward” used in Titus 1:7 reflects the household imagery of the Pastoral Epistles. A steward was a trusted slave who carried the responsibility of managing the household and other affairs for the owner. The church is presented as the family of God (1 Tim. 3:15). Stewards must therefore take care of its affairs for Him (Ferguson, 1996:322). Whether one speaks of elder, overseer, shepherd or steward it seems they all referred to the same leadership role in the church, but with different emphases.

The elders of the Early Church derived their function and name from Judaism which had known this position from the Old Testament era (Num. 11:16-24; Deut. 21:19-20; 1 Kings 21:8-11). The elders (Jewish) mentioned in the Gospels were most often members of the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem (Mark 11:27, 14:53). But there were also elders in the local Jewish communities, some of them also being mentioned in the Gospels (Luke 7:3). These Jewish elders were primarily older men with experience and wisdom who received the task of leading judicial matters – deciding disputes, interpreting the Law, and administering discipline. They were to serve as examples and preserve the tradition of the people (Deut. 32:7). Elders in the Early Church simply followed the same pattern fulfilling the same roles – overseeing the affairs of the community (Acts 11:30), deciding disputes (Acts 15:6, 22), and preserving the teachings (1 Tim. 5:17). It was therefore easy for the Early Church to accept this function since the Jews already understood its role and significance. Identical to Jewish communities there was always a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23; 21:18; 1 Tim. 4:14; James 5:14; Phil.1:1) (Ferguson, 1996:321-322). There were clear criteria for being eligible for the role of elder. We could call them institutional virtues in a tight organisation with a familial tone (Titus 1:5-9, 1 Tim. 3:1-7). To formalise a summary of the purpose of these qualities it is best to consider the view of Banks (1984:35): Paul is listing qualities necessary for someone who would have to get along with a community for a long time.

What were the significant function of elders? We can take note that the letters by Paul to Timothy reflects an apostle nearing death (2 Tim. 4:6-7). He is concerned about the church that stays behind and the young evangelist that has to lead them. He is concerned about the survival

of the church since false teaching is rampant and it could mislead the flock (Titus 1:10, 1 Tim. 4:1-2, 2 Tim. 3:6, 4:3). In the Timothy letters we see a Paul with a pastoral concern more than a missionary concern. The solution to a possible threat lies in the structure of the church elders. The authoritative guidance of such men will preserve the local church communities against disintegration. These elders are to be able to teach, and through such teaching hold to sound doctrine in order to protect the community from false teaching (Titus 1:9-2:1, 1 Tim. 4:1-11, 5:17). But the church is also the household of God (1 Tim. 3:15) which places the grave responsibility of elders to be like fathers taking responsibility for a home, administering its goods and providing example and discipline. Stability and close relationships similar to that of a family home will hold the church together against the disintegrating forces that surround or invade it (Banks, 1984:31-32). Key to their role in the church was shepherding...this is a pastoral duty which includes prayer and counselling. James 5:14 speaks of calling the elders when a person is sick in order to receive prayer from them (Giles, 1995:160). As Mckinion (2001:151) states, the best way to describe the role of the elders is by using the analogy of sheep. They are to feed the sheep with teaching and keep them safe from wolves.

6.5. Deacons

Apart from Apostles and Elders, deaconship was a leadership role in the Early Church. The first instance of deaconship is seen in Acts 6 as the church developed a problem with the distribution of food to the widows in the Church. The word “deacon” comes from the same root word “distribution”. Curiously we see the distribution of food taken over by deacons in Acts 6 in order to allow the Apostles to focus on the ministry of the Word. Luke does not give an indication as to whether the deaconship role became permanent in Jerusalem. The seven was not mentioned again in Acts and when the financial relief was brought from Antioch it wasn't deacons who collected it but elders (Harrison, 1985:106). It might seem like the office was temporary in the Jerusalem Church, but in the Pauline churches the role of deaconship was a permanent leadership function. A deacon (*diakonos*) was a special servant of the church. Like elders, deacons also had to possess inherent spiritual qualifications (1 Tim. 3:8-13) (Ferguson, 1996:334). In the Jerusalem deaconship selection qualifications were simply that they were to be filled with the Spirit (Acts 6:3, 8). We see in the Acts account that they were great preachers (Acts 8:5) and therefore didn't limit their role to service but also preaching (Harrison, 1985:107). The name of “deacon” suggests that these were assistants who serve under the supervision of the elders. Whereas the elders had spiritual responsibilities, the deacons had

physical temporal responsibilities. They were described as the “eyes” and “ears” of the bishop. Deacons had the primary task of ministering to the needy, visiting the sick, administering church property and assisting in worship. In summary we can say deacons are agents of the elders and intermediaries between them and the members of the congregation. In this work they represent and mediate the servanthood of Jesus (Ferguson, 1996:336-337).

6.6. Evangelists

There is an indication in Scripture that the church needed the role of an evangelist. Philip (Acts 6) is referred to as an evangelist (Acts 21:8). The list of leadership offices in Ephesians 4:11 lists “evangelist” after the apostles and prophets. We can deduce from 2 Timothy 4:5 that Timothy was considered an evangelist as Paul exhorts him to “do the work of an evangelist”. The term “evangelist” literally means “one who preaches the Gospel”. Their role was to win new converts like Philip did in Samaria (Acts 8:5-13) and the Ethiopian treasurer (Acts 8:26-39). Such a preaching ministry would often involve traveling (Acts 8:40) and locating for a period of time (Acts 21:8 – Philip was still in Caesarea some 20 years after Acts 8:40). Making converts doesn’t seem to be their only role. If they arrived at a place where believers with a deficient church life was, he would work to organise the church. We see such an instance with Titus who was left in Crete “for this reason, so that you should put in order what remained to be done, and should appoint elders in every town” (Titus 1:5). As we scan through the letters of Timothy and Titus it becomes clear that they were not only to evangelise but also to edify the church. They were also to teach younger men to preach the Gospel (2 Tim. 2:2) (Ferguson, 1996:329, 331-332).

6.7. Clergy and Laity

The English word “clergy” stems from the Greek word “*kleros*” which means “a lot”, “a portion”, “a possession”, or “something assigned”. The spiritual shepherds are not to Lord it over “their charges” (*kleron*), that is, the people allotted or assigned to their care. By a curious but not unusual semantic development, those who had a “charge” or “assignment”, a *kleros*, became themselves the *kleros* or clergy. The English word “laity” comes from the Greek word “*laos*”. *Laos* in Scripture refers to the whole people of God, not a part. These two words contrasted as depicted here indicates that the Early Church did not juxtapose the laity with the professionals (clergy) (Ferguson, 1996:75). What this teaches us is that everyone was a minister in the Early Church. Each member had a function like a body member, each has a function

(Barrett, 1985:31). Within the church there were no distinctions made between priests and laymen. For Paul, official priesthood which exists to mediate between God and man is shared by the whole community and never by any one member or group as distinct from others. It was a common priesthood, with no distinction between clergy and laity. Paul also rejected the formal distinctions between official figures in the church and ordinary members in the church. If he did hold such a view, there were ample words he could have used to express it (*arche* (ruler) or *telos* (power in office) etc.). Rather, Paul used terms like *diakonia* to refer to members of the church. Everyone were servants. The view of Paul that certain people did not possess formal rights to be placed officially above other “normal” members was not a common understanding in the 1st Century. There were officials in the synagogues who were over other members in regard to worship functions. The Pharisees occupied the chief seats in the synagogues (Matt. 23:6). Distinct officials also existed at Qumran and among the Essenes. Paul’s theology also clearly stated that there are no differences between members of the community and holiness, they all possess the Spirit. Paul didn’t just write to the leaders of the Church in Corinth, he wrote to the whole church community. It is everyone’s responsibility to ensure the assembly operates optimally, it is everyone’s responsibility to take care of each other and it is everyone’s responsibility to ensure discipline is handled in a Godly way (Banks, 1980:132-139).

7. Concluding Summary

Any investigation into the Early Church has to be fairly extensive, otherwise justice to the content and complexities of Early Church Ecclesiology will not be done. In this vain, much has been debated here. Denominations often choose to emphasise one aspect of the Early Church over others. I have tried to present an, as objective and balanced as possible account, of the Early Church. The most central conclusion I have reached is that the Early Church was communal. Everything revolved around relationships. These relationships are both vertical and horizontal. In its truest form, the church is a family. God is father, we are brothers and sisters. Families love, and they are authentic. Love and genuineness surpasses religiosity and ritual. Although ritual was kept at a minimum, we see the sacraments of baptism and communion take an integral position in the early church. If there were any mandated elements of Early Christianity it is these two that every church of any time should follow. Baptism is the rite that marks the entering of the earthly community temporarily and heavenly community eternally. The Lord’s Supper is a communal meal with God’s people in fellowship over what had been

done on the cross. Early Church worship services were far less liturgical than Christianity has portrayed. Worship in community was spontaneous, yet ordered. The essence of worship was relationship, praise from the heart to God, fellowship with one another. The leadership of the Early Church was far less bureaucratic and hierarchical as most of Christendom has suggested. Leadership was often situational and functional rather than legal. Such leadership catered for the needs of the community, shepherds catered for the spiritual needs of the flock whereas deacons served the physical needs of the flock. Evangelists took on the mission spearheaded by the original Apostles. Surprisingly the church was more democratic than what most “Pastor-led” contemporary churches would admit. At the heart of the early church existed a passion for mission. There was a deeper desire to do what is right than to be what is right. Churches gathered in homes, these groups were small. Small groups promote being “real”. Christianity was not about going to a building once a week for a time period. Rather it was a lifestyle, a sharing of life. Christianity lived itself out in public places too. Therefore, the church grew rapidly. The Early Church was a body on mission, a household in love and a bride in purity. All in all, the 1st Century Church had very little institutional elements. This information is now set up to be used in the engagement with the Restoration Movement and the Modern Church. Since the Early Church was the restoration goal, how did restoration leaders measure up with this 1st Century ecclesiology? In the next chapter I will evaluate the RM and its 1st Century ecclesiological ideals.

Chapter 3: A Historiography and Theology of the Restoration Movement

I turn now to consider the movement at the heart of this study. The Restoration Movement created an ecclesiology from the perspective of 19th Century America. It took its cue from Scripture and curiously did not elevate all the elements of 1st Century ecclesiology that have been pointed out in the previous chapter. It will be my aim now to describe how the movement came about, who the key leaders were, what particular principles it promoted and how effective it was in history. At the end of this chapter there will be enough evidence to show how 1st Century ecclesiology differs from restoration ecclesiology. Restoration principles will also signal possible points of interest for the Modern Church.

1. The Birth of the Restoration Movement in Context

Apostolic theology of the ekklesia is indeed rich in meaning and significance. The life and practices of the early church as seen through the lenses of Luke in the Acts of the Apostles is truly inspiring for any church of any time and place. The leadership structure we can identify in the early church was effective and efficient. The early church was not perfect, but something in its DNA made it living and impactful, it multiplied and left a powerful mark on the ancient world. But by the end of the 2nd Century much of the Apostolic Church had changed (Webb, 2014:14). Church History shows us how the Apostolic ecclesiology of the 1st century gradually took on a new identity. It didn't happen intentionally.

Gradually its leadership changed. The church in centuries following experienced pressure from within and without. In times when organisations undergo stress strong leadership is needed. Leaders who can make good decisions fast. A plurality of elders didn't seem to fit this task and so the church started to vest authority in individuals, strong leaders. The elevated elder then soon became known as the "bishop". This bishop would then have around him "presbyters" who acted as advisors in decision making. Within time it was established that the leader must not only lead, but trace his ancestry back to the Apostles (Hines, 2014:7). Soon it came to be that power was vested in an earthly man that stood at the helm of a hierarchical leadership structure over the church which phased out the importance of a plurality of elders to shepherd the flock. Bishops were now leaders over regions and no longer elders over people, the beginning of the institutionalisation of the church. Needless to say that the outflow of such a leadership structure led to the distinction between clergy and laity, another foreign idea to the early church (Thomas, 1941:24).

In the third Century the church was threatened with division over the deity of Christ. The first Christian Roman Emperor, Constantine, did not know how to settle this theological dilemma that threatened to split the church. He took the initiative to summon all the bishops of Rome to meet at Nicea to settle the issue. In AD 325 more than 300 bishops met and after long debate formulated the creed of Nicea (Webb, 2014:16). This effort of unity led to a statement of belief – a creed, the Nicene Creed. The creed to a large extent became the basis of all the creeds of the world. From this time on a human document was to be the standard of faith (Thomas, 1941:44). Though initiated with good intentions, creeds created more division than unity. As difficulties appeared creeds were adapted to include the concepts traditionally viewed as correct. These statements often came to embody human concepts and ideas particularly standing on philosophical ideas (Hines, 2014:8). Such human thought categories that influenced the creeds were originally derived from Greek philosophy and are quite foreign to the Hebrew-Christian tradition. History evidences that creeds are poor bases for the preservation of fellowship and unity (Webb, 2014:16). The early church had no need to reduce their faith to a creed which extrapolated their faith, their only creed was a person (Thomas, 1941,43).

It was a great day when a Roman Emperor confessed Christ for the first time. But it was also another step in the gradual drift away from the New Testament idea of the *ekklesia*. It paved the way for the merging of church and state. As time progressed the role of the bishop in Rome increased to the extent that he also possessed political power. By AD 600 the bishop of Rome was more than a bishop, he was a pope. The evolution of the political power of the pope and therefore also the Roman Church is no secret in history as the pope and the church were involved in war over kingdoms in the Middle Ages (Hines, 2014:8). The deviancy of the mission of the church became increasingly evident. One could go on and illustrate more extensively how the church gradually developed leadership structures, missional efforts, sources of faith statements and ritual practices that are foreign to the *ekklesia* we read of in the New Testament Scriptures. But the brief snippet I have offered makes it clear enough for the purpose of this study.

By the 16th Century the corruptions of the Roman Catholic Church had become so unbearable that things couldn't get worse. There were a few significant factors that brought the new challenge of the Reformation to the Catholic Church. It was the invention of printing, the revival of learning, and the enlarged acquaintance with and respect for the Scriptures. Much of

it started with John Wycliffe who has been named the “Morning Star of the Reformation” (Thomas, 1941:47). But the solid shock wave sent through the Catholic forces of the day came from the pen of Martin Luther on 31 October 1517 when he nailed 95 statements against some Catholic faith doctrines to the door of his Wittenberg church. Luther started a movement that rallied around three slogans: “sola fide” (faith alone), “sola scriptura” (Scripture alone) and “sola gratia” (grace alone) (Hines, 2014:9). Luther reached his point of defiance through personal study of the Word. He concluded that his church obscured the faith dimension of Christianity by its system of merits based on good works. From this central issue, Luther bravely took a stand against the corruptions that has infiltrated the church from the post-apostolic era (Webb, 2014:54).

Luther initiated the reformation of the Roman Catholic Church. It indeed eliminated many of the mechanical forms of religion, pointed people back to the Bible and the church of the Bible as the source for true Christian teaching and practice, and it renewed a proper sense of God’s grace and a trust in Christ for salvation (North, 1994:2). In the process reform did develop, but so did division. Luther unintentionally spearheaded a movement in the 16th Century that eventually lead to a plurality of creeds and ecclesiologies. Ulrich Zwingli originated the Protestant Movement (continued by John Calvin) which lead to its most central church namely the Presbyterian Church (1541). John Smyth could not come to agreement with infant baptism so he led a movement that promoted adult baptism and so doing created the Baptist Church (1606) (Thomas, 1941:55). John Wesley started the Methodist Church (1738) and so did Henry VIII in his immoral actions, he started the Church of England and the outflow of the Episcopal Church (Thomas, 1941:59). Slowly but surely “splintering” became more common. When these splinter groups emerged they became characterised by rivalry and competitiveness. The divisions formed, fostered the creation of specific theological statements to which adherents were fanatically loyal. Such theological statements fostered schisms which led to denominational division (North, 1994:3). When the New World was discovered in 1492 there was but one church in Western Europe. When serious settlement began a century later, there were numerous (Webb, 2014:20). The Reformation reformed the church, but in the process initiated a plurality of movements that gradually drifted apart and divided over creeds, doctrines and practices.

When the American continent was being colonised the various denominations with their creeds were simply transferred from the old world to the new. Religious pluralism roamed in

antebellum America early in the 19th century. The statistics of 1830 reveals that the major denominations were Roman Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Congregational, Lutheran and Episcopalian (Hines, 2014:106). For many immigrants the multiple protestant groups were something foreign. In Europe, each country had a dominant church – Lutheranism in Germany, Anglicanism in England, Reformed in Switzerland etc. The American scenario was thus one of religious pluralism, needless to say a confusing scenario to the European immigrant (North, 1994:4). The great question that arose as the new world was being colonised 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 into being a church that could appeal to all people, especially in a diverse religious milieu as found in early America. As the Spirit of God would lead, many opted for the latter, with a specific desire to see a more unified church experience in the new world (Webb, 2014:29).

It is also of great significance that the American colonisation coincided with the Age of Reason. John Locke wrote a book entitled “The Reasonableness of Christianity”. In it he deplored the pointless and often obscured speculation that were found in the numerous creeds. He also claimed that the accretions of Christian history were superfluous. He portrayed Christianity as a simple matter of belief of facts as set forth in the Scriptures. It is this understanding of the simple, reasonable and ethical nature of Christianity that would appeal to the rationalistic tendencies of the 18th Century (Webb, 2014:30). Many came to the new world with this mindset. James Madison¹⁷ for example was heavily influenced by Lockean thought and at one point stated: “*Those things alone should be held as essential, which our Lord and Master hath fully and clearly expressed, and which therefore cannot require the supposed improvements and additions of men*”. It was out of this theological milieu and religious pluralistic context that a movement emerged that some have called “The Reformation of the 19th Century” (Webb, 2014:32).

“The Reformation of the 19th Century” has more commonly been referred to as the Restoration Movement. It was started gradually by individuals spread out over early America. They were initially unaware of each other, but they promoted and took a stand on the same issues based on the same principles. Many will be named throughout this paper. The core objective of the

¹⁷ James Maddison, D.D. was the President of William and Mary College. The statement was made during an address to the convention of the Protestant Episcopal convention of Virginia in 1786(Webb, 2014:30)

movement was to “restore the ancient order of things” (Derry, 2014:9). In the face of the ecclesial confusion of the day these leaders believed that the restoration of the early church in the 18th Century using the New Testament as the only source of such an endeavour would unite all Christians. The variously scattered leaders came to realise independently that the church of their time had allowed tradition and human creeds to divide the body of Christ and was imposing teachings on its members that were inconsistent with Scripture. They then began to articulate what was perceived by some to be a radical concept of unity based solely on the authority of the Bible (Derry, 2014:8). It was a movement suited for the time. It arose when ideologies of self-assertion and criticism of old world religious traditions were both at a height. No wonder that the 1790’s marked the widespread idea that simple trust in the self-evident message of the Bible would overthrow the accumulated corruptions of the centuries, restore the church of the Bible to its New Testament character and unify the Protestant sects on the American frontier (Baker, 2002:10). The Restoration Movement took root and became the fastest growing indigenous religious movement through all of the 19th Century in America (Hines, 2014:11).

It is noteworthy to describe the relation of “reformation” with “restoration”. The Reformation sought to “reform” the Catholic Church. The Restoration Movement sought to “restore” the New Testament Church (Thomas, 1941:63). The reformers had the idea of reforming a corrupt condition rather than restoring the original. As Monroe Hawley (1976:18) puts it so well: *“Reformation results in patchwork structure, while restoration, if correctly followed, builds from the blueprints and reconstructs the original”*. This was the idea of the restorationists, they wanted to re-establish the apostolic church in their time. They believed it was possible. They believed it could only be done by simply and only using the New Testament as the means and authority to create a pattern of the early church.

At the core of the originating factors of the Restoration Movement stood a “reactive theology”. The restorationists reacted against the plurality of movements in their day. They reacted against the church traditions of the centuries because they saw how it divided. We see these reactions in the lives of many in antebellum America. James O Kelly, a Methodist preacher from North Carolina, pulled out of the Methodist church in 1794 because of its Episcopal form of government. Dr. Abner Jones, a prominent Baptist preacher in Vermont, left the Baptist tradition in the 1800’s due to his problem with its sectarianism. He established a church where the members were called Christians only and accepted only the Bible as a rule of faith and

practice. Stone and his colleagues opposed the Presbyterian church based on their disagreement with many anthropogenic elements of the tradition (Jovanovic, 2007:123-124). Many more can be listed. But not only did the movement emerge as a reaction against a plurality of churches, it also emerged due to the belief that the church (particularly in regard to Catholicism) in history existed quite contrary to pure biblical ecclesiology. It is quite evident that they stood in an anti-Catholic stance on many matters. Campbell believed that the church had fallen from its purity and simplicity with the emergence of the papacy and the development of the Roman Catholic tradition (Hughes, 2008:32-33). Catholicism and the traditions that flowed out from it were altogether considered corrupt by the restorationists. They often lambasted the “little popes” of Protestantism, the preachers of denominational churches. According to Campbell the little popes hardly differed from the pope in Rome. He maintained that they descended from Rome and like the pontiff himself represented a corrupted form of Christian faith which he labeled “Babylon” (Hughes, 2008:33). It is obvious that the restorationists felt the Reformation did not do the job well.

Once again it can be noted that church history often tells a story of individuals taking action based on perceived objectivity with good intentions which in the process lead to unintended consequences. North (1994:1) describes this aspect of church history well. He states that the apostolic church has always been a model for later generations to look back to in terms of theology and practice. To state this truism is also to admit that later developments within the church has often led to deviated forms of church. He then points to the picture I tried to paint earlier, that the church through history has accommodated the message to the world views and thoughts of its generation in different ways. The mere fact of survival in the ancient world meant that the church adapted itself to its environment. In this sense the church has always needed a sense of fluidity to stay relevant in every context of every generation. The problem is, as in our human nature, that later generations of Christians often identified with the adaptations rather than with the original model of the apostolic church. As a result, the church has constantly gone through cycles of revival to cast off some of the accretions that have built up around the structures of the church. Some of these revivals lead to significant cleansings, while others only added a new ecclesiastical form to the corpus of Christian activity. The Restoration Movement passionately sought to cleanse the church from any additions to the “ekklesia” that was carried along from the ages past.

It was the right context and right time for such a movement to emerge and find much favour. Most people on the American frontier became frustrated and lost interest in religion because most could not even agree about the basic tenets of faith (North, 1994:5). After the Revolutionary war only 7% of the population belonged to a church. The 1790 census revealed that church membership was at 10% with church attendance averaging 30% of the population (Hines, 2014:13). These statistics are all indicators of the religious atmosphere of Christianity in early America. When the Restoration Movement came along with its appeal to Christian unity and the basic common denominator of Christianity, many of these people heard a message they have long been waiting for. The people on the frontier were not standing in opposition to religion, they were just opposed to the petty squabbles among the myriad of religious groups. They readily identified with the positive and unitive message of the movement (North, 1994:5). In actual fact, the message of the Restoration Movement, led to large scale revivals, one of particular importance being the 2nd Great Awakening. Thousands renounced their sins and began following Christ (Hines, 2014:15).

At the helm of the religious revivals in early America stands the Restoration ideal. This ideology was not unique to history. Church history indicates that as soon as there was division there was concern for unity. We see this notion taking shape in the early church of Jerusalem as division was a concern over Gentile circumcision (Acts 15). In later centuries unity concerns surfaced in the wake of the cyclical divisions between eastern and western halves of Christendom – in the 6th, 9th and 13th Centuries to name a few. A few centuries later we see another such effort which can be named as an example: John Dury (1595-1680) tried to work out a theological statement that all major denominations could agree with. The idea of focusing on Scripture was also not new to church history. The renaissance scholars made their slogan *ad fontes* (“to the sources”) famous (North, 1994:7). It is obvious how this slogan brought the American frontier Christians simply back to the Bible and only the Bible. For two hundred years after the Reformation churches held to this ideology of back to the sources. So if the two ideals extrapolated above (unity and biblical authority) are not unique to the history of the church, what makes the Restoration Movement so unique? It was the first time in history that these two concerns were combined. Not until the Restoration Movement got underway was anyone concerned about restoring the unity of the church by restoring the original standard of the church. It is a restoration of biblical authority, that the church may be united, in order that the world might be won according to the prayer of Jesus – that was the pre-eminent purpose of the Restoration Movement. Unity and biblical authority was a means to an end, not ends in

themselves (North, 1994:9). The Restoration plea was a call for unity by throwing off the ecclesiastical accretions of church history by submitting to the Bible and only the Bible. To summarise the Restoration Movement's place in history from the perspective of the typically restoration plea ideal, I quote the title of Leslie Thomas's book (1941) on the Restoration Movement: "The Church, the Falling Away, and the Restoration".

2. Restoration Beginnings: A Movement Emerges

The restoration ideal was already coming to life in the Old World. At various places across Europe churches with anti-creedal and solely Biblical perspectives were being established. Such churches were seen in Glasgow (1778) and Edinburgh (1798), Scotland, Criccieth (1799) North Wales, Tubemore (1807) and Dublin (1810), Ireland, and Manchester (1810), England (Thomas, 1941:73). Much of the "restoration thinking" originated in Europe and was further strengthened and established in the early American context. James O'Kelly was probably the first individual on the American frontier who stood for restoration thought. He came to Virginia from Ireland in 1760. In 1775 his wife was converted to Methodism after which he soon followed and became a lay Methodist preacher and later a presiding bishop over southern Virginia (North 1994:13-14). O'Kelly developed a problem with non-biblical hierarchies in church governance and started promoting a "bible only" approach to his teaching. In 1792 he engaged his superior, superintendent Francis Asbury, in debate over this issue, but was unsuccessful in his persuasion. The situation led O'Kelly and his followers to meet by appointment at Manakin Town, Virginia on 25 December 1793 to form themselves into a new religious identity. They called themselves Republican Methodists and within a few days reported one thousand members in the new church (North, 1994:15-16). A year later, in August 1794 a group of seven men met together to work out a plan of church governance. At this meeting Rice Haggard¹⁸ spoke up and said: "*Brethren, this (a Bible) is a sufficient rule of faith and practice. By it we are told that the disciples were called Christians, and I move henceforth and forever the followers of Christ be known as Christians simply*"¹⁹. It was at this meeting that they decided to adopt "Five Cardinal Principles" which can be summarised as follows: (1)

¹⁸ Reformer and pamphleteer associated with the Republican Methodists of Virginia. He is credited with influencing two frontier reform movements to adopt the name "Christian". The two movement being the Republican Methodists of Virginia and the Stone movement from Kentucky (Helsabeck, in *The Encyclopaedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, 2004: 377).

¹⁹ Cited in Earl Irvin West, *The Search for the Ancient Order*, I (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1974) pg. 10.

Christ is the only head of the Church, (2) the name Christian only, (3) no creed but the Bible, (4) Christian piety is the test of true fellowship and the right of private judgment and (5) the liberty of conscience, the privilege and duty of all (Hines, 2014:24-25). In 1801 the group adopted the name “Christian Church” (Hawley, 1976:27).

It is worthy to mention William Guirey who was also stirred to seek the true Biblical church. In 1794 he went to Jamaica where he found religion to be cold and lifeless, especially under Anglicanism. He decided to start preaching independently and within weeks converted sixty people. It did not take long for him to be excommunicated and sent back to America. While in America he left the Methodists due to his disagreement of their doctrine. Episcopalianism prevented him from uniting with Catholics, Episcopalians, and Methodists. Calvinism prevented him from uniting with the Baptists or Presbyterians, and there were no other churches in his area. He described his dilemma in these words: “*What was to be done? To stand alone was disagreeable – to unite on bad conditions was worse. Thus circumstanced, I perused the Scriptures, and from them gathered a system, which I conceived to be correct; after my mind was perfectly satisfied on the subject*”²⁰. Not much later Guirey found a group calling themselves only Christians, the O’Kelly group. O’Kelly and Guirey did not agree about baptism, but nevertheless they joined forces (North, 1994:19).

Elias Smith (1769-1846), another significant restoration leader, was forcefully baptised in his mother’s Congregationalist Church at age eight which made him averse to the church. At age sixteen he almost died in the woods when a log fell on him. The event caused him to seriously question his salvation and search the Scriptures. His study led him to discover that baptism by immersion was cardinal and infant baptism was unscriptural. This drew him to his father’s church, the Baptists (North, 1994:24). At age twenty he was baptised in the Baptist church and became a member. He served as a Baptist preacher for ten years before he became convinced through his study of Scripture that orthodox Calvinism was in error and that all standardised bodies of doctrine and creeds were incorrect. Soon Smith found himself in a position that opposed theological systems as tests of fellowship and ecclesiastical forms as bonds of unity. At the heart of his motivation lay the desire to restore the simple faith and practice of the New Testament Church. From jumping here and there Smith eventually met a Dr. Abner Jones (1742-1841) who brought him to the Christian Church Movement of New England.

²⁰ Cited in *Herald of Gospel Liberty*, April 14, 1809, pg. 65.

Dr. Abner Jones was converted to the Baptists at age twenty and served as a part-time preacher, diligently being studious of Scripture. Throughout his studies in the 1790's he found three ideas related to his Baptists tradition unsettling: (1) He could not find a Scriptural warrant for the name "Baptist Church", (2) he was concerned about portions of Calvinism that he could not find sanctioned in Scripture (particularly predestination), and (3) he developed doubts about typical Baptist church polity (the organisation of Baptists churches in local associations) (North, 1994:25). He then dedicated his life as a restoration advocate in New England where he founded the first three congregations of the so-called New England "Christian Connection" (Foster *et al*, 2004:433). The first was in Lyndon, Vermont (1801), the other two in Hanover and Piedmont, New Hampshire (1802). In 1803 when Smith met Jones, Jones encouraged Smith to establish another church in Portsmouth, New Hampshire (Foster *et al*, 2004:190). The Jones-Smith movement was characterised by anti-Calvinism, anti-creedal and anti-theological systems. They took grounds on a simple return to New Testament Christianity (Hines, 2014:26).

Smith started a tradition that was used subsequently by the Restoration Movement to further its cause drastically. It was the creation of a religious journal. He published the *Herald Gospel of Liberty* for the first time in 1808 with 274 subscribers. It may well have been the first religious journal in the world. The paper ultimately reached 1500 readers, a substantial number for the day. Later on leaders in the Restoration Movement realised the effectiveness of religious journalism and used this method of proclamation to bring about its influence in early American society (Hatch, 1980:27). The Smith-Jones churches named themselves "Christian Church" and in 1807 there were about fourteen churches like this in New England (North, 1994:26). In 1808 the Republican Methodists (O'Kelly-Guirey) heard of the Jones-Smith movement of New England, met and united on three principles: (1) No head over the Church but Christ, (2) no confessions of faith, articles of religion, rubric, canons or creeds but the New Testament, and (3) no religious name but Christian (Hines, 2014:28).

In the meantime, the Second Great Awakening²¹ was sweeping through America west of the Appalachian Mountains. Thousands attended great emotional revivals which cut across

²¹ The great Awakenings were historic periods in which American Protestants perceived intensive and diverse manifestations of the Spirit of God in revitalizing Christian faith, experience and service. The First Great Awakening was between 1720 and 1740 and the Second Great Awakening from 1790 to 1840. The Second Great

denominational lines. The greatest of these were in 1801 at Cane Ridge, Kentucky, at which an estimated 20 000 to 30 000 people were present. The host congregation was the Cane Ridge Presbyterian Church lead by Barton William Stone (Hawley, 1976:27). Also, in the same time-period a father and son, Thomas and Alexander Campbell were on their way to the New world where they were destined to make inroads in American religious society with solid restoration ideologies. From this point in the “restoration story” Stone and the Campbell’s become the major leaders, thought shapers and promoters of the Restoration Movement. As Nathan Hatch (1980:39) points out, the movement started by Smith and O’Kelly slowly but surely vanished into insignificance while the Stone-Campbell movement in the West grew into a major denomination. But I mention the roles of Abner Jones, Elias Smith, James O’Kelly and William Guirey to point to the truth that these men came to similar conclusions independently despite being separated geographically. And they, neither Stone or Campbell, were the only ones. In 1819, John Wright an Indiana Baptist offered a resolution to the Blue River Association to dispense with all party names in favour of biblical expressions such as Christians. He called for an acceptance of God’s Word as the sole authority of faith and practice. Interestingly enough, by 1821, there were no longer Baptist churches in his region. A similar movement was started in 1809 in the vicinity of Tompkinsville, Kentucky by John Mulkey on the basis of the “Bible alone”. In 1819, Herman Dasher, a Lutheran immigrant found his way out of religious error by standing only on the grounds of New Testament teaching. And so I can list many such examples. There have been many distinct attempts to return to the Bible alone as our only source of authority. They continue to be discovered throughout the world, vividly illustrating that the restoration plea is not uniquely American, but is as universal as the Gospel message itself (Hawley, 1976:31).

3. Key Restoration Leaders: Stone & Campbell

The leaders described above who spear-headed a return to simple New Testament Christianity in their own contexts did a great work, but they did not formulate clearly defined ecclesiologies and memorable restoration principles. It was Barton Stone and the Campbell father and son combination who laid down the foundation of the Restoration Movement with clearly defined restoration principles and a stipulated ecclesiology. The leaders identified earlier, pointed in the same direction as Stone and Campbell, but they did not leave significant doctrinal or

Awakening was fuelled by the camp meetings which picked up intensity in Logan County, Kentucky, in 1800 (Olbricht, *in* The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement, 2004:368-369).

theological marks in the Restoration Movement as did Stone and Campbell. For this reason, the Restoration Movement has also often been referred to as the Stone-Campbell movement. Most historians place the formal origination of the movement with Stone and Campbell. The Restoration Movement therefore resulted from the confluence of two streams of thought to which were added other lesser known tributaries (Hawley, 1976:59). I turn now to consider these two streams of thought flowing from Stone and Campbell respectively which formed a movement that still operates on much the same premises today as those they established more than two centuries ago.

3.1. Barton W. Stone (1772-1844) was interested in faith from a young age. He eagerly listened to preachers who passed through his hometown in Virginia. He vacillated between two groups of Christians, the Methodists and Baptists, and witnessed the animosity between the two denominations. The conflict discouraged him to the extent that he quit praying and immersed himself rather in the sport of youth (North, 1994:35). Using his inheritance money, he went to study at University where he distanced himself from religion. One night, however, he was invited by a roommate to a revival service where James McGready (1760-1817) was preaching. His preaching was of the hellfire-and-damnation style. Under this preaching Stone decided to seek religion. He started seeking, but Calvinism caught him short. He wanted to be saved, but nobody could tell him how. At another preaching service William Hodge preached a sermon on 1 John 4:8 on the idea that God is love. It was this message that converted Stone. He became a devoted Presbyterian (North, 1994:36-37).

Stone decided to become a minister, but had to study theology and also prepare a sermon on a doctrinal topic. The topic given to him was on the trinity. He received some books to study through. In his quest he struggled and simply became more confused. He did not have a problem studying the Bible but he struggled with man's theologies. Before long he found himself emotionally and psychologically depressed because the study of abstract theology and Calvinistic systematics left him with a deflated, comfortless spiritual life. Nevertheless, Stone received his licence to preach in 1796 in North Carolina in the Orange Presbytery (North, 1994:38-40). The ordination process included a public confession on agreement with the Westminster Confession of Faith. Stone knew he had to be in agreement with the confession and so he studied it before his ordination. The confession troubled him since he could still not come to grips with the doctrine of the trinity and he found it difficult to agree with the doctrines of election, reprobation and predestination (Webb, 2014:45). When he was asked about the

confession in the presence of the Presbytery whether the confession is what is taught in the Bible he replied: “I do, as far as I see it consistent with the Word of God”. No objection was made and Stone was ordained (Webb, 2014:45-46).

Stone served as an itinerant preacher for a few years but eventually decided to settle down as a permanent preacher at two small congregations in Cane Ridge, Kentucky (Webb, 2014:44). Stone’s mind was troubled by the state of religion on the frontier; apathy was widespread and the influence of Christianity was on the decline. He made it his ambition to look for a way to revitalise frontier religion. At this junction (1801) he heard of a vibrant revival and awakening happening nearby in Logan County where James M Gready was preaching, the man whose preaching earlier had a great influence on him (Hines, 2014:31). This “Camp Meeting” impressed Stone so much that he was inspired to preach more fervently and decided to arrange a similar camp meeting at his home county. On 13 August 1801 Stone lead the largest camp meeting of all frontier history in Cane Ridge where there were from 10 000 to 30 000 people in attendance. Six preachers from different denominations were preaching at a time. It went on for days but eventually had to end due to a lack of food. It was interdenominational and there was harmony. Stone estimated the conversion of 500 to 1000 people at this event (Hughes, 2004:47,49).

The results of revivals like these caused great debate. “Exercises”²² often occurred which many found to be strange and out of order. Although many sneered at these behaviours it cannot be doubted that the revivals, especially the one at Cane Ridge had a profound effect on frontier life. Community life was improved and lawlessness and immorality declined (Webb, 2014:49). Interest in church was quickened and great church growth occurred across Kentucky in different denominations (Hines, 2014:32).

The largest fact that impressed Stone was the harmony and unity he saw between the different denominations. But his involvement in the Cane Ridge Revival cost him his future in the Presbyterian church. The revivals were criticised for three things: Firstly, the “exercises” were considered irrational. Secondly, the informal and unstructured nature of the camp allowed lay

²² During the proceedings of the revivals people would often start demonstrating ecstatic behaviors which some believed were led by the “Spirit”. The description of these exercises also explains how it was manifested: “falling exercises”, “the jerks”, “the dancing exercise”, “the barking exercise”, “the running exercise”, “the singing exercise” (Webb, 2014:48).

preachers to preach, which obviously opposed Presbyterian ordination principles. Thirdly, the theology of the revivals opposed the Westminster Confession of Faith by rejecting the doctrines of election and depravity (Webb, 2014:50). After a series of internal church politics, Stone and four other Presbyterian preachers separated from the Synod of Kentucky. On September 12, 1803, Robert Marshall, John Dunlavy, Richard McNemar, John Thompson and Barton Stone proceeded to organise a separate body which they called the “Springfield Presbytery”. Their reasons for doing so was published in a document entitled: “An Apology for Renouncing the Jurisdiction of the Synod of Kentucky” (Foster *et al*, 2004:696-697).

The *Apology* noted in essence a disagreement with Calvinistic doctrine. These men rejected total hereditary depravity with its emphasis on human inability and instead underscored the Biblical teaching that “faith comes from hearing” (Rom. 10:17). It was emphasised that they no longer believed and neither could support the notion that regeneration precedes faith (Hines, 2014:35). It was a document that entailed the objections of the doctrines of election and fore-ordination together with an affirmation of the rejection of all creeds of human devising (Webb, 2014:53). These men had no desire to depart with their Presbyterian roots, they simply wanted the freedom to preach and teach Scripture as they understood it (Hines, 2014:36). Many supported the new Presbytery and the following year there were already fifteen churches in the vicinity (North, 1994:53).

The Springfield Presbytery only lasted a short while, nine months (September 1803 to June 1804). In a meeting with Rice Haggard²³ they decided to dismantle the sect since they came to the realisation that it opposed everything they believed and stood for (Webb, 2014:53). They wanted to be known simply as Christians, and therefore denounced their party name. In the name of freedom from human institutions they declared their intentions in an important document entitled “The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery” (Hughes, 2008:11). This document is significant to the Restoration Movement since it holds four particulars that the Restoration Movement holds dear: (1) The ideal of Christian unity, (2) the emphasis on the authority of the Bible in all matters relating to faith and practice, (3) the local autonomy of each congregation, (4) the rejection of titles and the artificial distinction between clergy and laity (Hines, 2014:36). At the heart of the document stood a desire to “sink into union with the body of Christ at large” (Webb, 2014:54). Having divorced themselves from

²³ The man who a decade earlier had persuaded the Republican Methodists at Mt. Lebanon, Virginia, to adopt the name “Christian” as the biblically approved title for the followers of Jesus (Webb, 2014:52).

Presbyterianism altogether, they then constituted themselves simply as a community of Christians (Hughes, 2008:11).

But by 1811 Stone was the only leader left in this “Christians only” group. Soon Shaker missionaries converted McNemar and Dunlavy, the latter eventually becoming an elder. Marshall and Thompson returned to the Presbyterian tradition on October 9, 1811. Only Stone was left, that is why the movement increasingly became known as the “Stone Movement”. But by this time there were many followers of the “Last Will and Testament” and the Stone movement began to grow steadily (Webb, 2014:55). Over the next forty years Stone attracted a large following, especially in southern Ohio, Kentucky and Northern Alabama. His leadership was characterised by several themes: He insisted on freedom from human tradition in religion and he actively promoted the restoration of primitive Christianity as the means of uniting all Christians. Stone was a pietist and held a deeply apocalyptic worldview which prompted him to advocate simple, ethical living. In his personal life he believed in separating himself from the prevailing values of the culture and to hold himself aloof from militarism and politics (Hughes, 2008:11). As settlement in America increased and Christianity in America became more alive, Stone wanted to bring some cohesion to the movement he was leading. To reach this end he started to publish a monthly magazine, the “Christian Messenger”. It was published from November 1826 till his death in 1844 (Webb, 2014:57).

3.2. Thomas and Alexander Campbell shared perhaps the largest part of influence on the Restoration Movement. Thomas was born in Northern Ireland in 1763 in an Anglican home. He loved Scripture but found the Church of England cold and formal which challenged him to seek genuine Christianity elsewhere (Hines, 2014:42). He had a brief “salvational experience” in the Presbyterian church and later became a Presbyterian Minister where he preached only from Scripture. His thoughts and views were influenced by independent preachers like James A. Haldane, Rowland Hill and John Walker who often preached at an independent church close to their home. Other opportunities also introduced him to the thinking of those related to the Glas-Sandeman movement in Scotland. In his personal growth, Campbell became increasingly troubled by the church divisions in Presbyterianism and also between the Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland. In many ways he tried to bring about unity to no avail and ended up becoming very ill. At the advice of his physician, he decided to travel by ship to America where there was apparently religious freedom and cheap land. He was to go and scout before bringing his family over. He arrived in 1807 and started preaching immediately under the

Chartiers Presbytery of Pennsylvania. He soon became popular and just as soon developed problems with the Chartiers Presbytery for allowing Presbyterians from different party lines to partake of the Communion together. He was suspended from the Presbyterians and became an independent preacher, gathering many followers in the process. In the summer of 1809 Campbell and his followers met to discuss a plan for the future. At this meeting Campbell spoke passionately about his concern for unity and the sole authority of the Bible in matters of faith and practice. He closed the meeting with a very famous dictum: “Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent”. There was no intent from anyone to start a new religious movement, but on 17 August 1809 Campbell and his followers established an organisation entitled “The Christian Association of Washington”. On 7 September 1809 Thomas Campbell read a document he penned entitled: “The Declaration and Address of the Christian Association of Washington” (Hines, 2014: 44-46).

The *Declaration and Address* has been recognised as one of the most significant documents produced in the Restoration Movement (Hines, 2014:46). It included thirteen propositions Campbell believed could produce Christian unity when uniformly practiced (Hines, 2014:47). Jovanovich (2007:125) boils the manifesto down to four points for simplicity: (1) The unity of a single church – there is only one church; (2) Christian unity through local congregations; (3) the New Testament is the framework of Christian unity; (4) the authority of the New Testament – it is the highest written authority for Christian faith and practice. In its simplest form, this document called for Christian unity through a return to the clear and unambiguous teachings of the New Testament (Hughes, 2008:11). It is this notion that set the stage for the central theme of the Restoration Movement, the goal being to attempt to recover in the modern age the Christian faith as it was believed and practiced in the 1st Century. Thomas Campbell was initially concerned primarily about unity and then became convinced that it would only by following the precepts and examples of the New Testament be accomplished. The unquestioned authority of Scripture was the means to unity, and this in turn was the means to winning the world to the Gospel of Jesus Christ (North, 1994:94).

Thomas sent a letter to his family back in Ireland stating that conditions were favorable and they could board the first ship to America. They boarded the *Hibernia* on 1 October 1808, but the ship almost sunk in a terrible storm which forced it to run aground off the coast of Scotland. The experience was so terrifying to Alexander that he made up his mind to serve God if they made it safely to shore. It was too late in the year to board another ship so the family had to

winter in Scotland until the next summer. During this time Alexander decided to enroll at Glasgow University. Here he was influenced by Scots' Common Sense Philosophy and the Independent religious movements of the Haldanes, Glas, and Sandeman. Greville Ewing, a Haldanean minister, left an indelible imprint on Alexander. Ewing emphasised weekly communion, rejected human creeds, insisted on a plurality of elders overseeing each locally autonomous congregation and promoted mutual ministry. During their stay in Scotland, Alexander decided to part with Presbyterianism when he was examined at a communion service whether he was worthy to participate or not. It is interesting to note that Thomas and Alexander left the Presbyterian Church at more or less the same time, without knowing about each others life changes. When the Campbell family eventually arrived in America during September 1809, Thomas gave his son Alexander the *Declaration and Address* to read. Alexander agreed with the manifesto and from then forward father and son stood together in the quest of unity for all Christians based on a return to simple New Testament Christianity (Hines, 2014:51-52).

Thomas gave his son the opportunity to address the Christian Association of Washington in 1810, this was to be his first devotional. They were so impressed with his preaching that he was later invited to preach a whole sermon to a larger audience. His preaching was powerful and he soon became a favourite preacher with many invitations coming his way (Webb, 2014:102). Apparently he preached one hundred sermons in his first year (North, 1994:105). The Campbells promoted unity and therefore did not want to be separate from other churches. They pleaded with the Presbyterian Synod of Pittsburgh for admittance into their fellowship. But the Synod refused since they felt that the Christian Association of Washington promoted division rather than unity, denied the value of creeds (especially the Westminster Confession of Faith) and because Alexander Campbell preached without a license (Hines, 2014:53). It might seem strange how both Campbells rejected Presbyterianism and then later desired to be admitted into their fellowship. To explain this discrepancy one must take note that the purpose of the Christian Association of Washington was to create a movement to work within existing bodies to bring about reform and thereby achieve Christian unity. As a body, the members of the association was to meet semi-annually. It was never meant to become a church. But circumstances changed the ideal since most people associated with this new movement were not allowed to worship with other churches because they rejected their creeds. They were therefore left with no other option but to worship together weekly (Webb, 2014:103). On 2 May 1811 they established the Brush Run Church with Thomas Campbell as elder, four deacons, and Alexander Campbell was licenced to preach (Webb, 2014:92). The church existed

out of some thirty members (Jovanovich, 2007:128). This church served as the first example of an autonomous congregation under only one authority, namely Christ (Webb, 2014:92).

In the same year that the Brush Run Church was started Alexander Campbell married, and a year later they had their first child, a daughter, Jane. Alexander was now confronted with a somber theological challenge. Was he going to baptise his daughter according to Presbyterian (Sprinkling) tradition or not? Suddenly the “restoration ideal” of “Scripture only” became a serious test. Campbell had to practice what he preaches and find out from Scripture only what he was to do. Rather than relying on tradition or feelings, he applied inductive reasoning letting the Bible speak for itself. He concluded that Jane didn’t need baptism, but he did. He also discovered that biblical baptism was not sprinkling but immersion (*baptizō* - Greek) (Hines, 2014:53-54). Alexander wasted no time to get baptised and within a week ten people from the Brush Run Church was baptised with another thirteen the following week. From this point forward baptism became a vital part of the Campbell tradition (Webb, 2014:93). It was also from here forward that Alexander started taking the lead in the movement with his father slowly moving into the background (North, 1994:113).

The practice of baptism made the Brush Run Church look all the more like a Baptist church. Campbell also often got invited to preach at Baptist churches. Sometime in 1815 the Brush Run Church was accepted into the Redstone Baptist Association (Hines, 2014:55). Campbell allowed this alliance because he was hoping to meet a larger audience through this move to promote the return to New Testament Christianity (North, 1994:115). In August 1816 Alexander was allowed to preach at the Cross Creek Baptist gathering where he preached “The Sermon on the Law” which marked the beginning of the seven-year war with the Baptists. It was a sermon about the separation of the Old and New Testaments. Tensions increased and in 1824 the Brush Run church was formally removed from the Redstone Baptist Association (Hines, 2015:55).

A very common phenomenon on the frontier was public debates. It served as a great means of propagating the truth and exposing error (Webb, 2014:116). It also provided entertainment and thereby drew many people (Hines, 2014:77). Alexander Campbell²⁴ participated in various

²⁴ Campbell’s participation in debates led the movement to develop vigorous debating tradition. Campbell believed in debate and once stated that “*a week’s debating is worth a year’s preaching...for the purpose of dissenting truth and putting error out of countenance*” (Hughes, 2008:25)

debates which made him very popular, five in particular being noteworthy. The first debate occurred in 1820 with John Walker over the subject and mode of baptism (North, 1994:123). The second great debate was in 1823 with W.L. Maccalla over the meaning and purpose of baptism (Webb, 2014:116). The third debate with the British socialist Robert Owen, caught wide attention. Owen took a stance against the Christian religion and Campbell was to defend. Hundreds came from afar. Campbell was now seen not only as a promoter of the Restoration Movement but also as a defender of the Christian religion (Webb, 2014:123). Fourthly there was the debate with the Catholic Bishop John Purcell in 1837. In this debate Campbell lambasted Catholicism, something many on the frontier wanted to hear (Hines, 2014:99). In 1843 Campbell debated Nathan L. Rice about baptism, the Holy Spirit and creeds. Neither of the debaters walked away victorious. Afterwards the Presbyterians published the debate but soon came to realise that many Presbyterians moved over to the Campbell tradition. So they halted the publication. Campbell, however, picked up the publishing and continued to sell it (Hines, 2014:90-91). Campbells' participation in these debates made him popular. After these debates he was always assured of an audience when he spoke (Webb, 2014:116).

After his first debate (Walker Debate) copies of the debate were made and circulated widely with great influential results. This fact inspired Campbell to consider the publishing of a regular magazine which could serve as an effective means to influence people's thinking. In the same year, 1823, Campbell began the publication of a monthly magazine entitled the "*Christian Baptist*" (North, 1994:128). Campbell initially wanted to name it "the Christian" but through the guidance of Walter Scott (1796-1861)²⁵ he decided to name it the '*Christian Baptist*' since his desire was for this magazine to circulate between the Baptist churches and including the term 'Baptist' might find more favour (North, 1994:129). This was a year before the Brush Run Church was excluded from the Redstone Baptist Association, and therefore Campbell could still impart some influence in Baptist circles. The magazine was published with the intention of serving as a declaration of independence (North, 1994:131). It demonstrated the core theological mindset of Campbell and shaped restoration thought for years to come. It focused specifically on three areas: the pretensions of the clergy, the use of creeds and

²⁵ A close friend of Campbell that lasted for about forty years (North, 1994:131). Walter Scott is long counted, with Thomas Campbell and Alexander Campbell, and Barton Stone, as one of the four founders of the Stone-Campbell movement. He is remembered in the Movement as the evangelist whose success in the field brought stability to the fledgling reform movement led by Thomas and Alexander Campbell as it moved toward separation from the Baptists (Toulouse, M.G. in *The Encyclopaedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, 2004:673)

unauthorised organisations. Campbell vehemently opposed the airs of the clergy found in denominations and pointed out their superiority complex. He also pointed out the “rubbish” of splendid meeting houses and fixed salaries (North, 1994:132). He regularly assaulted creeds and denominational systems. He especially attacked missionary societies and any ecclesial institutions that he thought detracted from the glory of the local congregation. Though his chief interest was ecumenical, his rhetoric often sounded both sectarian and legalistic (Hughes, 2008:11-12). Campbell fathered a sectarian spirit which later by the 1840’s became the virtual substance of the movement increasingly known in those days as the Church of Christ. Apart from fathering a sectarian spirit Campbell also fathered a defense of his restoration plea in a hard combative style that prized verbal assault on the positions of opponents and enemies. The publication of the *Christian Baptist* was essentially an open, formal declaration of war against all religious sects and parties in the country. It wasn’t an uncommon way of doing things in his day, but it also became central to the movement which he led (Hughes, 2008:24).

The most significant series of articles Campbell wrote in the *Christian Baptist* was “The Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things”. It entailed 32 articles spread over four and a half years. The goal of these articles was to demonstrate the order of the ancient church – its organisation, worship and congregational life (North, 1994:134). In the *Christian Baptist* Campbell provided clear and lucid descriptions of precisely what the shape of the true church of the Apostolic era should take. Central to his understanding was immersion of adults for the forgiveness of sins. Beyond that Campbell held that the true church would partake of the Lord’s supper every first day of the week; that the supper was a simple memorial feast; that each congregation would be autonomous, governed by a plurality of elders, with deacons serving in various capacities, and that worship would consist of five basic acts – preaching, praying, singing, giving and communion (Hughes, 2008:24). The emphasis on the “pattern” of the New Testament Church marked the Campbell movement for some time. The first article in the series was a call to return to the New Testament order (or pattern), making a distinction between restoration and reformation. Campbell found the idea of reformation inadequate since it simply took the existing substance and put it in a different form. In his opinion reformation did not suffice, what was needed was the restoring of the ancient apostolic order – a restoration movement. Also in the first article Campbell took his perspective to the next level by penning a very provocative statement: “Just in so far as the ancient order of things, or the religion of the New Testament, is restored, just so far has the millennium commenced”. It was this post-millennial expression that seemed to indicate that Campbell saw the Restoration Movement as

the harbinger of the millennium (North, 1994:134). The message from the magazine was clear: The restoration of primitive Christianity was the only means to the unity of all Christians, which in turn would usher in the millennial age of the Earth (Hughes, 2008:22). No wonder the next magazine he edited was entitled *The Millennial Harbinger*²⁶.

During the 1820's the Campbell movement, with the assistance of the *Christian Baptist*, brought thousands of Baptist members into its fold. By the 1830's there was no need for the *Christian Baptist* anymore since all ties with them had been severed and the magazine was no longer circulated among them. So Campbell started the *Millennial Harbinger* in January 1830 which served as the main document to promote restoration thought for the rest of his life. Campbell started writing a little differently now. In the *Christian Baptist* he was aiming at breaking down the denominational institution. Now he was trying to build a movement and was therefore much more positivistic (North, 1994:155-156). Despite its more positivistic approach, the prospectus of the magazine was defined in no uncertain terms to be quite antagonistic: "*This work shall be devoted to the destruction of sectarianism, infidelity, and antichristian doctrine and practice. It shall have for its object the development, and introduction of that political religious order of society called the Millennium, which will be the consummation of the ultimate amelioration of society proposed in the Christian Scriptures*" (Webb, 2014:149-150). Campbell had a deep conviction that the preaching of the pure word of God would produce the true church and thereby eventually affect society in such a way as to transform it into that blessed condition envisioned in the prophets and implied in the phrase "Kingdom of God". This kind of social optimism might sound strange to a more cynical society like today, but it was widely accepted and welcomed in the 19th Century. The idea clearly illustrates Campbell's deep faith in the power of the Gospel to meet the individual and social needs of mankind (Webb, 2014:150). Alexander together with his father continued their quest for a return to the New Testament Church throughout their lives. Thomas passed away in 1854 and Alexander in 1866. Alexander has long been acknowledged as the "greatest promoter of this reformation". He was one of its founders and stood as one of its leaders for more than half a century. By the time of his death the movement had grown to more than half a million and has had an international influence (Foster *et al*, 2004:112).

²⁶ Millennial Harbinger simply means "Herald of the Millennium" (Webb, 2014:150).

4. Stone & Campbell Merge

In September 1824 Alexander Campbell visited Kentucky for the second time and came to Georgetown where he met Barton Stone for the first time. Both had the same desire for Christian unity, therefore it was easy for them to consider one another as brothers and friends. The platforms for such a unity were also agreed by both: The teaching and example of the Bible (Webb, 2014:57). Both these men's movements were profoundly American. Firstly, their discomfort over religious pluralism on the American frontier provided both with their motivation for Christian unity. Secondly, both addressed the problem of religious pluralism in a way that was common on the American frontier: They sought to escape pluralism by returning to primitive Christianity (Hughes, 2008:12). These two fundamental premises paved the way for joining forces in the quest to evangelise America. But they weren't yet convinced to unite. By 1827 the Restoration Movement under the leadership of the Campbells in Virginia and the Midwest and Barton Stone in the south was well underway. Campbell's ideas circulated in the *Christian Baptist* and Stone's in the *Christian Messenger*. Without a doubt Alexander Campbell proved to be the movement's strongest personality (Hines, 2014:59).

January 1832 marked the date that the Stone and Campbell movements formally united in Lexington, Kentucky. The basis of the merger centred around the similarities in views between the two groups. The similarities were quite clear: both believed in the all-sufficiency of Scripture, both rejected human creeds, both emphasised unity, both understood faith as the belief of testimony, both supported baptism by immersion only, both promoted the autonomy of the local congregation, both agreed that man possess free will, both rejected Calvinism and both confessed that Christ alone is the subject of faith (Hines, 2014:100). It was these agreements that formed the centre of the Restoration teaching for centuries to come. At the time of the merger it has been estimated that the size of the Stone movement numbered about 15000 and the Campbell movement between 12000 and 20000. Half of the Stone movement was not in support of the merger with the Campbell group. Therefore, one could estimate the size of the new movement to be between 20000 and 30000 followers (North, 1994:187).

The merger created a "people's movement" that was relevant to the times. Such movement are hard to stop, therefore it experienced great growth. Bear in mind that it was the Age of Jackson, a time when the frontier was seething with activity, productivity and was beginning to exert itself in national affairs. The frontiersmen felt liberated and therefore became self-sufficient and independent. "Common sense" solutions to problems were popular. The frontiersman was

fond of simplicity and direct action and was little impressed with traditions, which constituted authority or social amenities. The simplicity of the restoration plea was thus effective. It cut through theological jargon and proceeded directly from the pure word of God to establish self-governing, independent congregations. This made sense to the frontiersmen because such churches could be formed without permission, or obligation to any ecclesiastical authority and it could offer unlimited opportunity for the development of creative opportunity within the local community. By the middle of the century the movement had reached a large percentage of the population (Webb, 2014:159-160).

Although the movement grew rapidly and had a great influence, there were still two streams of thought. The Campbellites were more interested in restoring New Testament Christianity while the Stoneites were more interested in unity. The Campbellites insisted more on baptism than the Stoneites and the Stoneites had a more defined clergy than the Campbellites. The Stoneites promoted a more revivalist approach to conversion (emotional, ecstatic experiences) whereas the Campbellites promoted a more rational approach to conversion and promoted the notion that it happened in a sequence of steps: Faith, Repentance, Confession, Baptism etc. (North, 1994:161). Campbell sneered at the ecstatic and emotional outbursts which were common at the revivals. He took the position that feelings and emotional experiences could be misleading and ephemeral, and such provided no adequate basis for faith. He pointed rather to the Biblical record as the sufficient and only adequate foundation for the Christian faith (Webb, 2014:117). They also differed on issues like the practice of communion, the divinity of Christ and also the use of a group name (North, 1994:161).

Stone was a pietist who insisted that a return to apostolic holiness was the way to Christian union. But Campbell was a rationalist who believed Christian union can only be obtained upon adherence to the New Testament as a kind of scientific blueprint for the church. Stone held an apocalyptic worldview that rendered him pessimistic about his culture and age, whereas Campbell entertained an optimistic, postmillennial perspective that rendered him an apostle not only for primitive Christianity but also for science, technology and American civilisation (Hughes, 2008:12). Campbell brought to the Restoration Movement a potent mix of traditional Christian primitivism, combined with Scottish Common Sense Realism and Lockean epistemology, which in turn produced powerful strains of biblical literalism, sectarianism, and exclusivism (Hughes, 2008:48). Stone was also a sectarian, but he focused his attention on the

true church versus the world and not against the denominations as Campbell did (Hughes, 2008:92).

Despite their differences, the movement grew and there were enough common factors that kept Stone and Campbell together. The largest factor being that both men and their followers shared a deep commitment to Christian union based on the restoration of early Christianity (Hughes, 2008:99). The uniting glue despite the differences were therefore dual: Both wanted to restore primitive Christianity and both wanted to see the unity of Christianity (Hughes, 2008:114). These goals in themselves were large enough for them to remain unified in their mission.

5. Restoration Movement History: Then to Now

The united movement increasingly separated from their religious neighbours during the 1830's. Until this time, they were a group of efforts calling for all men to unite on the basis of the Bible alone. The merger of the two movements made the Stone-Campbell Movement a force to be reckoned with and friendship or indifference on the part of others turned into antagonism. Such reaction was not surprising, after all, their plea if truly carried out would result in the destruction of denominationalism. Debates, studies and pulpit sermons on Scripture permeated the 1830's with the goal of finding agreement with the denominations, but to little avail. Nevertheless, between 1832 and 1850 the number of Christians associated with the Restoration Movement grew from an estimated 20 000 to 200 000 people (Hawley, 1976:31-32). This fact made the Restoration Movement the 6th largest religious body in America (Harrell, 2000:5). The growth that took place can be accredited to four aspects: (1) straight forward preaching, (2) a common willingness to extend practical assistance, (3) the full empowerment of the laity, (4) and a vibrant attachment to the Bible (Baker, 2002:13). In this time period the movement produced at least twenty-eight religious papers and founded three Christian colleges. The movement's growth did not result from the clinking of denominational machinery or an organised missionary society, but from an emblazing zeal to tell others the story of Jesus (Hawley, 1976:32).

The movement continued to grow. After the Civil War it had probably about 300 000 adherents. In 1870 membership was reported at 350 000, ten years later 475 000 and in 1890 it was estimated at 641 000 (Webb, 2014:234). By the first decade of the 20th Century it had well over one million members (Harrell, 1964:45). There was no other religious body of the time that could match this growth. None of its growth came from immigration, it was a strictly American

movement (Webb, 2014:234). The final third of the 19th Century was a crucial time for the movement. It was a time of vigorous growth and expansion. But in the same period it was also a time that marked the greatest divisions in the movement (Webb, 2014:236).

Alexander Campbell had in his earlier writings condemned and opposed any organised society to carry out the work of the church. But in 1849 he had consented to become the first president of a newly formed society, the American Christian Society. Many felt that Campbell had abandoned his principles and believed that the society existed without biblical authorisation. The controversy continued well beyond the passing of Campbell and threatened the demise of the society and a possible division in the Restoration Movement in the 1870's. The concerns raised revolved around a growing fear of ecclesiasticism and a concern that the society might destroy the autonomy of the local church (Hawley, 1976:32). During the same period another controversy created a gradual division. Until 1859 none of the restoration churches had used musical instruments in public worship. Most of the restoration leaders rejected the use of musical instruments based on Scripture. But by the 1870's and 1880's city churches had become wealthy and advanced enough to have instruments and so many churches used such in worship (Hawley, 1976:33).

Near the end of the 19th Century a split in the movement had occurred. It was not as visible as one would assume, because each church was autonomous and there was not a denominational organisation that could formalise such a division. The names of the churches were used interchangeably between Churches of Christ and Christian Churches/Disciples of Christ, regardless of their views on the controversies. By the year 1900 there was not a middle ground anymore, there was now two poles. One side being the "progressives" and the other side being the "conservatives". The "progressives" were found more in the north while the "conservatives" centred more in the south (Hawley, 1976:33). In 1906 the director of the US Bureau of the Census, S.N.D. North, was analysing the religious census data when he discovered what appeared to be an overlapping of data for preachers listed with the Church of Christ or Christian Church/Disciples of Christ. He wrote to David Lipscomb²⁷ to ask for clarification of the data. He wanted to know if these were two different churches. Lipscomb responded positively, that they are indeed two different churches. From that time forward the movement was recognised as being split in two (North, 1994:251). The "progressives" were

²⁷ David Lipscomb (1831-1917). Tennessee preacher, educator and editor of the Gospel Advocate for forty-six years. He was a leader in the conservative branch of the Restoration Movement (Hawley, 1976:34).

generally associated with the “Christian Church/Disciples of Christ”, whereas the “conservatives” became associated with the name “Church of Christ” (Hawley, 1976:34).

Hughes (2008:12-13) proposed three reasons why the movement split into two. Firstly, two groups of people were developing in the movement. Those who principally served the restoration ideal and those whose interest was chiefly ecumenical. Those who opted for the first were generally associated with Churches of Christ whilst the latter became associated with the Christian Church/Disciples of Christ. Secondly, the Civil War also contributed to the sectionalising of the movement. After the war the restorationist churches centred in the upper south whilst the ecumenical disciples centred predominantly in the old Campbell heartland of Kentucky. Thirdly, the division was undergirded by the longstanding differences between Stone and Campbell. Campbell disciples increasingly reflected Campbell's commitment to progress and American civilisation. But the Churches of Christ, which centred especially in middle Tennessee often reflected the sectarian Stoneites commitment to the Kingdom of God that would finally triumph over human progress and civilisation.

Despite the official division in the movement, there was still some unity between the two groups, even if it was only a fellowship in heritage. The opinion has widely been held that the year 1809 marked the birth of the Restoration Movement since it was the year in which Thomas Campbell penned the *Declaration and Address*. One hundred years later the Restoration Movement adherents came from all over the country to celebrate the return to New Testament Christianity. The event took place in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania (North, 1994:289). The whole town was booked out and on the Sunday afternoon more than 25 000 people participated in the largest communion service recorded on American soil (Webb, 2014:273). Statistics placed the Restoration Movement membership at this time at 1.25 million. The future seemed bright and growth continued steadily (North, 1994:289).

The Restoration Movement continued to take shape into two different directions after 1909. The polarisation continuing between the “conservatives” and “liberals”. The liberals stood for freedom of Christian conscience and a commitment to Christian unity, whereas the conservatives stood for the historical practices of the early church as understood by the Campbells and their early followers (North, 1994:319). Despite the widening gap between the two poles the movement continued to see great growth. The total membership in 1900 was estimated at 1 120 000 and in the year 1925 the total membership estimated 1 450 000 (Webb, 2014:389).

As growth progressed and American society developed, the movement became faced with one of its biggest challenges yet. Up to the early part of the 20th Century the average restoration movement supporter has not questioned the presuppositions of the message they heard and had come to believe in. But then new forces entered the scene that would cause more complications in the movement (Webb, 2014:235). These were evolution, modernism and its related ideologies. Soon the influence of higher criticism and the new theology entered biblical studies (Webb, 2014:237). These modern paradigms brought along anti-creationism, textual criticism and science to the Bible. The Bible was placed under new scrutiny, scientific scrutiny, which led to the rejection of many traditional factors of biblical interpretation (Webb, 2014:239). The logical result of these factors were that there were a number of leaders who became marked as “theological liberals”. These leaders attacked the inerrancy of the written word and called into question its absolute authority. Theological liberalism led to another number of key theological issues that split the churches of the movement even further (Hawley, 1976:34). One of these was the issue of “open membership” which was about allowing people into church membership without them being baptised (Webb, 2014:239).

An identifiable split was gradually taking place from 1946 and in 1955 the rupture had become complete with the establishment of another new movement branching off from the Christian Church/Disciples of Christ. This progressive branch became known as “Independents”. The Church of Christ branch who was the original conservative branch of the movement experienced great numerical growth after World War II. They sent many missionaries into the world, especially Africa. With time they experienced various controversies on matters such as one cup or many cups in communion, supporting Bible Schools, congregational cooperation, kitchens in church buildings etc. These caused various smaller splinter groups. One writer noted that there are over twenty such off-shoots among the conservatives (Hawley, 1976:34-35). It is this branch, the conservatives named Churches of Christ that has been marked with a heritage of controversy from 1920 up to today (Harrell, 2000:39).

At the heart of the Restoration Movement controversies lies the differing hermeneutical perspectives on Scripture and a key theological slogan that the movement carried. Conservatives believed that the original pattern of the New Testament could be concretely established and duplicated in all ages. Liberals held onto the notion that each generation could work out its own concepts of Christian identity if they stay within a very general framework of commitment to Christian ideals (North, 1994:319). The slogan that has created controversy

over its interpretation was: “*We speak where the Bible speaks and we are silent where the Bible is silent*”. The real issue was about how one applies the silence of the Bible. Are the silences restrictive or permissive? The conservatives interpret the slogan in the way that silences are restrictive whilst the liberals see silence as permissive. Two key divisional factors discussed in this research was that of missionary societies and musical instruments in worship. Conservatives felt that since the New Testament knows no musical instruments in worship and neither shows any missionary societies it is a prohibited practice. Liberals held the view that since the New Testament does not say anything about these factors there is freedom to do what each generation understands best for their context (Baker, 2002:24). These arguments illustrate best why the movement experienced division like it did. Another factor that lead to the results we see in the movement were the different emphases. The whole Restoration Movement is shaped around the idea of “Christian unity based on Biblical authority”. But some emphasised unity over Biblical authority and vice versa. The liberals relating to the first and the conservatives to the latter (North, 1994:320).

Nevertheless, today the Restoration Movement is branched off into three streams which branch off into several other church traditions. They are the Churches of Christ (acapella), Disciples of Christ/Christian Church and the Independent Churches of Christ. Each of these bodies claim to be the true heir of the movement, the embodiment of the original purpose and ideals of the founders. Each one of them is partially correct (Webb, 2014:389). The Christian Church has modified many of the Stone-Campbell commitments and numbers slightly under one million adherents. The Independent Churches of Christ maintain many of the earliest Stone-Campbell teachings, usually sing hymns and do not alienate themselves from other Christian bodies. They also number about one million members. The third group, the Churches of Christ (acapella) has been the most ardent about maintaining the letter of Alexander Campbell’s strictest teachings. This group has persistently rejected the use of musical instruments in worship and participation with voluntary societies. They have about two million adherents (Baker *et al*, 2002:14). Harrell (1964:47) noted that the Restoration Movement Churches, when standing together, forms the largest and most significant religious movement native to America.

6. Restoration Movement Principles

The broad overview of the movement with the motivation of its key leaders in their contexts have provided a fairly clear description of RM belief and principles. It is however necessary to clearly demarcate these principles for the sake of clarity and later usage in determining the significance of RM thought with the Modern Church. One often gets a more accurate picture of what a movement was about when looking at it in hindsight. In 1907, 101 years after the establishment of the RM, Hiram von Kirk²⁸ listed three principles he believed Alexander Campbell envisioned to be fundamental to the movement. These were (1) the conversion of the world, (2) the union of all Christians, and (3) the restoration of early Christianity. The notion of the ‘conversion of the world’ was not always stated since it was just assumed, but the latter two principals were widely communicated and stressed (Hawley, 1976:38).

James North wrote an interpretive history of the RM and dedicated the title of his work to a phrase used by Thomas Campbell in the *Declaration and Address* to describe the overall emphasis of the movement: *Union in Truth*. The RM was committed to Christian union, but that union was to be based solely on biblical authority (Truth) (North, 1994: xii). The unity the RM promoted rallied around the goal of evangelising the whole world according to the prayer of Jesus (John 17:21). The purpose of unity thus was the conversion of the world. The existence and competition of the rival denominations was a stumbling block to the smooth progress of the Gospel in a lost world. It therefore became part and parcel of the movement ideal to remove the “stumbling block” (North 1994:7). In its simplest form the restorationists believed the divisions in the church could only be overcome by simply returning to the Bible and practicing the mandates it sets forth. They were convinced that it was the added opinions of men over time that divided the church. And the only way to remove such contaminations was through the “profession and practice of the primitive church, as expressly exhibited upon the sacred pages of New Testament Scripture” (Toulouse, 1992:59-60).

In summary therefore, the RM had overall one standard underlying objective; the conversion of all people. In its quest to fulfil this vision they believed that the unity of all Christians would make it more achievable. And in order to unify all Christians, the Bible would have to be the only source of authority. In time, as these three objectives were being played out, various slogans became popular in sermons, discussions and journals. The slogans typically used by

²⁸ Hiram Von Kirk, *The Rise of the Current Reformation* (St. Louis: Christian Publishing Co., 1907), p. 118.

the RM promoters gives the clearest indication of the principles the RM stood for. They encapsulated the movement's emphasis on the free, unencumbered association of Christians, their rights of conscience, and their aspiration to ecclesial unity. "*They served as rubrics or rallying points to divert Christians from the peculiarities of individual theological opinion and to gravitate the Movement's constituents toward the central plea of restoring "New Testament Christianity"*" (Foster *et al*, 2004:688). The most descriptive way to illustrate the RM principles therefore is to list and briefly elaborate on the central slogans most utilised by RM deliberations. Here are the five most prominent slogans:

"Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent."

Between 1809 and 1810, after being suspended from the Presbyterians, Thomas Campbell continued preaching independently and so gathered a number of followers. In 1809 the group met together to set a course for the future. Campbell passionately spoke about Christian unity on the sole basis of Biblical faith and practice. It was here where this first and most famous dictum of the RM was coined by Thomas Campbell as he concluded his discussion. The dialogue that followed clearly illustrates the role it would play in Restoration history and how it would shape restoration thought and practice for millennia to come. As Campbell verbalised the slogan, Andrew Munro, a Seceder, quickly voiced an objection: "*Mr. Campbell, if we adopt that as a basis, then there is an end to infant baptism*". Campbell then brushed off Munro's statement by responding: "*If infant baptism be not found in Scripture we can have nothing to do with it*" (Hines, 2014:46). Thomas Acheson, deeply moved, jumped up and said: "*I hope I may never see the day when my heart will renounce that blessed saying of Scripture, "suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven"*". He was overcome with emotion and broke down in tears. But James Foster, an old friend of Campbell, spoke up and said: "*Mr. Acheson, I would remark that in the portion of Scripture you have quoted there is no reference, whatever, to infant baptism*". At this, Thomas Acheson left the room in tears (North 1994:86).

This dialogue is quoted since it portrays, among others, two important aspects of the RM. Firstly, the original RM leaders promoted the notion of the "silence of the Scriptures". If the Scriptures were "silent" on something, it meant that God says nothing about it. If God says nothing about it; it is prohibited. The instance above serves as a clear example: since the Bible is silent about infant baptism, it is prohibited. Core to this method of establishing doctrine lies the RM idea of "authorisation". If the Bible does not authorise some practice, it is prohibited.

Later on the quest for what the Bible does authorise became a subject of debate. The RM promoted three hermeneutical principles in order to find out what the Bible authorises. These were Necessary Inference, Direct Command and Apostolic Example. If any doctrine or practice was not authorised by an example from the Apostles, or was not directly commanded by Scripture, or could not be inferred from Scripture it was deemed unscriptural, unauthorised by God and an addition of men.

Secondly, the RM provided a deep challenge to many Christians on the frontier. It was an emotional challenge. It is therefore not unclear why the movement faced so many problems in its emergence. The example above shows what many people felt. Most of the people at the meeting had accepted infant baptism without question all their lives, as their ancestors had done for centuries before them. Calling into question this belief required an objective detachment from feelings and identities that most, including Campbell, found very difficult. It took some time for Campbell to give up infant baptism, and some at this meeting never did (North, 1994:86-87). This dictum thus radically ensured that all anthropogenic elements of Christianity be expelled from Christian thought and practice regardless of the emotions such a challenge awakened.

"The church of Jesus Christ on earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one."

It was Thomas Campbell who formulated this slogan in his *Declaration and Address*. The primary motivating factor of the RM was its quest for unity among the denominations. The Campbells became more convinced that restoring the early church is more important than uniting the denominations. But for Stone, there was a different perspective. He often proclaimed a motto: *"Let Christian unity be our polar star"* (Foster *et al*, 2004: 688). Stone had an ecumenical perspective, a unity of the denominations. Campbell never believed the uniting of denominations was possible. Campbell desired true worshippers must leave their sects and come and meet together with other sincere Christians (Hines, 2014:94). The early RM leaders believed there were sincere Christians in the denominations. They believed Jesus stood for unity as well (John 17:21). They held the view that unity could not be invisible (Hines, 2014:96). In their minds Biblical unity could be nothing less than bringing together all those who honestly sought God's will and who determined to make the Bible their sole guide in matters of faith and practice. The RM's target for union were individuals who were invited to "come out from among them" (1 Cor. 6:17). It was this idea that gave the RM the designation: "a come-outer movement". It is a way of evangelising that seeks its converts from existing

denominations (Hines, 2014:97). The evidence of this practice is seen in RM history as much of its emphasis has been to target “Christians” in other denominations instead of targeting the world. The reason for this was the central RM belief that there is one church, it was invisible at the time, but it was their goal to make it visible. When people started practicing the faith of the early church, they were considered to be part of the “one Church”. The Scriptural warrant for this belief are numerous, but in particular Ephesians 4:4.

"We are Christians only, but not the only Christians."

The author of this slogan is unknown, but it came into regular usage in the RM (Foster *et al*, 2004: 688). Robert Mallett in relation to the slogan pointed out one of the allergies early RM leaders expressed towards “denominationalism”. In fact, as Thomas (1941:72) extrapolates, the RM leaders saw denominationalism not only as erroneous but even sinful. One of the problems was that Christian identity was often associated more with the anthropogenic traditions individuals came from than simple Biblical Christianity. In the days of the RM original Christians were known either as Baptists, Presbyterians or Lutherans etc. But the RM leaders opposed these terms because they pointed back to man-made inventions. “Raccoon” John Smith²⁹ spoke up at the merging meeting of the Stone and Campbell movements in 1832 with the following words: *“Let us then, my brethren, be no longer Campbellites or Stoneites, New Lights or Old Lights, or any kind of lights, but let us come to the Bible alone, as the only book in the world that can give us the Light we need! Let us stand together united in the Church of Christ as his disciples and as Christians only”*³⁰. In their simple return to becoming the early church, they chose to throw away any identifying titles except “Christians only”.

The early movement led by Stone became widely known simply as the “Christian” movement (Webb, 2014:151). It served as a challenge to those in other churches to depart with their anthropogenic identifying labels. The RM made it clear that they were not just another denomination; they did not choose a denominational name, creed, book or doctrine. As individuals their names would simply be “Christians” (Mallett, www.thecra.org). The second part of the slogan “not the only Christians” points to a reaction against the sectarianism and exclusivism that most of the frontier Christian churches directly or indirectly promoted. The

²⁹ John “Raccoon” Smith (1784-1868) was an evangelist and activist for Christian unity in the early Stone-Campbell Movement (Foster *et al*, 2004:690).

³⁰ John A. Williams, *Life of elder John Smith* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1956 orig. pub. 1870), p. 372.

RM wanted to steer clear from such a stance being adopted by its own adherents and put this neatly described perspective in a slogan. It indicates that the original intent of the RM was to be inclusive and simply call all sincere Christians from among the denominations to practice pure biblical Christianity.

"In essentials, unity; in opinions, liberty; in all things love."

This famous dictum was written by the 17th Century Lutheran theologian, Peter Meiderlin, and was adopted by the RM for good reason (Foster *et al*, 2004:688). From the RM's reactive perspective on denominationalism it seemed like they believed the denominations neglected essentials necessary for unity and elevated opinions that fostered suppression. Campbell spent much of his studies, and verbal and literary declarations on extractions from Scripture about what the essentials are in the Christian faith. Much of this revolved around ecclesiology. Taking his intellectual background as lenses through which to view Scripture, he claimed that there are essentials in Scripture that are clear and undebatable. The founding practices of the restorationists were based on supreme Enlightenment self-confidence in the human ability to discern the simple meanings of the Bible (Baker *et al*, 2002:13). Thomas Campbell in his *Declaration and Address* insisted in the sufficiency and perspicuity of Scripture itself. According to him there would be no need to uncover the "essentials" from the "opinions" or "non-essentials" in the Bible because the Scriptural directives binding on all Christians, and instrumental in Christian unity, were already "self-evident" (Foster *et al*, 2004:253) In this simple evaluation of Scripture, the RM, and particularly Campbell found baptism by immersion for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38), the autonomy of local congregations, a plurality of elders in each congregation and the celebration of the Lord's Supper each Sunday to be essentials (Baker *et al*, 2002:13).

As noted previously, the hermeneutical principles used to reach these essential doctrinal conclusions were Direct Command, Apostolic Example and Necessary Inference. In turn these principles were generated by a mixture of Scottish Common Sense Realism, Lockean Philosophy and Baconianism inherent in the intellectual formation of the RM leaders, especially Campbell. Whatever these principles could not support in Scripture were considered to be in the realm of opinion. The separation of "essentials" and "opinions" made it possible for the church to have a divine standard that was eternally fixed, while at the same time being aware that there is a realm of indifference which may be regulated in the light of the ever-changing and progressive conditions within which they found themselves (Thomas: 1941:72).

In summary, the slogan points to the central restoration ideal that unity is possible only when everyone agrees upon the essential teachings of the New Testament as clearly stipulated. There was a condition to unity: an unquestionable support of the clear doctrine of Scripture.

No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible, no law but love, no name but the divine."

The very first stanza of this slogan reveals the RM antagonism towards creeds. Barton Stone described creeds as “nuisances of religious society, and the very bane of Christian unity”. In his *Apology* he described creeds as instruments of ecclesiastical tyranny, enslaving the free consciences of Christians and spawning sectarianism. Creeds, he argued, detracted from the simpler and plainer truth of the Bible itself. Although they might have begun as a means of summarising and explaining Biblical truth it inevitable took on a life of its own, engendering artificial unity at best and open schism at worst. The Campbell combination’s criticism on creeds centred around the historical tendency of creeds to supplant the primary authority of Scripture. Alexander argued in one of his *Christian Baptist* series that human creeds are absent from the New Testament and must therefore be summarily discarded. Stone and Campbell juxtaposed the idea of an “inspired and infallible” creed with the “uninspired and fallible” creeds in existence in their day. The latter having a need to be “reformed” continuously and the previous being perfect, never in need of reform and eternal (Foster *et al*, 2004:252-253). Campbell stated that religions cannot be reformed and only creeds, structures and outward practices can be reformed. He pointed out that all the famous reformations in history have rather been reformations of creed and clergy than of religion. Though they were called reformations of religion, they have always left religion where it was. “*Human creeds may be reformed and re-reformed, and be erroneous still, like their authors; but the inspired creed needs no reformation, being like its author, infallible*”. Campbell concluded by stating that genuine Christianity cannot be reformed, it can only be restored (Hines, 2014:58-59).

This “inspired and infallible” creed they claimed was the Bible, and only the Bible. Campbell called it the New Testament creed. Yet, such a description of a creed seemed too wide and general. Walter Scott responded to this gap in creedal theology with what he termed the “golden oracle”. According to him the Christian creed was the Petrine Confession: Jesus is the Christ (Matt. 16:16). On this confession alone a person was baptised into Christ, admitted into the fellowship and on it alone was Christian unity centred. Soon, the slogan “no creed but Christ” was widely circulated (Foster *et al*, 2004:253-254). It gave direction and clarity to a movement

that had no formal creed. Through this phrase they hoped to capture the essence of the centrality of Christ as an authority for Christian life and work, and nothing else (Toulouse, 1992:62).

The second section of the slogan, “no book but the Bible”, stands as the foundation of the RM. The RM trusted and supported nothing that did not come from the ancient book. The authority of the Bible was placed over creeds, books and institutions. The RM radicalised the notion of *sola scriptura* with a deep commitment to the Bible (Toulouse, 1992:61). Two additional slogans in this regard were widely communicated: “*Do Bible things in Bible ways.*” And “*Call Bible things by Bible names.*” Much has been said already about the RM plea in applying Biblical practices in their time and nothing more or less. But even more drastic was the RM plea to use only Biblical language in matters of church practice and life. The latter slogan was coined by Alexander Campbell. He never used the terms “sacrament” or “Eucharist” because they were not found in Scripture (Toulouse, 1992:107). The movement was passionate, not only about purifying the church from anthropogenic practices, but also about purifying Christian discourse by shaping a language conducive to Christian unity solely through Biblical terminology (Foster *et al*, 2004: 688). One such example would be the name of the church. The mainstream church produced by the RM was named “Church of Christ”. It flows from Paul’s remark to the church in Rome (Romans 16:16): “*The Churches of Christ salute you*”. The third and fourth stanzas of the slogan merges well into the first two. In opposition to the law of creed stood Christ, the synonym in redemptive theology for love. And no name or description not found in Scripture could be divine, and therefore has no place in the Christian Church.

7. Concluding Summary

All RM principles circulate around two primary elements: Unity & Scripture. There is one church, there should be one mission. Creeds and their additional elements divide, and only the pure Biblical record unites. On these two complementary elements the RM took on the quest to represent the path to the purity and simplicity of the original faith, a faith uncontaminated by either time or history. The American frontier was fertile soil for a movement like this. These slogans which encapsulate most of the RM principles were the right words, at the right time, to the right people. Mark Toulouse (1992:60) provide a set of reasons why the restoration plea and its accompanied principles fit the context so well. Among those he stated, two stand out in particular: Firstly, restoration ideas supported the aims of younger, more dynamic movements in their quest to break ties with the established church. And secondly, in the context of a

confusing array of people and institutions offering authoritative answers, restorationists told people they could turn to the Bible and discover the answers for themselves.

Restoration theory in essence sounds faultless and represents itself as an infallible endeavour. It essentially says: “Let’s all just simply do what the Bible says, then we will be united and conquer the world for Christ”. It sounds easy. But the RM together with many such attempts throughout history shows that it is quite complex and predominantly unsuccessful. Yet, the goal of the RM was noble and its quest did leave a mark in Christendom. With reference to the previous chapter, it is quite clear that RM ecclesiology had a similar view in regard to church form. Its leadership was very much biblical, but much of its practices were simple anthropogenic components carried over from the leaders’ inherited churches. The RM missed the Apostolic emphases on community and simply perpetuated many institutional elements. These aspects can be extrapolated much more, but I leave that for the final chapter. To place the study within the contemporary context it is necessary set a chapter apart to explore the Modern Church trends. The following chapter will thus be an extrapolation of how postmodernism has influenced the church to bring to the fore a new form of church. Once the Modern Church trends have been identified it can be contrasted for points of contact with the RM.

Chapter 4: Origins, Principles and Objectives of the Modern Church

Every theology in this case and historical ecclesiological investigation, is made complete only by considering its contemporary implications and applications. Every research effort needs to ask the “so what?” question. Restoration Movement and Early Church ecclesiologies are valuable only as much as they can add insight to the Modern Church. In order to make a correlation it is therefore necessary to inspect the Modern Church with its origins, principles and objectives. This chapter serves to describe the Modern Church. The Modern Church could be seen as a broad “umbrella” term that might be difficult to provide contours for. We can speak of a “trend”. To discover this contemporary trend is ultimately a central quest of this chapter. In order to provide some contours for this investigation I have chosen to select the three most prominent movements within the contemporary church (Modern Church). These are the Emerging Church, Fresh Expressions and the growing House Church Movement. Each of these movements are birthed in a context, are shaped by a context and are passionate about some key theological and ecclesiological truths. I will consider each movement in the light of these factors and then compare them to each other in order to delineate what the correspondences are. In turn, these contemporary ecclesiological trends can be contrasted and correlated with the 1st Century church, but particularly with the Restoration Movement.

1. The Emerging Church

The Emerging Church is hardly three decades old. Brian McLaren³¹ heard his friend Andrew Jones use the term “emerging culture” for the first time in 1990. In that era people generally sneered at the term “postmodern” and “emerging culture” was a less negative word. It wasn’t too long afterwards that the phrase “emerging church” was circulated. It became known as a phrase that described churches who were seeking to engage constructively with the emerging culture (Anderson, 2006:5-6). Most scholars would mark the official birth of the movement in the latter half of the 1990’s. In 2005 D.A. Carson claimed the movement was scarcely a dozen years old. Jones (2011: ii) said that by the year 2000 the emerging church label was being used with some frequency. It is safe to agree with Jones (2008:41), in summary, that the emergent

³¹ Brian D. McLaren. Author, speaker, activist, and public theologian. Passionate advocate for "a new kind of Christianity" - just, generous, and working with people of all faiths for the common good. (<http://www.brianmclaren.net/archives/about-brian/>) – Accessed 30/08/2016

phenomenon began in the late 1990's "when a group of Christian leaders began conversation about how postmodernism was affecting the faith".

1.1. Originating Factors

Carson (2005:14) suggests that the movement is characterised by protest³². Upon consideration of the convictions and lives of its most prominent leaders one comes to an understanding of what lies at the heart of the movement. Mike Yanconelli (one such leader) compiled a list of emergent leaders with their stories in the book *Stories of Emergence*³³. These "stories of emergence" have in common a shared destination (namely, the emerging church movement) and a shared point of origin: traditional (and sometimes fundamentalist) evangelicalism. These leaders all have one thing in common: They began in one thing and "emerged" into something else. It is this reality that gives the book a flavour of protest. It carries undertones of rejection: "we were where you were once, but we emerged from it into something different" – *moving from absolutes to authentic* (as the book subtitle). Spencer Burke for example, also considered a prominent leader in the movement, was the leader of a megachurch that ministered to ten thousand people a week. He became allergic to institutional/organisational/consumer driven ministries like 'parking lot ministries'. He also became exasperated with 'three-point sermons and 'ten step discipleship programs'. Burke then left the church and five years later expressed his thought patterns by stating that his discontent was never with the particular church he served (Mariners) but with contemporary Christianity as an institution (Carson, 2005:14-15). The movement thus gradually emerged over a period of time among church leaders particularly, primarily due to a dissatisfaction with the effectiveness in reaching the postmodern person with their inherited church's structures and traditions.

Labanow (2009) also describes the emergence as being an outflow particularly of evangelicalism, primarily in the West. Decreasing church attendance, closing churches and inflexible institutional structures prompted many to wonder what is next for Christianity in the West. A network of leaders and churches gradually developed with the motivating quest of

³² The whiff of protest in the emerging church movement is everywhere. It can be usefully analysed along three axes: Against what is perceived to be personally stifling cultural conservatism, against modernism and its incarnation in modern churchmanship, and against modernism's incarnation in seeker-sensitive churches (Carson, 2005:41).

³³ Mike Yanconelli, ed. *Stories of Emergence: Moving from Absolut to Authentic* (El Cajon, CA: emergentYS/Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

countering this reality. Robert Webber calls the emerging church “Younger Evangelicals”. He categorises three generations in the evangelical movement. Firstly, the *Traditional Evangelicals* (1950-1979). Secondly, *Pragmatic Evangelicals* (1975-2000) and of course thirdly, *Younger Evangelicals* (2000-?). He suggests that the 20th Century variety held fast to a biblically informed and historically tested faith. He adds that that generation “saw it, explained it, and presented it in a cultural situation that no longer exists”. The traditional evangelicals were enculturated in modernity which included fundamentalist paradigms with rational worldviews grounded in propositional truth. The approach was sufficient in a stable society, but when the radical changes of the sixties and seventies (the advent of post-modernity) took shape, many of the traditional evangelicals opted for the familiar and resisted these changes. The result was seen in their children who grew up in a world of revolution against the past (especially traditions of all kinds) in which, as the adage says: *newer is truer and bigger is better* (Labanow, 2009:1-2). These pragmatic evangelicals began to reform church practices around such notions of seeker-oriented services, contemporary worship music, and big business/mega church principles spawned from the church growth movement. It was the pragmatic evangelicals that viewed Christianity as therapy to answer people’s needs. They sought reliable formulas for gathering large numbers of persons into congregations and in order to accomplish this they sought dependable and sophisticated techniques of organisational science. Unfortunately, much of this era simply turned out to be their parent’s progressivist Christianity driven by modern consumerism (Labanow, 2009:1-3). It is this “pragmatic evangelical” creation of church that many emerging leaders grew out of and in some instances stood opposed to. Labanow (2009:3-4) makes an interesting observation: “When pragmatically-minded evangelicals encounter postmodernism, they have often countered it with sociological adaptation to culture, viewing postmodernism as a necessary medium to master in order to perpetuate their modern, propositions-based version of Christianity”. Emerging mindsets hold postmodern worldviews themselves and therefore offer a postmodern-based paradigm in order to establish a postmodern version of Christianity.

It is true that many emerging church leaders represent those who were reacting against the legalistic, fundamentalist contexts of their inherited churches. But there are also those leaders who were motivated by other factors. Some were simply seeking more honest answers, and a more comprehensive social agenda than that were offered by the churches of the past. Gibbs (2009:9) calls the postmodern world a “pluralistic world floundering in a sea of relativism”.

He quotes the work of Kinnaman and Lyons³⁴ who found that the most common perceptions held by young non-Christians about American Christianity were that it is anti-homosexual (91%), judgmental (87%), hypocritical (85%), old fashioned (78%), too involved in politics (75%), boring (68%), not accepting of other faiths (64%) and insensitive to others (70%). Mosaics (Generation Y) and Busters (Generation X) carry the tendency to want to discuss, debate, and question everything (Gibbs, 2009:14). Whereas previous generations simply accepted propositional inherited truths, the postmodern generation needs more convincing. Jones (2011:1) says the primary characteristic that epitomises the emerging movement and makes it distinctive is *epistemic humility*. An early theme in the movement that contributed significantly to its origin was that churches and seminaries from which leaders were emerging had grown too certain about their stands on doctrinal issues, polity and social issues (Jones, 2011:1). As Gibbs (2009:38) summarises the two poles so well: “*The confusing diversity of emerging churches represents both a reaction to the evangelical tendency to draw boundaries to determine who is in and who is out and a postmodern celebration of ambiguity and diversity*”. What thus caused the origin of emergence is the irrelevance of and inability of the inherited churches to soothe (relationally and theologically) the postmodern person. What changed is not the church, but the culture. As Carson (2005:12) states: “At the heart of the conversation lies the conviction that changes in culture signal a new church is emerging”. The emerging movement developed through individuals who were honestly and openly aware of this change in culture. Their awareness of the changes led them to position themselves reactively against the inherited churches they left simply because these didn’t see the cultural changes. It might be valuable to inject here some thoughts on the major difference between The Reformation and the Emergence. Both want to reform the church. The Reformation was driven by the conviction that the Roman Catholic Church had departed from Scripture and had introduced theology and practices that were inimical to genuine Christian faith. The leaders of the protest wanted change not because they perceived that new developments had taken place in the culture so that the church was called to adapt its approach to the new culture profile, but because they perceived that new theology and practices had developed in the church that contravened Scripture and therefore that things needed to be reformed by the Word of God. The Emerging Movement on the other hand challenges on biblical grounds some of the beliefs and practices of evangelicalism. By and large it insists it is preserving traditional confessionals

³⁴ David Kinnamon and Gabe Lyons, *Unchurched Christian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity...and Why it Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

but changing the emphases because the culture has changed. And so, inevitably those who are culturally sensitive are seeing things in a fresh perspective. In other words, at the heart of the Emerging Church Movement lies a perception of a major change in culture (Carson, 2005:42). It is about relevance. “If the church is unaware of it (changing cultural context) or blind to it, it will continue presenting the Gospel behind forms of thought and modes of expression that no longer communicate with the new generation” (Carson, 2005:12). Emergents have become aware of this danger.

The emergence is not totally unique to history. Phyllis Tickle³⁵ quotes Mark Dyer, an Anglican Bishop, whom famously observes that every 500 years the church feels compelled to hold a giant “rummage sale”. “About every 500 years the empowered structures of institutionalised Christianity, whatever they may be at the time, become an intolerable carapace that must be shattered in order that renewal and new growth may occur”. The first “rummage sale” took place in the 6th Century with Gregory the Great in the era labelled as “The Fall of the Roman Empire” or “The coming of the Dark Ages”. Gregory became “Great” not because he led a revolution as pope, but because he cleared one up. The second 500-year re-formation is the 1054 Great Schism that ensured the wedging of Eastern Orthodoxy and Western Roman Catholicism. The third re-formation is the Great Reformation which officially took its course on October 31st 1517 when Luther nailed his 95 theses to his Wittenberg church door. Tickle is of the opinion that Christendom is currently in another “Great” rummage sale entitled “the Great Emergence”. She says that history gives us a few hints about the future when such re-formations take shape, there are a few consequences. Firstly, a new and vital form of Christianity does indeed emerge. Second, the organised expression of Christianity which up until then had been the dominant one is reconstituted into a purer and less ossified expression of its former self. The third result is the rapid spread of Christianity, so there are missional advantages (Tickle, 2008:16-22).

The Emerging Church is thus considered a watershed movement in the 21st Century. It originated as an outflow of evangelicalism. The individuals who took a lead in the movement, in its broadest sense, were discontent with the ineffectiveness of modern evangelicalism in

³⁵ Phyllis Tickle is founding editor of the Religion Department of Publishers Weekly. One of the most respected authorities and popular speaker on religion in America today with more than a dozen authored books under her name. She is also a lay Eucharistic minister in the Episcopal Church. (in *The Great Emergence* (2008), Bakerbooks).

connecting with the postmodern person. The movement origin cannot be pin-pointed to one person or to one particular event, rather it emerged among various individuals spontaneously over the course of the last twenty-five years. The movement was thus not “started” but rather it was “identified” and is still being defined. Carson (2005:13) confirms this reality when he comments on why the movement has managed to draw so much support and attention so quickly. The reason he provides is that it brought some perspective and clarity to a lot of inherent thoughts and feelings and perspectives that have already been circulating in culture. “It is articulating crisply and polemically what many pastors and others were already beginning to think”. This is a subject for later discussion, but theologically I hold the view that it is this observable fact that is the handiwork of the paraclete. Carson also points out further that there are many individuals who do not identify themselves with the movement, whether they’re aware of it or not, but yet they share its core values.

1.2. The Essence of Emergence

What remains to be discussed is, as Phyllis Tickle puts it: “What is this thing?” There is no easy or simple answer since it is amorphous and its boundaries are ill-defined (Carson, 2005:12). The emerging church is a moving target, impossible to pin down. Brian McLaren likes to say it is more of a conversation than a movement (Anderson 2006:10). Generally, the phenomenon resists definition. Its adherents do not necessarily agree on polity, worship style, or theology; even the rubric by which the movement is known (emergent, emerging, missional) is being debated. The central reason why the movement resist definition is due to its lack of a centralised and organised structure. Emergent Village is the most well-known of the ECM groups, and could be seen as an organisational entity within the movement. But in reality it does not operate like a traditional denomination or parachurch ministry. It does occasionally publish books, host conferences but there is no form of official recognition, do not have paid staff and do not provide the benefits common to organised religious structures (health insurance, pension, job placement etc.) (Jones, 2011:4-5). Despite the resistance to definition, some have for the purpose of clarity suggested some.

Gibbs & Bolger (2005:44) defined the movement as “*Communities that practice the way of Jesus within postmodern cultures*”. Scot McKnight, holds however that this definition is too broad and creates the following definition: “*Emerging churches are missional communities emerging in postmodern culture and consisting of followers of Jesus seeking to be faithful to the orthodox Christian faith in their place and time*” (JesusCreed). Jones, (2011:5) proposes

that the best definition comes from the Encyclopaedia of Religion in America: “*The emerging church movement is a loosely aligned conversation among Christians who seek to re-imagine the priorities, values and theology expressed by the local church as it seeks to live out its faith in postmodern society. It is an attempt to replot Christian faith on a new cultural and intellectual terrain*”. The reason for his preference of this definition lies in the fact that it has a more sociological approach, it avoids Christian and theological euphemisms and it is simple. The definition offers a good description, but needs further extrapolation to show more clearly what the “re-imagining of priorities” and “replotting of Christian faith” in postmodern society actually looks like. As has been noted already, the boundaries are ill-defined. It is necessary however to draw some boundary lines of the movement. This will best be done by dotting points of Emerging Church emphases through which one can draw boundary lines. But first, it is necessary to describe the cultural phenomenon without which the emergence would never have occurred.

1.2.1. The Emerging Church Movement is Postmodern

It is the influence of postmodernism that has led to the shift in modern ecclesiology. Although some inherited church traditions seek to oppose postmodernism, the Emerging Church embraces it and the individuals operating in it hold in themselves a postmodern worldview (Labanow, 2009:4). Gibbs (2009:19-29) suggests that there are five megatrends impacting the church in the West. He claims that these are the five factors that have and are bringing rise to the emergence. The first of these is a shift from modernity to postmodernity³⁶. Dave Tomlinson wrote a book entitled “*The Post-Evangelical*” in which he argues that post-evangelicals are shaped by a different culture from that which helped to shape evangelicalism. He calls this phenomenon the shift from modernism to postmodernism. He continues to extrapolate that evangelicals think about the integrity and credibility of their faith in the culture of modernism, whereas post-evangelicals think about integrity and credibility of their faith in the culture of post-modernism (Carson, 2005:25).

To understand this shift, it is worthy to describe the differences between the two paradigms. Carson (2005:27) sets the two paradigms effectively apart: “Modernism is often pictured as

³⁶ The other four ‘megatrends’: From the industrial age to the information age. From the Christendom era to the post-Christendom context. From production initiatives to consumer awareness. From religious identity to spiritual exploration. (Gibbs, 2009:19-29)

pursuing truth, absolutism, linear thinking, rationalism, certainty, the cerebral opposed to the affective – which in turn breeds arrogance, inflexibility, a lust to be right, the desire to control. Postmodernism, by contrast, recognises how much of what we know is shaped by the culture in which we live, is controlled by emotions and aesthetics and heritage, and in fact can only be intelligibly held as part of a common tradition, without overbearing claims to be true or right. Modernism tries to find unquestioned foundations on which to build the edifice of knowledge and then proceeds with methodological rigor; postmodernism denies that such foundations exists (it is “anti-foundational”) and insists that we come to know things in many ways, not a few of them lacking in rigor. Modernism is hard-edged and, in the domain of religion, focuses on truth versus error, right belief and confessionism; postmodernism is gentle and, in the domain of religion, focus on relationships, love, shared tradition, and integrity in discussion”. Postmodernism accepts human pluralism, embraces the experiential, delights in the mystical, and is comfortable with narrative, with what is fluid, global, communal/tribal, and so forth (Carson, 2005: 37).

Ecclesiologically, the shift from modern to postmodern can be described in paradoxes: From internal focus to external focus, inherited denomination to independent network, monocultural to multicultural, theologically conservative to theologically liberal, attractional to missional, high profile celebrity leader to low-profile situational leader, negative toward popular culture to engaging popular culture (Gibbs, 2009:61). It promotes an emphasis of feelings and affections over against linear thought and rationality, experience over against truth; inclusion over against exclusion; participation over against individualism and the heroic loner. It illustrates a move from the absolute to the authentic (Yaconellie) (Carson, 2005:29-30). Postmodern ecclesiology as seen in the Emerging Church believe the road to the future runs through the past, and views Christianity as a community of faith (as opposed to a rational worldview or system of therapy). They prefer smaller and intercultural churches, lean toward team ministry and decentralised leadership and are very concerned for the plight of the poor (Labanow, 2009:4). These postmodern paradoxes and perspectives of church are a mouth-full, but in terms of the Emerging Church they can be encapsulated in umbrella concepts which will be able to serve as pin-points in the construction of an all-encompassing understanding of the essence of the Emerging Church.

1.2.2. The Emerging Church is *Progressive*

It has already been aptly shown that the Emerging Church carries an awareness that an old Christendom is being replaced by an emerging postmodern world, a disillusion with how the Christian faith has been accommodated by the baby boomer generation, and an eagerness to explore new ways of articulating and living out their faith with a central emphasis on Jesus (Jones, 2011:5). The “old Christendom” Jones refers to in relation to the Emerging Church refers particularly to Evangelicalism as has already been noted previously. When we speak of “progress” in the first instance we refer to the “moving out of” evangelicalism. The Emerging Church has progressed beyond traditional evangelicalism with its traditions, worldviews, missiological theories and practices. At the heart of evangelicalism stood the church growth and seeker-sensitive initiatives. Dan Kimball³⁷ takes note of how the seeker-sensitive church leaders were motivated by a desire to reach people who did not seem to be attracted to traditional approaches of church. He then notes how the seeker-sensitive movement is now old enough to be one of the traditional approaches. The postmodern generation is the post-seeker-sensitive generation (Carson, 2005:37).

Many of the emerging leaders have encountered various dissatisfactory elements with evangelicalism which led them to move beyond its forms of thought and practice. The movement carries a form of protest against modernity and the Christianity it practiced and produced. Spencer Burke notes one of his dissatisfactions which he termed “*Spiritual Isolationism*”. Burke notes how many megachurches move from the cities to the suburbs in order to avoid “messiness”. They create a world on their own by constructing an entire on-campus world, complete with shops, gyms and aerobic centres. What this isolation does is, it creates a kind of separation that does not do a number of things that most people do. This notion points to a dislocation between the culture and evangelical expectations. In this sense the movement is a living contradiction. Another factor for Burke was what he termed “*Spiritual Darwinism*”³⁸ that plagued so much of modernism’s evangelical churches. The phrase refers to the notion of climbing up the ladder on the assumption that ‘bigger is better’. The zeal for growth often fostered a program envy. As Carson (2005:18) puts it: “To shepherd a

³⁷ The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations (El Cajon, CA: emergentYS/Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

³⁸ The idea that bigger is always better, creating a food chain which encourages less successful church leaders to adopt the schemes and ride the victories of the biggest and best experts on church growth (Labanow, 2009:5).

congregation was not enough; the aim was to have the fastest growing congregation – It was survival of the fittest with a thin spiritual veneer” (Carson, 2005:17-18).

These two discontents of Burke points to two particular protests of the Emerging Church: A protest against evangelical consumerism and institutionalism. Mike Yaconellie speaks of the “*Illegitimate Church*”. He makes it clear that he has never lost his love for the church with a capital “C”, but as far as institutional church is concerned he has been appalled, embarrassed, depressed, angry, frustrated and grieved because of it. He made the following statements: “*I realized the modern-institutional-denominational church was permeated by values that are contradictory to the Church of Scripture. The very secular humanism the institutional church criticized pervaded the church structure, language, methodology, process, priorities, values, and mission. The ‘legitimate’ church, the one that had convinced me of my illegitimacy, was becoming the illegitimate church, fully embracing the values of modernity*” (Carson, 2005:20). Here we see a clear protest against modernism influencing the practices of evangelicalism. At the heart of these protests lies the concern of mission. The emerging Church is protesting consumerism and institutionalism because consumerism creates “staying to consume disciples” instead of “going to serve disciples” and institutionalism prioritises the institution over a lost world. The Emerging Church Movement signals the need to move on from inherited church traditions in order to remain effective with the Gospel. If this does not happen, the future of the church will be bleak.

Anderson (2006:2) exemplifies the dilemma well when he asks the question: What has Jerusalem to do with Antioch? The Jesus movement was launched from Jerusalem from where it was to spread its influence throughout the world whilst retaining its essence. It was to begin in Jerusalem, but it couldn’t be contained by Jerusalem – by its language, culture, customs, taboos, scruples or history. In other words, the Gospel message was not confined or contained by cultural norms of geographical locations or times. If this happens, the Gospel message would stagnate. Any movement that stops moving is an oxymoron, an impossibility. When the Jerusalem Christians tried to limit the movement’s daring expansion into and constructive engagement with other cultures, when they tried to contain it and control it and prune back its continuing emergence, Antioch became a new centre from which the movement could move. History tells the story that the headquarters’ of the faith’s last expansion may always be tempted to limit and contain and control the next expansion (Anderson, 2006:4-5). This truth leaves every Christian community with the constant choice of being Jerusalem or being Antioch.

There are thus questions to consider: Are we going to follow a Jerusalem based faith, where our message is tamed and contained by a dominant culture from the past? Or are we going to follow an Antioch based faith, where our message never loses its wild untamed essence, but like a spring of living water or vibrant new wine, it always flows and is never contained by old forms? The goal of the Emerging Church is to make missional progress without being contained by outdated cultural forms (Anderson, 2006:4-5). The Emerging Church is progressive. It desires to make progress with mission, reach the world. And it is characterised with progress in forms, paradigms and worldviews. There is an emphasis of progress in thinking, sticking with the times. The movement is focused on future, without neglecting the past, but certainly being willing to let go of the past. This is true progressiveness.

1.2.3. The Emerging Church is *Anti-Hierarchical*

A usual factor of new church movements has much to do with organisational or leadership structures. Eddie Gibbs points out why the Emerging Church takes a different stance towards hierarchical church structures. His argument once again starts with the changing times and speed of progress of 21st Century culture. We live in a culture of discontinuous and unpredictable change. Historical church structures were designed for a cultural context in which change was more predictable and occurred at a slower pace. When things happen suddenly and unexpectedly the church needs organisational structures that are flexible and flat – that is, capable of adjusting to changing needs and circumstances to allow for timely and appropriate responses. This phenomenon has an impact on any institution, sacred or secular. Hierarchical structures are thus increasingly problematic, because decision making has to go through a chain of command and levels of control. People find themselves boxed into structure. Vertical relationships are emphasised at the expense of horizontal engagement. Hierarchies paralyse initiative and are ponderous in responding to unanticipated challenges (Gibbs, 2009:11-12). Typical hierarchies contradict the free and spontaneous mindset of the postmodern person and ecclesiologically creates a less effective faith environment. As noted earlier, the postmodern Christian favours participation over against individualism (Carson, 2005:29), lean toward team ministry and decentralised leadership (Labanow, 2009:4) and prefers low-profile situational leadership over high-profile celebrity-type leadership (Gibbs, 2009:61).

Spencer Burke also promotes a protest against evangelical church leadership practice in what he calls “*Spiritual McCarthyism*”³⁹. There are a few concerns he points out with the common practice of a sole pastor leading a church. Burke rejects this style of leadership, the leadership-type that belongs to a “linear, analytical world” with clear lines of authority and a pastor who fulfils a “CEO” role. He claims that spiritual McCarthyism happens when the pastor CEO model goes bad or when well-meaning people get too much power. One of the key concerns for Burke is that such individuals hold too much sway over popular opinion. Associated with this is the common occurrence of when one hints at disagreement with such individuals one is black-listed as a liberal. Whereas modernism felt comfortable with truth claims from whoever was in authority, postmodernism asks many questions and take no facts at face-value as unquestionable. He further notes that Spiritual McCarthyism encourages people to orchestrate their lives to avoid censure and minimise risk. It teaches people to live in fear – to put up and shut up. Fear, intimidation, and control shouldn’t be the defining hallmarks of Christianity (Carson, 2005:16-17).

1.2.4. The Emerging Church has a *Generous Orthodoxy*

On the front cover of Brian McLaren’s book “*A Generous Orthodoxy*” he states the reason for his thesis: “*Why I am a missional, evangelical, post/protestant, liberal/conservative, mystical/poetic, biblical, charismatic/contemplative, fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, catholic, green, incarnational, depressed- yet hopeful, emergent, unfinished Christian*”. McLaren in these words point to the nature of emergence which Jones (2008:8) explains well: “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, 2005:28). Emergents reject the politics of left versus right. They see both such sides as a remnant of modernity, and through it they look forward to a more complex reality (Jones, 2008:20). The Emerging Church takes into account the contemporary emphasis on tolerance: not telling others they are wrong (Carson, 2005:30).

³⁹ The authoritarian rule by a sole church leader, generally the senior pastor, which results in a deadlock on truth and a near totalitarian church culture (Labanow, 2009:5).

Spencer Burke started a new ministry entitled “The Ooze.com”. It has an active chatroom. The idea behind the name is this: Various parts of the community are like mercury. At times we roll together, at times we roll apart. If you try to touch the liquid or constrain it, the substance will resist. Rather than force people to fall into line, an oozy community tolerates differences and treats people who hold opposing views with great dignity. On this Burke noted: “To me, that’s the essence of emergence”. This initiative stemmed from Burke’s own experience with Christ which made him realise that God could handle severe honesty. Authenticity in all its messiness is not offensive to Him. God allows anger, doubt and confusion (Carson, 2005:19). This safe environment or “epistemic humility” promotes the idea that members of the movement is not afraid to question core beliefs. At the heart of the movement lies the belief that we can ask questions about everything and anything. Because Christianity has been wrong in the past (slavery, whether woman could vote or not, Apartheid South Africa) it is perhaps wise to ask the “what if” questions sometimes (Carson, 2005:17). Nobody has it all together, no answers are fully perfected. That is why Burke considers himself no longer as a tour-guide but as a fellow traveller (Carson, 2005:19) and Todd Hunter describes himself as a postreductionist (Carson, 2005:21).

There is however a complexity with a generous orthodoxy. Brian McLaren points out three specific terms that illustrates this complexity. Firstly, he speaks of *pluralism* with specific reference to *philosophical pluralism*. It can be defined as the point of view that asserts that no single outlook can be the explanatory system or view of reality that accounts for all of life. Christian sects in particular often oppose such pluralism, but the reality is that there are diversities among us. Philosophical pluralism denies that any system offers a complete explanation. The second term is *relativism* which originally had a particular influence in the field of aesthetics: It was the theory of aesthetics that denied absolutism and insisted that aesthetic is relative to the people holding particular stances regarding what constituted beauty. Today relativism dominates the field of religion as well. In religion it denies absolutism and insists that morality and religion are relative to the people who embraces them. A generous orthodoxy touches on both relativism and philosophical pluralism. McLaren thus points the danger out that if both these are given free play it becomes very difficult to be faithful to the Bible. On the other side of the pendulum stands McLaren’s third term: *absolutism*. Absolutism cannot be allowed to rule either because criticism of it is too devastating and convincing to permit.

McLaren then continues to provide the emergent way of dealing with these three terms in a healthy way. He does this by using the illustration of a tree that keeps growing one layer at a time. Each layer embraces everything that went before. In this one sees the ability to embrace the old and yet moving on to acquire the new. The conclusion is in this: A culture plagued by absolutism needs a dose of relativism to correct what is wrong with it. Not a relativism that utterly displaces what came before, but a relativism that embraces what came before, but yet moves on. “If absolutism is the cancer, then relativism is the chemotherapy”. Even though this chemotherapy is dangerous, it is a necessary solution. It is a common phenomenon to hear conservatives complain that liberals are relativistic and liberals complain that conservatives are absolutist. But history teaches us that if either party solely takes the lead we are in a great deal of trouble. The way ahead is without neither extreme (Carson, 2005:31-34). One could perhaps then call the Emerging Church a “pendulum-swing” movement. Its quest is to correct the absolutism generated by the church of modernity. It carries strong undertones of relativism and will probably still find a good balance with absolutism.

1.2.5. The Emerging Church is *Relational*

The thing which sets emerging churches apart from others is ecclesiology. The visible emerging church, its church leadership and forms of worship sets it apart and illustrates its belief system. The Emerging Church is practicing a new form of congregationalism, which Tony Jones terms a “*relational ecclesiology*”. Although previous sects have adopted the same ecclesiology previously, the recent advent of technological devices, the “new media” and the significant generational differences begat by globalisation have enabled wholly new forms of intra-church and inter-church relationality (Jones, 2011:1). Tony Jones evaluated the practices of eight emerging congregations and concluded with the following: *Communion* was practiced more frequently than most evangelical churches, *worship* was informal in regard to timeousness and dress-code, *preaching* was done through communal hermeneutics (everyone interprets - participatory, semi-dialogue instead of traditional monologue), *fellowship* (community - *koinonia*) is done quite extensively online. In regard to practices of virtue he observed: *Hospitality* is done in such a way that it is not a program, but a way of being so everyone feels welcome, *theology* is about thinking through doctrine instead of being preached at with doctrine, *creating art* is seen as a holy practice, *priesthood of all believers* is seen in the lower view of ordination and higher view of laity, *sacred space* shows sensitivity to church tradition, but is also clearly a reflection of the informal and relational nature of the people who

are drawn to churches (Jones, 2011:82-121). Jones then claims that there is a binding characteristic of all these foregoing practices: They are ultimately practices of relationality. In emerging churches relationality is placed at a premium. It refers to the experience of lived relations between human beings and between human beings and God (Jones, 2011:121).

Jones also lives out this ecclesiology since he soon moved from a program mentality toward a pattern of ministry that focuses on pastoral care, contemplative care and intergenerational community – all aspects that focus in relationships (Carson, 2005:23). When Eddie Gibbs (2009:54-55) sets out his perception of the agreements between the missional church and the emerging church a “relational ecclesiology” clearly emerges. Both agree that “church” must be understood as referring to a people rather than to 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, receive support, and is encouraged to make their own distinctive contribution. It consists not of passive consumers, but of creative participants. It is structured not just for attracting a congregation, but also for sending and dispersing people on mission. It is comprised of an extensive network of clusters of believers providing mutual support, as well as engaging the broader networks of relationships of which they are a part. The church is not primarily a place of refuge, but a community of people on pilgrimage (Gibbs, 2009:54-55).

1.2.6. The Emerging Church envisions *Carpe Mañana*⁴⁰

Carpe Deim refers to “seizing today” whereas *Carpe Mañana* refers to “seizing tomorrow”. In the context I am using it I suggest that the Emerging Church has a view of the future and strives to be on the cutting edge of being effective in reaching the person of today, but also of tomorrow. Eddie Gibbs (2009) in *ChurchMorph* touches effectively on this idea. The “morphing” of the church refers to its transitioning to a new identity as a missional presence in the West. Emerging Church leaders have an acute awareness that simply adding new programs to the local church’s operation will not insure institutional survival as the culture evolves into tomorrow. Therefore, they choose to speak of an “unfettered re-imagining of the church” resulting in a comprehensive change in its self-understanding and its configuration. Gibbs continues to explore the notion of “deconstruction” which is often used in emerging circles. Often it is misunderstood to mean “demolition” which implies an antagonistic negative attitude

⁴⁰ Phrase is taken from the title of the book written by Len Sweet entitled: **Carpe Mañana: Is Your Church Ready to Seize Tomorrow?** (Zondervan,2001).

to break down. No need to say such an understanding is faulty. Rather, deconstruction describes a particular method of literary criticism that seeks to get behind the text to reveal the embedded assumptions. Among emerging churches deconstruction signifies “breakthrough” and not “destruction”. The “morphing” of the church describes the process of transformation of the church as it was, or as it exists today, to the church as it needs to become in order to engage appropriately and significantly in God’s mission in the context of the 21st Century (Gibbs, 2009:16-18).

Brian McLaren wrote: “You see, if we have a new world, we will need a new church. We won’t need a new religion per se, but a new framework for our theology. Not a new spirit, but a new spirituality. Not a new Christ, but a new Christian. Not a new denomination, but a new kind of church in every denomination”⁴¹ (Anderson, 2006:6). Gibbs & Coffey (2001) provides some direction markers as to what is necessary to happen for churches to become “new” and remain effective and relevant in the transitioning tide: They need to move from living in the past to engaging with the present, from inward driven to mission oriented, from bureaucratic hierarchies to apostolic networks, from schooling professionals to mentoring leaders, from following celebrities to encountering saints, from dead orthodoxy to living faith, from attracting a crowd to seeking the lost, from belonging to believing, from generic congregations to incarnational communities. It is these things the Emerging Church directly or indirectly are trying to apply in the quest of *carpe mañana*. The movement is thus missional from beginning to end.

1.3. A Summary of the “Great Emergence”

The Emerging Church is a movement growing around the globe, although its strongest point of origin is the West. It is perhaps accurate to say that we cannot talk anymore of “emergence” because the church has already emerged (Carson, 2005:14). Phyllis Tickle claims that by the time the Great Emergence has reached maturity, about 60% of practicing American Christians will be emergent or some variant thereof (Tickle, 2008:139). Tony Jones, however, notes that scholars are unsure whether the movement will have a long-term impact on American Protestantism (Jones, 2011:1). Regardless of what its impact on tomorrow will be it is quite evident that its paradigms and worldviews definitely finds resonance with the postmodern person seeking Christ. It rejects the sacred-secular divide, it chooses relationship over dogmatic

⁴¹ Brian McLaren, *Reinventing your church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998) p. 13.

differences, it favours community, robust theology and meaningful faith practice. Emergents believe that our relative position to God, to one another and to history breeds biblical humility and not relativistic apathy. It holds that the church as an institution is on the rocks, but not the Christian faith itself. Emergents embrace the whole Bible, but hold that the truth like God cannot be definitively articulated by finite human beings. Emergents embrace paradox, believe the church should function more like an open-source network and less like a hierarchy or bureaucracy. Emergents start new churches to save their faith, not necessarily as an outreach strategy. Emergents downplay and even outright reject the difference between clergy and laity and believe the church should be just as beautiful and messy as life (Jones, 2008:75-213).

2. Fresh Expressions

Fresh Expressions of Church is the youngest modern church movement. The movement originated in the Church of England which sought to address the challenges facing it in a changing context, particularly in the United Kingdom society (James, 2012). In 2003 the Anglican Church mandated a working group in the denomination to produce a visionary report on church planting. The report was published in 2004 upon which the General Synod of the Church of England commended it to the whole church for study and implementation (Gibbs, 2009:64-65). The report, entitled *Mission-Shaped Church* coined the phrase “Fresh Expressions of Church”, which was officially used as “Fresh Expressions” for the past eleven years (since 2005) particularly by the Anglican and Methodist Churches (freshexpressions.org.uk, 2012). Evidently the movement is thoroughly modern and contemporarily contextual.

2.1. *Pre-Mission-Shaped Church Report*

As noted in the *Emerging Church* section, church growth worldwide among traditional institutional churches has taken a toll with the advent of postmodernism. The Church of England being no exception. As David Male notes about British society: “We are struggling to connect with large areas of our society” (Male, 2011:11). Some changes or trends in society signalled a need for the church to re-evaluate its missional attempts. What were these trends that led the Church of England to launch a detailed report on its mission?

Many have provided insight to this question. Bishop Graham Cray stated that the nature of community has changed (and was changing long before 1994). The change was so significant that no one strategy would be adequate to fulfil the Anglican incarnational principle in Britain.

He describes the change in community as now being “multi-layered, comprising neighbourhoods, usually with permeable boundaries, and a wide variety of networks, ranging from the relatively local to the global”. He also notes how increased mobility and electronic communications technology have affected the nature of community. On this basis he concludes that a parochial system is no longer adequate by itself to deliver incarnational mission and therefore there is a need for integrated missionary approaches. He also notes how diverse consumer culture will never be reached by one standard form of church (Cray, 2003:x).

Eddie Gibbs (2009:67) noted that the changing social context resulted in the marginalisation of the church. Britain gradually became a post-Christian society that has bypassed the influence of the institutional church in redefining its core identity. Changing social mores reflect the progressive influence of secularisation, pluralism and relativism (Gibbs, 2009:67). Phil Potter⁴² (2016) provides a vivid illustration of the institutional church’s struggle to play an effective role in British society. He places his symbolic illustration under the shift-phrase of “*attracting to attaching*”. He proposes the picture of a lighthouse and the sea filled with many rafts. The lighthouse represents the strong recognised universal church on a landscape of certainty and absolutes. The rafts on the sea represents networks of communities, the little places where people live their lives in for the purpose of obtaining security and community. He then stresses the scenario in the following way: In the past people were guided to the lighthouse, but today many don’t see the lighthouse or don’t recognise it. Instead they choose to float on the restless sea constantly reinventing themselves to survive. They are confused, and disorientated. To them, there is no lighthouse anymore. This is a predicament of living in a postmodern post-Christendom world (Potter, 2016). The church is no longer the respected authority in life-guidance and people grab whatever is closest to them to provide the central answers to life rather than trust in the church.

Nelus Niemandt (2016) extrapolates the type of contemporary societal trends that bring about this scenario. He identifies four issues of developing society that the church needs to be aware of. Firstly, he speaks of *individualism* which refers to the individual being autonomous. Secondly, he speaks of *Church Refugees* (the “Dechurched”) which refers to those people who are done with church (“Doners”). These people take such a stance because they believe that the church is inwardly focused and is consumed by the politics of its own survival. He quotes one

⁴² Phil Potter is the Archbishops’ Missioner and team leader of Fresh Expressions, involved in national and international strategies for promoting new ways of doing church (Pioneering a New Future, Potter, P. 2015)

“doners” comment to illustrate the reality: “I guess the church churched the church out of me”. Thirdly, there is *Secularisation/post-Christendom* which refers to the notion that Christianity is losing its normative status. Those members of society who still believe, realise their choice to believe is just one choice among many, including the choice not to believe. They hold the view that faith in the transcendent is no longer rational or valid and can be contested. And lastly, he notes *Consumerism* in which people define themselves by what they buy and own – the search for happiness through material acquisition. This phenomenon has spilled over into Christian culture where Christians see worship for example as a consumer event (Niemandt, 2016). These four societal changes signal quite effectively why the “*lighthouse-sea-rafter*” scenario is so prevalent. It is a scenario stemming from both sides, those on the rafters and also the church. Often the church has misbehaved which simply fuelled societies’ antagonism against the church. But fault doesn’t belong to the church alone, the typical person has fallen victim to societal postmodern thinking and become his own god, thereby eliminating the need to seek guidance and counsel from the religious institution.

Missiologically speaking the church of the past used mostly the attractational model of reaching people, which seems to be ineffective in the 21st Century. The 1960’s saw “crusade evangelism” which was basically getting people together to listen to a great preacher. The 1970’s marked an emphasis on mission weeks and guest services in order to draw people, still about a time and event. In the 1980’s a new model of evangelism appeared in the form of friendship evangelism, and in the 1990’s more sophisticated methods such as *Alpha* was emerging. All these methods are “lighthouse methods” and operate on the premise of “attracting” and it simply is not effective enough anymore (Potter, 2015:119). Eddie Gibbs takes the situation further and identifies four reasons why the traditional institutional church is struggling on its mission. Firstly, the model of church they are endeavouring to reproduce is a style of church shaped by and suited for Christendom. It is not a missional model. Secondly, new church plants, when they do happen, have to meet criteria that are *-----set by the denomination in order to be considered a fully-fledged church: real estate, pay scales for clergy, furnishings for liturgies etc. Thirdly, traditional denominations suffer from a shortage of trained and passionate church planters. Such churches tend to attract and train leaders who seek security and a career in ministry, rather than ground-breaking risk-takers. Fourthly, seminaries that provide their leaders have trained their students in teaching and pastoring existing congregations, rather than in how to birth and reproduce new faith communities (Gibbs, 2009:64). These factors are not exhaustive of the issues that faced the Church in England, but

they point at least in the direction of answering why it was necessary for the Anglican Church to evaluate its missional efficacy.

2.2. The Mission-Shaped Church Report

The report was mandated to address the challenges facing the Church of England. Richard Osmer proposes that practical theology is an approach that has four tasks⁴³. The *descriptive-empirical* task asks “What is going on?”. The *interpretive* task asks “Why is this going on?”. The *normative* task asks, “What ought to be going on?” and the final task is the *pragmatic* task which questions “How might we respond?”. The report under consideration followed this pattern fairly accurately. It flows from contextual and descriptive analysis, through theological themes, to constructive proposals. In this sense the report can be seen as a practical theological report on the practice of church planting in the 21st Century.

The report firstly reveals the shifts and trends in English society which limits the effectiveness of the church directly or indirectly. Some of the social trends identified includes smaller households, more women in the workforce, longer work hours, increased mobility, increases in divorce and singleness, and the dominance of television among leisure activities. Of great importance is the shift in the nature of community; a move from structure of relationships based on geography toward a network-based one. In such a society location is secondary and relational connections through commonalities are primary. Further notes are made on the consumer culture and the arrival of post-Christendom. A section of the report is dedicated to the historical background on English church planting since 1978.

The report then initiates the engagement with the interpretive task by intersecting the changes and development both in the church and in society with present day questions of the mission task in England. An important observation of the report is its identifying of five types of relationships to the Church and their percentage in English society. These are regular attendees (10%), fringe attendees (10%), open-churched (20%), closed dechurched (20%), and non-churched (40%). A chapter is dedicated to expound upon the variety of fresh expression of church flourishing at the time. Across the diversity of expressions, several common features were identified: The importance of small groups for discipleship and mission, eschewing

⁴³ Osmer, R.R. 2008. *Practical Theology: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Sunday meetings, focus on relational networks not geographical areas, post-denominational identity, and connections to resourcing networks.

The report is not devoid of theological reflection. A chapter is dedicated to offer a thoughtful theology for a missionary church. It asserts God's missionary nature, it demonstrates the church as being the fruit of God's mission as well as the agent of His mission, and it shows Christ as a missionary whose incarnation and death are emblematic of the way and cost of mission, a way that the church must take. The final three chapters of the report proposes answers to the question: "How might we respond?" Amidst other recommendations it stresses constructive methodologies such as double-listening (attend to both culture and tradition) under the assumption that the context should shape the church. It also recommends church planting to be done in networks rather than neighbourhoods (James, 2012).

A central aspect of the report is *enculturation*. The report recognises that the changing nature of the missionary context requires a new enculturation of the Gospel within our society. Enculturation provides a principled basis for the costly crossing of cultural barriers and the planning of the church into a changed social context. On this note we can say "church should be planted, and not cloned" (Cray, 2003: xi). The thrust of the report is thoroughly missional. The report speaks of five values of a missionary church. Firstly, a missionary church is focused on God (the Trinity) - worship is at the heart which means to love and know the truth. Secondly, a missionary church is incarnational – it seeks to shape itself in relation to the culture in which it is located or to which it is called. Thirdly, a missionary church is transformational – it exists for the transformation of the community that it serves, through the power of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit. Fourthly, a missionary church makes disciples – it is active in calling people to faith in Jesus, it not only seeks to transform communities but also individuals. And fifthly, a missionary church is relational – it is characterised by welcome and hospitality (Gibbs, 2009:66).

The report's essence can be encapsulated as follows: It was about recognising "creative ways of being church" that have grown out of the grassroots of the Church. It aimed to set out an integrated strategy for both neighbourhood (Parish churches) and network churches as a response to the mobile and diverse environment of postmillennial society. It brought the message through loud and clear that the Church of England must become a missionary church. There can no longer be a reliance on people coming through the doors. It stresses the notion that churches should be outward looking and not rely solely on what worked in the past. In

2004 the Bishop of Manchester reported as saying “within a generation the Church of England may disappear if it doesn’t stop the recent decline” (Philips, 2004). It was thus a drastic measure taken to curb the ineffectiveness of the Church in England. And from it flowed the Fresh Expressions movement which was officially formally launched in 2005.

2.3. Fresh Expressions of Church Defined

The phrase “fresh expressions “is constantly being redefined and it is open to continuous reinterpretation (Potter, 2015:11). Despite this reality it is very evident that there is a common definition given to the movement. The widely accepted definition of the Fresh Expressions movement came from the joint work of the Church of England and the British Methodist Church in 2006: *A fresh expression is a form of church for our changing culture established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church*⁴⁴. “It will come into being through principles of listening, service, incarnational mission and making disciples. It will have the potential to become a mature expression of church shaped by the Gospel and the enduring marks of the church for its cultural context” (Potter, 2015:118). A “fresh expression”, simply put, is a new form of church for the new world in which we live (Collins, 2015). It entails the idea of thinking afresh what it means to be church in the world of today, to be relevant in the world of today (Pillay, 2016). 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 (Cray, 2016: Fresh Expressions Conference).

2.4. The Essence of Fresh Expressions

The definition provides insight regarding the movement, but further extrapolation is necessary to reach the thrust of the quest of the movement. The Fresh Expressions website (freshexpressions.org.uk) unpacks the definition in four terms that Potter (2016) also repeats as an explanatory method of the nub of the Fresh Expressions program. I see it necessary to extrapolate on these four terms with the additional term used by Nelus Niemandt (2016). These are *missional, contextual, formational, ecclesial, and relational*.

⁴⁴ This Definition is placed on the official website: <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/about/whatis> - Accessed 5 September 2016.

2.4.1. Missional

Fresh Expressions of church have the fundamental aim of reaching those who are outside the reach of the existing church. This quest makes the movement primarily missional (Cray, 2016). It is clear that if the church were to wait for society to come to it, it might wait forever. Fresh Expressions is therefore much more concerned with the “go” word than the “come” word (Potter, 2016). Goodhew, Roberts & Volland (2012: Kindle Locations 79) states in description of the movement: *“There has always been an urgency in the Gospel message that will not permit us to wait for people to come to us – we have to go to them. We have to pioneer new ways of connecting with people if they are to connect with Jesus”*. At least a third of the adults in the UK, and the majority of children and young people have never been regularly involved in any church in their lifetime. This fact makes the UK a big mission field. The movement exists for the unchurched, those who will not be reached by the traditional church (freshexpressions.org.uk).

The current model of church is: “gather for worship, scatter for mission”. The phrase sounds good and right, but in reality it is not very effective. It is difficult for the one person “who scatters” to his context to do mission alone. A group working together is better and more effective. We see this principle from Jesus Himself. He chose twelve disciples with whom to go on mission. We see the disciples baptising, not Jesus. Jesus sent them out on their mission two by two. God chose a couple (Adam & Eve) to take care of Eden, and He chose Israel as a nation to uphold His Name. The principle is simple: Mission is to be done in community (Moynach, 2016). Fresh Expressions takes this to heart and reaches into society as a team, as a community to establish community in the unchurched spheres of society.

Reaching the unchurched necessitates a different approach than traditional “mission tactics”. In this regard Potter (2015:141-142) speaks indirectly of using consumerism for the benefit of the growth of the Kingdom of God. Consumerism has been described as the religion of the 21st Century, where everything we do and believe is seen primarily as a consumer choice. Generally, we would rally against the idea, but Potter reminds us that every church goer is a consumer too. We choose where and when we worship, which denomination to follow and the clergy we would like to attend on Sunday. When we attend worship we choose where to sit, what to give and when to join in. “Churches already offer a wealth of choice, but the choices are geared to the faithful and are rarely aimed in the direction of those with no faith”. Fresh Expressions in this reality promotes a fresh consideration of the importance of choice and

variety in reaching the unchurched. Such a perspective does not imply a compromise in the truth that is proclaimed, but rather it stresses spontaneity in the way in which it is proclaimed. As Potter puts it: “We need to keep those styles that work in the areas they work and then rebuild mission shaped styles instead of maintaining church-shaped styled” (Potter, 2015:141-142). The mission in UK society necessitates the creation of flexible and relevant church styles. In order to discover these “styles” pioneers need to enter the contexts of where the unchurched find their communities. Such a mission makes the outreach contextual.

2.4.2. Contextual

Fresh Expressions assumes that the church is shaped by both the Gospel and the culture it is trying to reach. It does not promote the church becoming a conformist to culture, but rather suggests the church communicates and lives itself out in such a way that it can effectively reach and transform culture (freshexpressions.org.uk). Fresh Expressions of church therefore listens to people in order to enter their culture (Cray, 2016). As Eddie Gibbs says: “We need to learn, as a matter of urgency, how to exegete our cultural context” (Niemandt, 2016). Disciple-making is a process of enculturation, involving the reading of a local culture. The character of the local church will not be determined primarily by the character, tastes, dispositions, etc., of its members, but by those of the secular society in which and for which it lives (Cray, 2016). At the heart of such a missional strategy lies the belief that everything the church does, does not have to fit into a church building – one size does not fit all (Potter, 2015:119).

The change in society is so dramatic that the church cannot simply change to being a trendier church, rather there is a need to be more revolutionary (Male, 2011:11). On this note Fresh Expressions is synonymous with the notion of “mission-shaped church” rather than “church-shaped mission”. The first strategy fits the church in accordance with the mission whereas the latter is a mission shaped to fit the church. The latter in essence means: “This is the kind of church we are, and your very welcome to join us. But the shape of our church and its particular tradition cannot be changed”. It should be the other way around. The church should always be shaped by mission, by the context and culture in which it finds itself (Potter, 118-119).

There is Biblical and Early Church support for church taking shape in the mission field itself. Moynach (2016) stresses the idea that mission needs to be in everyday ordinary life. Jesus taught his disciples in everyday life. The New Testament churches met in the epicentres of everyday life. Church was happening in the community, not in the sacred space of the Temple

(Potter, 2016). Houses in the 1st Century didn't have windows, so the immediate community heard them worshipping God. It was public worship in the midst of life. Church should happen in the heart of day to day life. As the consumer world took over and sacred and secular became separated this notion of church died a fast death. Fresh Expressions strive to bring the church back into public life; meeting in restaurants, pubs and crèches. Society is fragmented to the degree that one church won't attract the diverse types of people. Rather the church must reach into those fragmented areas of society (Moynach, 2016). There are many things that believers have in common with other areas of society that can be used for the glory of the Kingdom of God. Consider three questions that describes this reality: What if the call on our lives is not just to be witnesses in the places where we live and thrive? What if our God-given pull is about becoming more than that? What if it is about actually building church and *koinonia* in new places, taking what we have in common as believers, harnessing what we have in common with non-believers, and creating a fresh expression of church, one that is truly mission-shaped and connected to the culture we're in? (Potter, 2015:124)

2.4.3. Formational

One of the faults of the traditional church is its emphasis on regular church attendance. Dallas Willard stresses in this regard: "One of the greatest contemporary barriers to meaningful spiritual formation in Christlikeness is overconfidence in the spiritual efficacy of regular church service". What he is essentially saying is that you don't become a disciple by just showing up at church. For this reason, Fresh Expressions places discipleship as a priority. It is intentional from the beginning (Cray, 2016). It does not just engage in serving people, or getting attendees to an event, but strives to lead the lost into being true disciples (freshexpressions.org.uk). It is not a new worship gathering or an event, rather it engages with culture and presents a counter-cultural challenge by its corporate life based on the worldview and values of the Gospel. It is concerned about the transformation of individuals and communities (Cray, 2016).

2.4.4. Ecclesial

A Fresh Expressions of church is an attempt to be fully church, it is not a stepping stone (Potter, 2016). It is a church plant, or a new congregation. "It is not a new way to reach people and add them to an existing congregation. It is not an old outreach with a new name ('rebranded' or 'freshened up'). Nor is it a half-way house, a bridge project, which people belong to for a while,

on their way into Christian faith, before crossing over to 'proper' church. This is proper church!" (freshexpressions.org.uk) A missionary church is reproducible – new faith communities are produced, not simply carbon copies of the mother church (Gibbs, 2009:66). In this regard church planting is not church “cloning”. The problem with the image of planting is that it suggests a predetermined model that will be inserted into a host culture, without regard for its relevance. Eddie Gibbs prefers therefore to use the phrase “birthing”. It is not a model for an already existing church, but rather it represents a newly created church that is birthed within a specific context. Fresh Expressions are thus not designed to provide an introductory experience of church for those alienated from traditional church life. They are not created with the intention of establishing temporary faith communities that will transfer later to the real thing. They are rather themselves authentic expressions of church that are indigenous to their cultural contexts (Gibbs, 2009:67-68).

It is important to note Phil Potter’s continual emphasis on retaining the ideals and allegiances to the institutional church. In his description of new fresh expressions of church, he says that we must “remember that we’re talking about additions to, and not a dismantling of, the church we have known, loved and inherited” (Potter, 2015:124). In this regard, Fresh Expressions completes and does not compete with the inherited church. He claims that we must keep the inherited church as is because it works for thousands of people. Pioneering a future is not about discarding and replacing but about adding and renewing what is already there. It carries a both-and vision instead of an either-or one. It embraces contemporary and traditional, as well as neighbourhoods and networks. The one thing it doesn’t embrace is the notion that simply doing things as they have always been done is still acceptable. We cannot afford to go on putting mission-shaped patches on church-shaped traditions (Potter, 2015:140).

2.4.5. Relational

Although the aspect of “relationship-centredness” is not listed as a part of the Fresh Expressions defining ideal, it implies such through its emphasis on networks, and listening to people. Nelus Niemandt picks up the relational nature that Fresh Expressions incorporates and promotes when he speaks of the future church. He claims that the future church will be driven by relationships. The church will increasingly exist as a community rather than a meeting once

a week (Niemandt, 2016). Jerry Pillay⁴⁵ strengthens the importance of community when he asserts that God is community (Trinity) and that the church (*ekklesia*) refers to a community whether it is a local church, a city-wide church or as the universal church. He states that God works with community and whenever He does work with individuals he sends them right back into community (Pillay, 2016). A missionary church is thus relational because a community of faith (*ekklesia*) is being formed through the endeavour. The ultimate reality is not substance but relationship. Faith is relational – we experience God in the other. Truth is relational – truth is a person and not a principle. As Len Sweet says “the church is a set or network of relationships, not a set of propositions, buildings or beliefs”. How does this relationality play itself out? The early church ate together. They had meals of joy. It is more important that our churches have tables that are relationally correct than liturgically correct. Fresh Expressions of church are smaller communities and do not fall in the category of mega-churches. The reason for this approach is based on the fact that millennials seek tighter connections and groups, it is all about quality of relationships (Niemandt, 2016). The average size of these groups are 44 and was started by small teams of 3 to 12 (Moynach, 2016).

2.5. Final Observations

Moynach (2016) claims that Fresh Expressions is a theological necessity. Even if the church was growing and was healthy, the movement would have to take shape since its incarnational missional nature is the essence of Christ’s work on Earth and should be imitated by the church. Birthing a Fresh Expressions starts with listening, it moves from there to loving and serving activity, then it forms community, then discipleship is explored and only then does the church take shape. The cycle then is to do it again. What happens in the process is that a new church is birthed in a unique context. A key word of Fresh Expressions mission is “variety”. If the call is to connect with every culture and engage in every context, then the challenge is to embrace a whole variety of styles in the way church is done (Potter, 2015:139-140). It requires therefore a willingness to transition, to let go of old ways. As Gerald Coates says: “God will not be tied down to 17th Century language, 18th Century songs, 19th Century morality, or 20th Century jargon”. Phil Potter adds... “or 21st Century technology” (Potter, 2015:139). It essentially inspires the notion of a “church without walls”. It is important to note however that when one

⁴⁵ Prof. Jerry Pillay is currently the Head of Department of Church History and Polity in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria. He is also President of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (International Fresh Expressions of Church Program, February 2016).

create an environment for the unchurched in their context that one does not make it so comfortable that the cost of discipleship and the call to serve is watered down.

The phrase “Fresh Expressions” was adopted in the Church of England to suggest “something new or enlivening is happening, but also suggests connection to history and the developing story of God’s work in the church” (Gibbs, 2009:69). Fresh Expressions therefore embraces the “emergence” of new forms, but also places great value in the church of the past. It is true that some of the most innovative, and potentially most enduring and significant, “fresh expressions” of church are found within the inherited church denominations. Fresh Expressions have the potential to influence the traditions that have birthed them. This will help them transition from their Christendom mindset to engage the missional challenges of post-secular society (Gibbs, 2009:84).

Fresh Expressions practice, emphases and theology stresses the need for transition. It calls for a change in mission style and also church style. But in order to support and engage with such a new way of doing church in the contemporary culture it is necessary for individuals to undergo a mind-shift. As Gibbs (2009:116) puts it: What needs to happen is a paradigm shift which can be defined as “a fundamental change in approach or underlying assumption”. New paradigms have already emerged in the UK. Churches have become more passion focused than problem focused, more network than neighbourhood, more fluid than fixed, more fragile than finished, more seasonal than permanent, more coaching than courses, more blended than mixed, more lay than ordained, more pre-faith involvement and inclusion, than post-faith instruction (Potter, 2016). All these shifts can be summarised in Paul Siaki’s phrase: *Church as usual vs church unusual*⁴⁶. It is transitioning from normal traditional church practice to more relevant and contemporary forms of church which is not as usual.

As Fresh Expressions continually transition in thinking and practice there are some more paradigm shifts that will need to take shape. Eric Swanson in his article “Ten Paradigm Shifts towards Community Transformation” points out the following necessary shifts: From building walls to building bridges, from measuring attendance to measuring impact, from encouraging the saints to attend the service to equipping the saints for service, from “serve us” to service

⁴⁶ Dr. Paul Siaki, a missionary from South Africa, commented as a respondent on Phil Potter’s lecture entitled “*Fresh Expressions and the Future Church*” at the International Fresh Expressions of Church Conference, 16 February 2016: Cape Town, RSA.

(from inward to outward focus), from duplication of human services and ministries to partnering with existing services and ministries, from fellowship to functional unity, from condemning the city to blessing the city and praying for it, from being a minister in a congregation to being a minister in a parish, from anecdote and speculation to valid information, from teacher to learner (Pillay, 2016). Reggie McNeal also points out some important shifts that are worthy to mention. He speaks of moving from saved souls to saved wholes, - missions to mission, - centre to margins, - top to bottom up, - diffused to focused, - transactional to transformational, - relief to development, - professional to full participation, - formal to fractal leadership, - Institution to movement, - Great commission to great completion. Pilly (2016) summarises these shifts by stating that Fresh Expressions is moving from church focused ministry to Kingdom centred ministry, from simply building the church to transforming the community. It is less institutional and more relational. And most importantly it is a shift from bringing people into the church to taking the church into the world (Pillay, 2016).

It is clear that the movement is “moving” in its thinking and methods of engagement. But it is also “on the move”. It has made great strides in the last couple of years. There has been a steady increase in pioneering ministry. We know now that about 30 000 Christians have gone into the mission field. They have planted just over 2000 fresh expressions of church with over 80 000 people attending them (Potter, 2016). In 2014 there were 3500 known fresh expressions of church in the UK. 13% of parishes have a fresh expression. Of those who attend 25% are existing churchgoers, 35% are lapsed churchgoers, and 40% are never churchd (Moynach, 2016). These figures say many things, but the most striking is the fact that fresh expressions are connecting in a very real sense with the lost of the world. It is a thoroughly missional attempt that is actually effective. Apart from its missionary success, it has also served as a catalyst for ecumenicity. The movement has brought together the Church of England and the Methodist Church. Apart from these two partners in mission the Congregational Federation, United Reformed Church and various other denominations have taken on the mission in unity.

3. The House Church Movement

Unlike the Emerging Church and Fresh Expressions, house churches have been around for a long time, it is not a new or unique phenomenon. We see house churches taking shape in the Greco-Roman world in the first three centuries. We also see lay led house churches exist after Constantine. The Celtic movement was the first to evangelise Europe. The holistic concept of

early Celtic Christianity resembles very closely that of New Testament house churches. (Simson, 1999: xxx-xxxii). Wolfgang Simson traces house church movements throughout history and finds strands of it being practiced right through time. Christians have been worshipping in homes in one way or another since the time of Christ (Hadaway *et al*, 1987:11). About more recent history he notes that between 1760 and 1960 there were simply too many movements and groups rediscovering the significance of small groups to mention. There has however arisen a strong movement towards house churches in three particular areas of the world in the last half-Century. In the 1970's Britain saw the birth of the "Restoration" or House Church Movement". One of the battle cries of this movement was that traditional church services and church life were in dire need of restoration through New Testament principles (Simson, 1999:71-72). This particular house church movement was characterised by charismatic emphases (Hollenweger, 1980:45). Organic house churches are thus not foreign to Europe, both now and in history. Another area of the world which was profoundly influenced by house church ideals is the East, especially the Third World, specifically China and Korea. In the 1960's the largest church in the world was developing through small group/house church initiatives – this was in Seoul Korea. The 1980's saw the expansion of the house churches in China. In 1986 there were more than 50 000 house churches in China. It has been estimated that there were more than 20 million Chinese involved in house churches at the time (Hadaway *et al*, 1987:15-20). Thirdly of course, house churches and associated ideals have emerged in the West. A variety of networks and independent experiments gathered momentum in the decades of the eighties and nineties on both sides of the Atlantic (Gibbs, 2009:58). According to Barna research there are about 11 million people involved in house churches in the USA with approximately 70 million having experimented with it (Cloud, 2012: Kindle Locations 27). Discussions on the house church ideal in the West has been more prominent over the last 30 years (Payne, 2008:1). House churches emerged for various reasons, which will be extrapolated below, but in the West it was birthed for very much the same reasons as the Emerging Church and Fresh Expressions. The House Church ideal that will thus be the central focus of this research section will be on the House Church trend that have developed in a Western mindset over the past thirty years.

3.1. The Origin of House Churches

The beginning of any movement is challenging to describe because any idea has probably lain dormant in many forms and many places for a while. This is even more so true when one tries

to pin-point the origins of the modern house church movement. Many house churches don't have contact with each other, they have not always had a common name and they haven't really been a visible movement (Hadaway et al, 1987:14, 20). But history seems to at least give us enough information to identify an increase in house church practice and the factors that gave rise to such initiatives. Although the House Church Movement under scrutiny is the trend developing in the West, it is also worthy to mention the originating factors of house churches in the East since it indicates house church elements that strengthens the ideal and forms part of the essence of the movement. In China house churches emerged because free worship in public buildings were illegal (Hadaway et al, 1987:11). Persecution made house churches a necessity (Hadaway et al, 1987:20). Much of house church initiatives stem from the Third World. The Third World has been recipients of missionary activities for many years. These missionary activities usually included the transplanting of traditional Western Church structures and traditions into the Third World. It could be phrased "the colonialism of the first world church". Such Third World churches found it easier to let go of such traditional structures than their Western counterparts. In this exploration they have themselves developed new structures of church that are more effective. Paul Cho's⁴⁷ Yoido Full Gospel Church is a good example since it is the world's largest church, yet its growth came from simple house church initiatives. Its exponential growth sparked interest in the West which lead to many Western churches embracing the cell group practice. The catalyst which transformed the house church into a movement was the emergence of new forms of church in the Third World (Hadaway et al, 1987:14-19).

Apart from Western house church ideas stemming from Third world initiatives like we see in Korea, there has been a growing tendency of protest against the institutional church and its forms. A precursor to the Emerging Church consisted of house churches, in which small groups met to experiment alternative ways of being church. Some of the house church groups around today represent an alternative experimental structure in continuing relationships with a parent church, but most are groups separated in protest, declaring their complete independence from institutional Christianity (Gibbs, 2009:58). In many ways it carries underlying rebellion against Centuries of church history. The organic nature of church took on a new structure after Constantine in the 4th Century. The structure introduced the "congregation type" church which

⁴⁷ Paul Cho. Founder of the largest church in the world which made use of home groups to reach exceptional growth (Hadaway et al, 1987:14).

led the church in becoming an audience. Slowly house churches were marginalised and ultimately forbidden. Nobody could function as Christians privately, without the sanction of the state and its acknowledged and ordained orthodox church. With the rise of the structured church in Constantine's time, professional leadership emerged, special buildings (cathedrals) were erected and the church was gradually removed from everyday life. With the symbolic rituals of priests there developed a growing tendency for church to become a spectator-based experience. This had a profound effect on various church-related practices. For example, the Lord's Supper was now reduced to a sip and a bite, suddenly it wasn't a "supper" anymore (Simson, 1999:24-27)

In time the structured church became problematic because people needed a more intensive and supportive form of church than the church of history has generally given them (Hadaway et al, 1987:11). Despite the inherent need for community many have started to see discrepancies with ecclesiological institutionalism. Smith (2016) notes: "Disillusioned by the lack of NT realities, abusive authority and the spreading apostasy within large segments of institutionalised Christianity, thousands of Christians across America, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the UK are gathering in homes to study the Scriptures, pray, share communion and experience fellowship and the simplicity of 1st Century Christianity". Nate Krupp in his *Radical Christianity* website says: "We are seeing God do incredible things: people are leaving the institutional church by the thousands; they are tired of being an audience, instead of a body; they question increasingly all the money that goes into buildings; they are tired of being controlled and manipulated; they long to use their gifts to serve God and see "the priesthood of all believers" instead of the clergy and they long to see the Holy Spirit allowed to freely move instead of everything being controlled. God is sovereignly in these days raising up a massive growing movement of people who are desiring to function like the early church in the Book of Acts. Believers are turning their backs on all the programs and returning to their first love, Jesus" (Smith, 2016). Krupp and Smith here identifies the problem for which Paul Cho had the solution already back in the 1960's. The "secret" of Yoido Full Gospel Church is not so much a secret, it is rather simple. It is filling the need in the lives of Christians for small-group worship and for the caring and support of friends they come to know and trust. Additionally, all of this is done in a way that naturally results in evangelistic growth. Such a method of church and mission 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 house church concepts (Zdero, 2004:1). In fact, almost all contemporary church plants in the West go through an organic house church phase in their early days (Simson, 1999). Such methodologies outstrip more traditional approaches to evangelism, church growth, and church planting. They are great for mission because it is biblical, simple, natural, inexpensive, duplicable, intimate, and is a breeding ground for new leaders (Zdero, 2004:1).

The House Church Movement in many ways are pointing out the failures of the institutional church, especially in regard to God's mission. As Simson (1999: xiii) points out "church as we know it is preventing church as God wants it". Up to the nineties the church experienced great growth. From about 150 million in 1974 to 650 million in 1998. It is interesting to note however that this growth period was marked by the greatest frustration that people ever had with the church. Although statistics of growth was rampant, we saw little statistics on how many members concretely enter the membership role and even less did we hear about the "silent exodus" of people slipping out again. These people were *attracted but not included*, they were *interested but not integrated*, *harvested and cut but not gathered in the barn*, *touched but not transformed*. They turned to look at the "Way" and then turned and looked "away" in disappointment because of what they saw. It is worthy to note that this scenario doesn't mean people were not interested in God, it simply means the Church was not a good witness. A research project in Amsterdam in the early 1990's asked young people whether they were interested in God. 100% answered "yes". The same sample was asked whether they were interested in church. 1% said "yes" and 99% said "no". Clearly there is a problem with mission (Simson, 1999:1-2). It is a two-fold problem faced by the West: How can the church activate the large pool of nominal or lapsed Christians? Secondly, how can the church reach into the smaller but increasing population of unchurched who see no use for Christianity? Megachurches/seeker-sensitive churches and traditional orthodox churches are battling with the mission posed by the two questions. House Church thinkers believe that it is a mission that can only be adequately addressed by house churches in neighbourhoods. Change the families and you change society (Simson, 1999: xxvii). The desire for effective mission coupled with an aversion for ecclesial institutionalism are the two main factors that gave rise to the emergence of an increasingly prominent house church trend.

3.2. The House Church Movement Defined

The house church movement has no central organisation that oversees the number of house churches. Each house church is autonomous and carries no denominational associations. This

reality confirms why there is a lack of information on the movement, inclusive of a clear definition of what the movement is (Payne 2008:15). House churches usually do not make much of themselves, that is part of the reason few of them are even noticed (Simson, 1999: xxx). Based on this truth, Zdero (2004:14) says it cannot really be identified as a movement, but rather as a fledgling house church *trend*. The very essence of the emergence of the house church ideal centres around “deinstitutionalisation”. It is only natural therefore that measuring the movement, or defining the movement, or providing headquarters for the movement would be absent since these are all institution-associated aspects. The “house church movement” (no capitals) is therefore more of a “grassroots trend” than an “organisational program”. Descriptive terms have however emerged, such as “simple church”, “open church”, “integrated church”, “micro church” and “organic church” (Cloud, 2012: Kindle Locations 27). Each of these provide insight to what the trend entails, but they do not encapsulate in totality a definition of the movement.

Perhaps the most effective starting point to describe the trend is to correlate it with the common “cell group” initiatives existing in various contemporary churches. The difference between the two revolve around two elements: *Autonomy* and *Pastoral Leadership*. A cell group is not autonomous, but is an addition to a mother church. A house church is autonomous. The cell group’s mother church is led by clergy, whereas the house church as “total church” is led by laity (Payne, 2008:13). The only similarities between the two groups is perhaps only size and location. In traditional churches “home-groups” or “Bible studies” are merely optional appendages. People who meet in such a way usually are members of the mother church and are generally inward focused. In this scenario we can speak of “the church *with* small groups”. Small groups are an added, but the real and main thing is Sunday worship at the building. A house church does not belong to a larger system having a pyramid leadership structure with a senior minister at the top. What we see here in house church practice is a “church *of* small groups” (Zdero, 2004:3-4).

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 it is 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 programs. 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*. It is important to note however that the idea of "house" should not be overemphasised. Although meeting in homes are characteristic of the trend, the issue is not what type of place believers gather but what shape their "committed life together takes as they wrestle with the many duties and privileges of flowing out of the priesthood of all believers" (Smith, 2016). It is about sharing Christ around life, and not an institution saturated with programs, infrastructure and professional leadership.

3.3. The Essence of the House Church Trend

What remains to be discussed is the underlying ideas that fuel and strengthen the house church concept. Like most movements there is a strong Biblical motivating influence. Out of all the movements, it is the house church movement that probably is best supported by Scripture. I will briefly discuss the Biblical support to house churches before turning to the descriptive-phrases proposed by Wolfgang Simson to exemplify the heart of the trend.

3.3.1. Biblical Support for the House Church Trend

House churches take their cue from Scripture and claim that the early church consisted of house churches. The Early Church saw itself as the assembly (ekklesia) which is a term that can be used in three contexts: someone's home, in the city-wide region, or in the universal sense. The term is never used in reference to a special building, a religious ceremony, or a class of paid professional leaders. The church met privately from house to house (I have already indicated Scriptural references in Chapter 2). The Gospels also record that homes, among other places, were a natural part of Jesus's life and ministry. Christ was worshiped as a baby in a house, He healed Peter's mother-in-law in a house, the Last supper was held in a house, and Jesus preached to people, crowded in homes. The very first text refers to the church (Acts 2:42-47) and speaks of the disciples going from house to house. The fact that the Early Church also met in the Temple courts and Synagogues does not negate the fact that they met in homes. The first

Christians were Jewish; they would have found it very natural to continue being part of Jewish religious life. At closer inspection, however, we see these places being used for evangelistic efforts and it is therefore doubtful that these occasions were meetings for mutual encouragement in the faith (Zdero, 2004:17-25).

The practice of house churches has been debated on the basis of the Early Church. It has been suggested that persecution, poverty and an early developmental stage were the deciding factors for the house churches in early times. The problem with these suggestions is that the Early Church had wealthy people too, and there were not persecutions in all the places where the church was and lastly, if the house church ideal was developmental, 300 years would be too long a developmental stage in order for it to have evolved into buildings. Rather, house churches were used because the theology of the church was a family, living out community life together and the interactive nature of church meetings led them to meet in homes. In other words, the Early Church did not consciously utilise or explicitly advocate the house church structure because of its efficiency or effectiveness. Rather, the house church form was simply the natural result of their beliefs and values as modelled and initiated by the Apostles (Zdero, 2004: 17-25). Nate Krupp characterises New Testament Christianity as a movement away from clergy-dominated services and programs to mutually participating assemblies of believers, from a Gospel of “easy-believism” to the Gospel of the Kingdom with its call to repentance and submission to Christ as Lord, from one-man leadership to a plurality of servant-leaders, and from gathering in church buildings to gathering in homes (Smith, 2016).

In terms of practice, these house churches engaged with mystical elements (prayer, praise and singing), intellectual elements (Apostle’s teaching), spectacular elements (prophecy, tongues etc.), symbolic elements (Lord’s Supper and Baptism), relational elements (“one another” and “each other”), evangelistic elements (when non-Christians visits 1 Cor. 14:23) and there were material elements (sharing of wealth). Meetings were usually held on the 1st day of the week, possibly before the sun arose and meetings could go on for a long time as we see in the instance of Paul in Troas (Acts 20) (Zdero, 2004:25-39). Zdero (2004:39-48) describes two leadership roles in this church setting: The local leader (shepherd and deacon) and the mobile leader (apostles and evangelists). He then concludes by saying that when one considers the brief summary of early church practices and leadership structures a critical feature emerges: *They minimized the complexity of their forms in order to maximise the effectiveness of their functions*. Organisation was kept to a minimum so they could focus on their dynamic mandate

of making disciples of Christ and expanding into new uncharted territories. The early Jesus movement identified itself more along the lines of relationships with each other and Christ, rather than membership in an organisation. Metaphors like family, a body, a household, a flock, a spiritual temple all point to the fact that the church was less of a spiritual factory and more of an organic entity. Their theology of church was characterised by the notions of family and organicism (Zdero, 2004:56). The house churches of the 1st Century were living room churches that conquered the world. Many have come to realise the power and simplicity of the 1st Century church. Some traditional churches are even beginning to sell their buildings and reorganising a web of house churches to more effectively penetrate segments of their city with the great news of Jesus Christ. House churches have a vision of recapturing the lost vision of what the Christian church once was (Zdero, 2004:5).

3.3.2. Descriptive-Phrases Exemplifying the House Church Trend

Wolfgang Simson suggests a set of phrases that underscores the motivations of the house church trend. I have listed below the most relevant of them:

1. *Christianity is a way of life, not a series of religious meetings.* Christians were called “The Way” before they were called Christians. “The Way” was used to describe the early movement because those in the movement had found the way to live. Christianity is about life. The nature of church is not reflected in a series of religious services led by professional clergy, rather it is the community of disciples of Jesus doing life together with their extended spiritual family every day of the week.
2. *Time to change the “cathegogue system”.* The “Cathegogue System” refers to linking the Temple (house of God) mentality and the synagogue. It is a religious system based on two elements: A Christian version of the Temple (cathedral) and a worship pattern styled after the Jewish synagogue. It was created by the historic orthodox and catholic church after Constantine in the 4th Century. They adapted a blueprint for Christian meetings and worship which was neither expressly revealed or even endorsed by God in New Testament times. The system had various concerning issues associated with it: It was birthed in pagan philosophy, it developed into the Black Hole of Christianity which swallowed up most of the church’s society-transforming energies and inducing the church to become absorbed with itself for centuries to come. As Simson so adequately explains the issue: *“The Roman Catholic church went on to canonize the system. Luther reformed the content of the Gospel,*

but left the outer forms of church remarkably untouched. The Free churches freed the system from the State, the Baptists then baptised it, the Quakers dry-cleaned it, the Salvation Army put it in uniform, the Pentecostals anointed it and the Charismatics renewed it, but until today nobody has really changed the system. The time to do that has now arrived” (Simson, 1999: xx).

3. *The Third Reformation.* Luther reformed the theology of the Church. This was the first reformation. The second reformation was in the 18th century through the pietistic renewals which was about a new intimacy with God. God is currently initiating a third reformation, a reformation of structure (Simson, 1999: xvi). The third reformation is not a matter of making a few cosmetic changes or alterations, but it suggests a rebuilding according to fundamental New Testament patterns. This might suggest a starting from scratch, going back to zero (Simson, 1999:7). It has already been noted that one of the biggest barriers to church is the church itself. The quickest way to church the unchurched may very well be to unchurch the church (Simson, 1999:12). You cannot produce a new quality in the church by changing structures. On this note, Simson quotes Tom Peters (Management Guru) who says “renewal and reformation is out, revolution is in”. Companies don’t need a CEO, but rather a CDE (Chief Destructive Officer). The idea he promotes is that it is easier to rebuild according to a new pattern than to restore and renew an outdated one. It requires the dismantling of obstructive traditions (Simson, 1999:14). At the heart of the house church trend stands the dismantling of institutional Christianity.
4. *From church houses to house churches.* The New Testament does not mince words about the fact that God has no house. He does not live in Temples made by human hands (Acts 17). The church is the people of God; it is not a place or a time. “The church is at home therefore where people are at home” – in ordinary houses. It is in the home where people can have natural “meetings”. They eat, they share, they teach how to live through real life dialogue and they baptise one another. Here we see the true nature of *koinonia* (Simson, 1999: xvi-xvii).
5. *The church has to become small in order to grow large.* Many churches today that are particularly birthed out of the seeker-sensitive/megachurch/church growth movement initiatives are simply too big to provide real fellowship. They have become “fellowships without fellowship”. The New Testament churches were typically made up of ten to fifteen people. It didn’t grow by forming big congregations of 300 people to fill cathedrals and in

so doing, losing fellowship. Rather, it multiplied sideways, dividing like organic cells, once these groups reached around 15 to 20 people (Simson, 1999: xvii)

6. *No church is led by a pastor alone.* It has already been adequately stressed that early church leadership was practiced by a plurality of leaders, specifically elders. These were shepherds taking care of the needs of the flock (Simson, 1999: xviii).
7. *The right pieces fitted together in the wrong way.* If one wants to put together a jigsaw puzzle, it must be done according to the original pattern. If it is not done in such a way the final product, the picture, will turn out wrong and many of the individual pieces will not make sense. Similarly, the church has always had the right pieces, but we have fitted them together in the wrong way because of fear, tradition, religious jealousy and a power-control mentality (Simson, 1999: xviii).
8. *Out of the hands of the bureaucratic clergy and on towards the priesthood of all believers.* The New Testament does not provide a pattern that suggests the Church was led by one man and the rest of the church were simply passive consumers. Christianity has adopted the “spectator-based” worship idea from pagan religions, and the Old Testament at best. Simson states: “The heavy professionalization of the church since Constantine has been a pervasive influence long enough, dividing the people of God artificially into an infantilized laity and a professional clergy, and developing power-based mentalities and pyramid structures”. We see in the letter from Paul to Timothy that there is only one mediator and God allows no other (1 Tim. 2:5) (Simson, 1999: Xix).
9. *Return from organised to organic forms of Christianity.* What has become a maximum of organisation with a minimum of organism, has to be changed into a minimum of organisation to allow a maximum of organism. The body of Christ is not a description of an organised mechanism, rather it is a description of an organic being. At the local level the church consists of a multitude of extended spiritual families which are organically related to each other as a network. Too much organisation has, like a straight-jacket, often choked the organism for fear that something might go wrong. But fear is not a Christian virtue, faith is. Control might be good, but trust is better. Today we need to develop regional and national networks based on trust, not a new arrangement of political ecumenism, for organic forms of Christianity to emerge (Simson, 1999: Xx-xxi)

10. *From worshipping our worship to worshipping God.* The image of much contemporary Christianity could be summarised as follows: “Holy people coming regularly to a holy place on a holy day at a holy hour to participate in a holy ritual led by a holy man dressed in holy clothes for a holy fee”. Since this regular performance-oriented enterprise called ‘worship service’ requires a lot of organisational talent and administrative bureaucracy, formalised and institutionalised patterns develop quickly into rigid traditions. Statistics prove that a one or two-hour contemporary “worship service” is very resource-hungry, but it produces very little fruit in terms of disciplining people (i.e. changing their lives). Economically it is a high input, low output structure. Traditionally, the desire to worship in the right way has led to much denominationalism, confessionalism and nominalism. This ignores the notion that Christians are called to worship in spirit and truth rather than in cathedrals holding songbooks (Simson, 1999: xxi).
11. *Stop bringing people to church, and start bringing the church to the people.* The church is changing back from being a come-structure to being a go-structure. The mission of the church will never be accomplished just by adding to the existing structure (Simson, 1999: xxi – xxii). We see here very much the same notion as Fresh Expressions in which Phil Potter (2016) speaks of putting lipstick on a pig. The pig remains a pig no matter how you try to decorate it. Similarly, the church is not going to be more effective by changing some of the existing structure, rather the church must simply “go” as prescribed by the Great Commission.
12. *Rediscovering the Lord’s Supper as a real supper with real food.* The Lord’s supper was actually more a substantial supper with a symbolic meaning, than a symbolic supper with a substantial meaning (Simson, 1999: xxii).
13. *From denominations to city-wide celebrations.* Jesus called a universal movement, but what arrived was a “series of religious corporations with global chains marketing their special brands of Christianity and competing with each other”. Jesus never gave a mandate to his people to organise themselves into factions and denominations. Paul called this type of behaviour “worldly” and a sign of immaturity. The early Christians had a dual identity: They were vertically converted to God, and they converted to each other horizontally here on Earth. They set themselves up in relation to God and also organised themselves geographically towards one another. This means that the early Christians not only came together in their neighbourhood house churches in order to share life locally but that they

also came together as a collective identity as much as they could for a city-wide celebration. When authenticity in the neighbourhoods complements the city-wide corporate identity, the church becomes politically significant, spiritually convincing and it allows a return to the biblical model of the city church which is the sum total of all born again Christians of a city or an area (Simson, 1999: xxii – xxiii).

14. *The church comes home.* The easiest and most difficult place to be spiritual is at home in the presence of your family. It is here where hypocrisy can be effectively weeded out and authenticity can be grown. What we see in Christianity so often is a move away from family (often as a place of spiritual defeat) on towards a move of organised, artificial performances in sacred buildings far from the atmosphere of real life. God is in the business of recapturing homes. So the church is returning back to its roots – back to where it came from. It literally comes home, completing the circle of church history at the end of world history (Simson, 1999: xxiv).

3.4. Unique Positives of House Churches

The house church ideal is not simply a good biblical idea to be copied. There are numerous valid advantages of the model. Simson (1999: 32-37) provides twelve advantages of a cell-based house church movement: Disciple multiplication, persecution proof structure, freedom from church growth barriers, involvement of many more people more efficiently, breaking the pastoral care dilemma, providing a place of life transformation and accountability, the house is a most effective place for new Christians, solving the leadership crisis, it is more biblical, it is undeniably cheaper, and it resurrects the city church. These can further be extrapolated in three particular areas:

3.4.1. Natural Growth

Christian Schwartz in regard to church growth has become an expert on biotic principles. These are patterns that operate within God's creative order of organic life. His studies in this field led him to develop "Natural Church Development" which refers to a set of principles that fuels "non-microwaved" church growth. The principles are drawn from agricultural and biological contexts where growth processes are paralleled with natural methods versus mechanical (machine-like methods). It is a juxtaposition of machine and organism. The machine model functions very well in the world of technology but it fails in the world of biotic, organic growth. If we agree that the church is a creation of God, a biotic organism, then we must look for God's

natural organic principles to understand how it grows. Biotic principles utilise the minimum amount of energy to produce the maximum results. And very significantly, it happens all by itself. It prevents the church from becoming manufactured and allows it to be recreated by the Spirit of God according to God's creational patterns. One of the important principles is *multiplication*. Unlimited growth is not the ideal, but multiplication is. The fruit of an apple tree is not an apple, but another apple tree. When speaking in the context of house churches we can say that the fruit of a church is not a convert, but other churches that plant other churches. Another principle to note briefly is *energy transformation*. This is the principle that observes how existing forces can be used positively towards a desired goal (Simson, 1999:14, 16). The house church practice grows through multiplication, the splitting of cells. It happens naturally, is not programmed and therefore uses less energy. It is the best model to reach all the nations of the world (Simson, 1999: xxxi). Elton Trueblood said "The Church must be smaller before it can be substantially stronger". The contemporary church movements will have to consider the house church trend if it seeks to missionally engage the world in years to come. The church of the future will have to become smaller, before it can be substantially larger. It will have to shrink in order to grow (Simson, 1999:21).

3.4.2. Spontaneous *Koinonia*

Simson (1999:17) speaks of the "20-barrier". There is a line (represented by the limit of 20 members) between organic and organised, formal and informal, spontaneous and liturgical. In many cultures 20 is the maximum number of people where there is still a sense of family. The moment the church crosses the 20 barrier it stops being informal and organic. When this happens, effectiveness in relationships and mutual communication decline and the need for someone to coach and lead the meeting ascends. When this happens, the original organism is a thing of the past, still alive, but trapped into a formal structure that chokes it, conditions it, and ultimately could prevent relational and spontaneous fellowship in the name of organised fellowship. So the larger the group gets the more one has to organise and plan *koinonia* which is supposed to happen spontaneously. Since house churches generally subscribe consciously or not to the 20-barrier it is always assured of natural fellowship and community. This promotes genuine relationships (Simson, 1999:18)

3.4.3. No Boundaries

One of the greatest positives of the movement is that it destroys boundaries. There is no allowance made for denominational boundaries or traditions to prevent partnering together as one city-wide church (Zdero, 2004:3). Although the movement characterises anti-institutional ideals it also recognises that its own model is not the only model and therefore does not in totality oppose denominational structures (Simson, 1999: xxv). Its non-institutional nature makes no allowance for an “us and them” or “in or out” mentality, characterised by sectarianism. Therefore, there are no boundaries. In this regard it becomes an authentic ecumenical movement.

3.5. Concluding Observations

House churches are living things in themselves, they are organic. They have already stood the test of time without going extinct. Not only did the church survive in house churches during the first three Centuries, but even in the time of Constantine, it is even possible that the body of Christ actually survived the centuries of the dark ages in the congregational church because of the house churches. The effectiveness of house churches cannot be avoided, as it is marked in history (Simson, 1999:74). As the house church trend arises today we can be assured that it is not just another fad that will become outdated, it has been around for too long (Smith, 2016). It plays a unique role as a grassroots initiative that can easily penetrate any population.

4. The Modern Church Trends Encapsulated

The three movements that have been evaluated gives 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 Emerging Church were birthed spontaneously over time, but Fresh Expression was initiated through the Church of England and its “Mission-Shaped Church” report. Whereas the first two movements “emerged” spontaneously, Fresh Expressions were more of a planned movement. Fresh Expressions also differ with the other two movements on its loyalties to the institutional church. Fresh Expressions are expressions of church in addition to the inherited church, whereas the other two are slightly more conflicted towards the inherited church. House churches operate independently of the inherited church, and the Emerging Church strives towards the transformation of the inherited church itself. Fresh Expressions continues to seek the preservation of the institutional church alongside the creation of new forms of church. Fresh

Expressions is also a more structured and 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 in Britain, the Emerging Church in the USA and house churches worldwide, but particularly in the East. Despite these differences, which are actually quite insignificant, I have picked up six broad similarities between the three movements that can be used as coordinates to draft a map of the contemporary church trend:

4.1. Mission

All three movements tie back to mission and are driven by mission. The Emerging Church came in existence out of grappling with ideas on how the church can reach postmodern people. Fresh Expressions was birthed out of a report which sought to evaluate how the Church of England can reach the unchurched of British society. A strong part of house church initiatives 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. More will be said on this in the final chapter, but the fact that these movements are flavoured with mission indicates that it is the work of the paraclete.

4.2. Cultural Sensitivity

The key factor that separates the Emerging Church from the churches it emerged from is the fact that it is culturally sensitive. People who lead in the Emerging Church 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. 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 centres for the key paradigm shifts that postmoderns operate under. Fresh Expressions 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 engages postmodern ideas. The House Church ideal has embraced, among other things, the postmodern notions of distrusting authoritarianism and an aversion to rigidity. All three movements therefore proactively formulate ways to meet their culture in context.

4.3. Ecclesial Fluidity

The Emerging Church is 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 fundamentalist and absolutist. Both these ideas oppose the postmodern mind. The postmodern culture promotes relativism. As noted previously, relativism is the chemo therapy 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 on propositional truth. In regard to doctrine, there is thus fluidity. And in regard to practice, these churches have great fluidity and flexibility in ways of worship. Fresh Expressions is based on the notions of “enculturation”, “incarnational mission”, “contextualisation” and “variety”. 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 “organic”. This term is placed in opposition to “organisation” to reveal the spontaneous and flexible nature that church fellowship, mission and worship should entail.

4.4. Priesthood of all Believers

The Emerging Church and 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 mindset 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. 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. 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 do not make such a big fuss of clergy dominated leadership. I suspect the reason is that there is no need. 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.

4.5. Relational Ecclesiology

In terms of the Emerging Church 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”. 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. The postmodern person seeks community. The average human being needs community. All three these movements therefore realise, due to their cultural sensitivity, that relationality needs to be placed high on the list of priorities.

4.6. Ecumenicity

All three 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 that is a product from postmodernism is the avoidance of the “us-and-them” sectarianism that characterised so much of evangelicalism. The Emerging Church emphasises inclusivism over exclusivism, it is a church with no walls. In this sense it has stimulated ecumenism. Fresh Expressions 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. The result of this is that they are genuinely non-denominational and therefore a church without boundaries. It 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.

Chapter 5: The Restoration Movement critiqued to provide insight for Modern Church struggles.

Up to this point segments of the church in three spaces of history have been labelled and described. The apostolic movement in the 1st Century produced effective missional churches that penetrated every social sphere and geographical location of ancient society. The Restoration Movement of the 18th Century shaped churches in antebellum America that left an indelible mark on American society. The contemporary Modern Church movements are currently paving ways through postmodern societal strata to introduce the church anew to a rapidly changing social milieu. What thus remains is to tie these three ecclesial movements together into a meaningful whole. Central stage belongs to the RM. This final chapter will be divided into two sections. Section one will primarily be a critique of the RM which will include a critical analysis of its basic objectives and underlying principles and also a comparison of its ecclesiology to the 1st Century ecclesiology explored in chapter 2. Section two will be a correlation of the RM with the Modern Church with the specific aim of extracting restoration principles that can benefit the quest of the Modern Church. The “so what” motif of this research is to reflect on history in such a way that the contemporary church can benefit. As George Santayana says: *“Those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it”*.

Before bringing the study to a position of relevance it is necessary to make brief comments on the critique I will be making on the Restoration Movement. In this study I have come to realise that most of the RM, its theories, theologies and hermeneutics are found wanting. It is a difficult task to find a success in the RM that can benefit the Modern Church. Instead what I am left with to do primarily is to use the failures of the RM to draw lessons for the Modern Church to reflect on. In reality I have come to realise that it is quite unfair to critically investigate a movement of the past. The reason for this is that our theology has evolved. Our hermeneutics have evolved. The church has evolved. The gap between now and then is large enough to show two different worlds and forms of thought. I mention this because it is not my desire to seem overly pessimistic of the RM, but to simply point out areas from which lessons can be drawn from. With great humility and respect for the RM, I now proceed.

Section 1: Critical Analysis & Reflection on the Restoration Movement

1. Analysis of Restoration Principles & Objectives

The rapid growth in adherents of the movement in its early years attests to its success in its time. In terms of establishing an ecclesiology that spear-headed effective mission, the movement was initially faultless. The paradigm and its associated principles that took shape through Stone and Campbell resonated with the social milieu it sought to penetrate. The new Americans were impressed with the new nation and inherently imagined it to be a time of religious renewal devoid of old world paradigms (Hughes, 2008:95). In actual fact, immigrants were ready to abandon traditions of the old world. A great sense of liberty permeated the social and religious strata of American society. People took matters of faith into their own hands. Authority rested in the hands of the common people. Truth was determined by the ordinary populace and no longer flowed from the top down through hierarchical structures. Newspapers appealed to the ordinary person and became a great means of persuasion. No wonder the *Christian Baptist*, *Millennial Harbinger* and *Christian Standard* worked so effectively in the campaign of restoration thought. As immigrants started to spread West, the influence of the authority of the establishment was gradually left behind. Despite the “liberty consciousness” pervasive in antebellum America, there was also a great political motif broadcasted by Thomas Jefferson. He encouraged the masses to believe in themselves and in the importance of their own freedom and individual sovereignty. Therefore, Jeffersonian republicanism assisted to sever the cords between the present and the past (Toulouse, 1992:19-22). Seizing the opportunity, the RM promoted the same “liberty consciousness” in the realm of faith and gave people the right to read the Bible for themselves to find truth, to establish churches and govern them apart from religious authorities and to make peace with the desertion from the past church into the creation of a new church. The RM could not have been more suited to impact early America than it was. That is why it experienced such rapid growth. Despite its success in its time, there are questions that need to be asked about its permanence and its applicability in the Modern Church. From the perspective of the 21st Century the Restoration Plea, the long-term ecumenical results of the movement, and the Hermeneutical premises of the movement need to be critically evaluated.

1.1. The Restoration Plea⁴⁸

The plea of the Stone-Campbell Movement, as has been thoroughly demonstrated already, in summary is: The unity of all Christians, through one church, formulated through the premises of Scripture only. In its shortest and simplest version, the Restoration Plea is a call on all Christians to restore the Early Church. To critically engage the plea is therefore to ask questions like: Is it possible to restore the early church? Is it reasonable? Is it realistic? Henry Webb (2014:104) noted that the restoration ideal sounds good and necessary in order to unite fractured bodies of faith. But to talk about the idea and then to implement it is another story.

The restoration notion is not unique to church history, although the Stone-Campbell movement seems to be slightly more focused than previous ones. One key error that often flows out of movements⁴⁹ who acted on the beliefs in primal innocence is the conviction that they could “escape the influence of the past by assuming that cherished Christian truths fell directly from the skies with no intervening terrestrial history” (Baker *et al*, 2002:14). The restorationists were actually convinced that they could recreate the 1st Century church exactly in their time once and for all and that this recreated church would be totally devoid of any human traditions, simply and only founded on the Biblical witness.

Firstly, it is necessary to point out that many of the anthropogenic ecclesial elements of history was simply applied in restoration practice (Thomas, 1941:69). Pulpits and church buildings together with notions like the catechogue system was simply carried over into restoration efforts. Here the restorationists claimed an erroneous position, their system of belief was not devoid of man-made history. Hughes (2008:2) elevates this point well: “*Churches that root their identity efforts to restore ancient Christianity are susceptible to the illusion that they have escaped the influence of history and culture altogether*”. It is simply not possible, and simply not viable to claim that any movement is devoid of anthropogenic influence. To claim that any movement has no human influence can be equated to saying there is no “human” in Christ and no “human” in Scripture.

⁴⁸ “Plea,” The. This was a byword for the original message of the Stone Campbell Movement and its appeal to sympathetic minds (Foster *et al*, 2004:598).

⁴⁹ Other examples might be dispensational fundamentalism, Higher Life piety, mechanical notions of biblical inerrancy, and some catholic and orthodox commitments to capital T tradition (Baker *et al*, 2002:14).

Secondly, it needs to be pointed out that the notion that the “church” has been restored “once and for all” is irresponsible. Typical restorationism revolves around the notion of “denominationalism” and “sectarianism”⁵⁰. In its heydays the RM churches operated like a sect. They asserted that they have restored the New Testament church and nothing short of it. They were not any institution, they had no man-made affiliations, they were not a denomination. They were the perfect church, directly flowing from the 1st Century. This unique self-understanding served to create institutional and denominational identity out of a denial of institutional and denominational identity (Hughes, 2008:2). This newly formed identity became concretised and served simply as a new anthropogenic tradition. The RM was successful in freeing converts from the restraints of dead traditionalism. But sadly, as has happened with many movements before, the original liberation turned into a set of calcified standard procedures and automatically expected beliefs. The consequence of this is seen in the third and fourth generations of the movement whom experiences a restriction of spontaneity and an end in real freedom. *“Restorationist movements are sometimes marked by considerable self-congratulation at having broken through the stultifying bonds of tradition. Yet when such groups proceed to establish the particular forms of their restoration as “traditionless traditions” they can become every bit as inflexible as the supposedly corrupt traditions that the movement came into existence to overcome”* (Baker et al, 2002:14-15). This criticism of restorationism has merit, but does not deny the validity of its aims. Rather it must be noted that “restoration” is not a finished task. As Hawley (1976, “Redigging the Wells”) puts it, we have to continue “Redigging the Wells” of truth in our effort to reproduce early Christianity in every generation. In any religious reformation there is a tendency to crystalise and concretise doctrinal positions. Although the restoration leaders rejected creeds and traditions, these efforts did not prevent a certain amount of crystallisation. Perhaps the biggest concern with movements that concretises a universal and once and for all set of doctrines, is that follow-up generations become less concerned about continuing the search for truth and are more occupied with defending the conclusions previously reached by their tradition’s ancestors (Hawley, 1976:213). These factors can be clearly witnessed in RM history up to date.

⁵⁰ The term “sect” refers to any segment of the universal body of Christ that regards itself as the total body of Christ. The term “denomination” is commonly used to refer to a segment of the universal body of Christ that recognises itself as a segment and confesses itself to be a segment. When this notion is applied to the church of the RM the understanding of denomination can be deceptive. They have always denied denominational status, but have (especially in the 20th Century) behaved as if they were a part of a larger whole (Hughes, 2008:4)

Thirdly, it is important to note the shortcomings of the RM doctrinal plea of “patternism”. The early lights of the movement believed the New Testament could provide a set of practices of the early church. They claimed that practices could be systematically extracted from the text, and if all followed this ‘pattern’ there would be unity. Campbell coined an aphorism: “*Doctrine, divides, but practice unites*”. He believed churches would unify if they all agreed upon and practiced the practices as laid out in the New Testament. He also believed that these practices are clearly and unequivocally spelled out in the New Testament (Baker *et al*, 2002:229). Campbell had a particular view of Scripture in that he claimed it was not so much a theology book as it was a kind of scientific manual or technical blueprint that laid out in precise factual detail the “pattern” of early church practice and theology (Hughes, 2008:32). He often spoke of the New Testament as a veritable constitution of the church and argued that “*the constitution and law of the primitive church shall be the constitution and law of the restored church*”. In essence, Campbell thus created another set of laws that led to the movement carrying strong legalistic undertones (Hughes, 2008:28). Stanley Grenz⁵¹ provides a reasonable critique on RM patternism and its associated premises. He simply points out that the New Testament does not clearly delineate a prescribed church order or “pattern”. The New Testament does not provide a detailed blueprint for what every congregation should look like. In actual fact, the early church communities were not characterised by uniformity in organisation or practice (Baker *et al*, 2002:230).

1.2. The Unity Ideal

It has already been noted how well the revivals in the form of Camp Meetings contributed to the ecumenism on the frontier. The birth of the RM tells a story of various groups of Christians coming together and coalescing on the same principle for the same purpose. So initially we see a unifying movement. But as history progressed we observe a movement that became extremely divisive. This divisiveness was evidenced from within and from without. It didn’t take long for the RM to start distancing itself from the denominations. This happened because the RM developed the goal of calling people out from among the denominations⁵² (1 Cor. 6:17

⁵¹ Pioneer McDonald Professor of Theology and Ethics, Carey Theological College and Regent College. A prolific evangelical author the church and culture (Baker *et al*, 2002:255).

⁵² Historically the Stone-Campbell Movement was a reaction against “denominationalism”. The term “denomination” therefore became a negative label commonly employed by RM preachers to depict church groups which have denominational organisations with headquarters (Baker *et al*, 2002:23).

– they became known as a “come-outer-movement”). They sought converts from existing denominations which indicates that they saw those in denominations as lost until they submit to the restoration plea. Those in denominations were to be rescued from error. It was this prideful and antagonistic spirit that often acted as a detriment to the fulfilment of the plea. Too many in the RM saw themselves as “the only Christians” instead of “Christians only” (Hines, 2014:97). The fragmentation of the movement later on canceled out the second proposition and the arrogance of the first displays an attitude wholly contrary to the genius of Christianity (Hawley, 1976:139). Campbell, through the *Christian Baptist* and *Millennial Harbinger* minced no rhetorical skills in attacking the “denominations” (North, 1994:133). In reality these magazines served as antagonistic platforms to discredit the denominations. By the end of the 19th Century many of Campbell’s followers were insisting on all churches to submit to such a rigid application of biblical authority that they were not interested in unity with those who disagreed with them on their application of Biblical principles (North, 1994:251-252). The logical conclusion of such an approach is that denominations started viewing the RM no longer as allies in ecumenism, but as agents of disunion and legalism. The end-result being an ever-deepening fracture between the RM and other churches. As Hawley (1976:38) states, practically speaking, the restoration’s call for all followers of Jesus to unite did not materialise. Many historians point out the greatest critique of the movement to be the notion that a movement that began with the passion for unity lead to widespread division within the body of Christ.

The greatest fracturing associated with the RM was situated from within. The RM story is one of great irony. All its efforts at unity were governed by slogans and principles that in essence became the very factors that led to division. At the heart of the RM stood a plea to abandon all anthropogenic ecclesiologies. Alexander Campbell became very popular in and through the movement he led. Both him and his father coined slogans and formulated systematic doctrines which followers passionately supported. These slogans and doctrines were in reality anthropogenic, the very thing the RM opposed. They were informal creeds. History indicates how many passionately followed these principles, thereby illustrating that many followed men, exactly the same phenomena the RM criticised in the denominations. In actual fact, some followers extended and dramatised Campbell’s teachings. Many followers missed his ecumenical intent and sectarianised his vision. As early as 1826 he was frustrated with those in his movement that misapplied his original intent (Hughes, 2008:37). Campbell preached men should not be followed (Luther, Calvin, John Smyth etc.) but in the process he became a

man that was followed. And men change. Campbell himself in many ways became opposed to the movement he started. In 1849 the Campbell who opposed missionary societies became the president of the American Missionary Society (Hughes, 2008:39-40). It was this event that evidenced a definite anthropogenic flavour already present in the movement. The leader's (Alexander Campbell) actions which opposed his original teaching spearheaded great division for centuries to come.

Alexander's actions and change in doctrine served as a great divisive factor in the movement, but his father's most famous dictum in the *Declaration and Address* served as the greatest dividing principle to date. The great tension in RM theology was between Biblical Authority and Unity. From the Biblical record, principles were to be extracted that all could agree on and therefore could bring unity. The slogan "speak where the Bible speaks, be silent where the Bible is silent" was to be the guiding principle in this quest. All agreed about the Bible having sole authority, but most disagreed about how this slogan was to be applied to the Bible. As has been stated previously, is the silence prohibited or permissive?⁵³ It is this question that brought great division within the movement. We see here how an anthropogenic dictum became the source of division, and not the pure Word (North, 1994:252). Once again, without realising it at the time, a movement that claimed to be without any anthropogenic elements became haunted by a major anthropogenic element.

One doctrine that was extracted from Scripture based on the argument of "silence" was regarding the autonomy of the local church. This particular doctrine produced an effective church growth method on the frontier. But it was equally effective in becoming a catalyst for serious internal disunity. Every man could preach. Every man could read the Bible for himself. No church had a formal organisational leadership. The logical conclusion? Division crept in. Differing opinions was rampant. False teaching crept in. No wonder the movement was and has always been characterised by acrimony. Stone saw this, and by 1844 he was starting to become so pessimistic about unity that he felt it could never be achieved (Hines, 2014:39). The RM that originally wanted to be characterised by unity, tells a narrative throughout history of dissension and factions. In time it manufactured a body of arguments that became an almost impenetrable maze to outsiders. Arguments over missionary societies, instrumental music in worship, methods of congregational cooperation, the role of the church in supporting

⁵³ Ironically, many followers (both today and at the time) of the Declaration and Address do not know which one of these two premises of "silence" Thomas Campbell intended (Hines, 2014:150).

institutions (Harrell, 2000: XII), salaried preachers (North, 1994:220), one cup or many cups at the Lord's Table, fund raising methods (Hines, 2014:148-149) and many more such issues characterised RM churches throughout its lifespan. The subject will be discussed further in the next section, but it is important to note that the RM produced a tradition that promoted the letter and practice of the law more than the role of the Spirit. Ecclesiology was emphasised more around visible practice (doctrine divides, practice unites) than the role of the Spirit. Leroy Garret (2002:84) points out a very important oddity in the RM: There has always been a disputation over methodology more than theology. He points out that all of the disputes in the movement have been about methodology. As Harrell (2000:49) states: "*Visible differences in practice and worship rather than propositional affirmations about particular beliefs, have always provided the mechanism for schism in the RM because they caused opposing groups to doubt the other's commitment to truth*".

Much can still be added, but the irony in the RM has been made clear. Instead of calming sectarian strife and restoring endemic harmony, the RM Christians engendered controversy at every step and perpetuated chronic factionalism within their own ranks. Instead of creating an accurate copy of the early church free from theological tradition and authoritarian control, they came to the point of advocating their own sectarian theology and leaving doctrine formation to the persuasion of a dominant few (Hatch, 1980:40). Looking back, we see an ecumenical denomination that separates itself from the ecumenical movement. A movement that opposed written creeds, follow their own unwritten creed. A movement that did not want to be a denomination has become a very denomination. A denomination without tradition, creates its own tradition. A denomination that wants to restore early Christianity turns out to be very modern and complex. Irony is key. It teaches us through history that original intentions often end up with differing consequences and that good intentions often digress into harmful actions (Toulouse, 1992: XII).

Although much critique can be provided for internal fissions, there is however also merit for the RM approach to church theology. Controversy did serve a useful purpose. Preachers in opposition to denominations used altercation to chart a course for the future. Argumentation was a stratagem for reaching consensus in an intellectually unrestricted church. As the denominations crafted boundaries and planted limitations on the faith and practice of their members, the RM churches formulated no such doctrinal range, any belief or practice was open to re-examination. There existed an open intellectual market where average minds could

compete over the perceived truths of Scripture. It was this commitment to free thought and discussion that made the RM a “wild democracy” in which the common sense of every person was the governing religious authority (Harrell, 2000:43-44).

1.3. Objective Hermeneutics

Restorationism at its core is a hermeneutical process. The goal was to restore the early church, but to determine what the early church was and how she operated required biblical interpretation. The more objective the interpretation, the closer one would be to finding truth and thereby accurately defining an objective ecclesiology. Objective interpretation seems possible in theory, but in reality it is not. It has been noted already that division in the RM did not originate from the Bible but from man’s misapplication of it (Hawley, 1976:35). The largest issue in RM theology was hermeneutics (Harrell, 2000:202). Ernst Conradie (2008:26-27) notes that there are pervasive ideologies that can distort biblical interpretation. Since RM leaders believed they restored the exact early church once and for all, they also implied that their interpretation of Scripture was faultless, without any ideologies and therefore objective. But a reflection on the intellectual premises carried by Stone and Campbell clearly reveals that their respective hermeneutics was all but void of ideologies and anthropogenic paradigms.

Campbell was influenced by the Age of Reason (Enlightenment). As Ernest Lee Tuveson states: Campbell married biblical Christianity to the Enlightenment⁵⁴ (Hines, 2014:20). He also carried a strong Baconian outlook which assure him that all Christians could read and understand the Bible for themselves. His Enlightenment model for achieving unity was based on John Locke’s idea that religion can be reduced to a set of essentials upon which all reasonable people could agree. He reasoned that once all agreed upon the clear essentials drawn from Scripture, unity would come in Christendom on a voluntary basis (Hughes, 2008:26-27). Campbell held the strong view that division could be traced back to human influence in biblical interpretation. In his perspective, through his allegiance to Scottish Common Sense Realism and the method it espoused (popularly known in those days as “Baconianism”), it was possible to discover objective truth and knowledge through the inductive method of reasoning. According to this method, one simply collects all the pertinent facts on a given topic and then draws proper conclusions on the basis of those facts. This procedure is commonly understood

⁵⁴ Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America’s Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) pg. 217

today as the scientific method. More commonly referred to as empiricism (Webb, 2014:99). It is therefore clear that Campbell viewed biblical interpretation as a kind of scientific enterprise. If the scientific community could be unanimous based on scientific facts, he believed the Christian community could also be unanimous based on the facts of Scripture. His Baconianism thus lead him to perceive the Bible as a book of facts and not a book of opinions, theories, abstract generalities nor of verbal definitions. Further, he considered the meaning of these facts to be self-evident, requiring no human interpretation (Hughes, 2008:31-32).

Barton Stone on the other hand was not so much a product of Enlightenment rationalism. Rather he was a product of the First and Second Great Awakenings. Stone's thinking was shaped more by experience in the revivals than academia of the day, yet he reached the same conclusions as Campbell. Both emphasised non-denominational Christianity, but how to achieve that differed between them. Whereas the Enlightenment sought to reduce religion to a set of essentials upon which all reasonable people could agree, revivalism sought to reduce Christianity to a set of essentials upon which all Christians could agree (Hughes, 2008:96). Stone put his efforts to unity in revivals, Campbell put his efforts to unity in intellectual interpretation of Scripture. Therefore, Campbell has the greatest influence in the interpretive history of the RM. Among others, there are three primary areas in which RM hermeneutics worked towards the detriment of its mission.

Firstly, the "argument of silence" can be pointed out. The argument of silence was undergirded by a literalistic view of Scripture. Campbell's "scientific blueprint" and "constitutional" view of Scripture was here to blame. If the "constitution" does not authorise it (is silent on the topic) then it is prohibited. Thomas Campbell in the *Declaration and Address* stated "where the Scriptures are silent, no human authority has the power to interfere" (North, 1994:224). It is obvious why this hermeneutical principle caused havoc in the movement. Some held the opinion that silence gives liberty while others felt it restricts. It thus influenced the basic tenets of church practice. This argument thus created the greatest division in the RM. A movement designed to promote unity based on the authority of God's Word, divided largely over issues relating to what Scripture does not say (Hines, 2014:150).

Secondly, the one particular principle of the RM hermeneutical trio that caused great debate and division was "Necessary Inference". Initially Campbell believed that the application of such a principle to interpret Scripture was just as erroneous as following human creeds since it relied on human argumentation. But later in his life he was forced to use the principle when he

was faced with questions that emerged as time progressed. This fact tells us that even Campbell was erroneous in assuming that all things in Scripture was easily understandable without the need for man-made principles. Once again it is noteworthy to point out that the principle of necessary inference rested on a particular understanding of Lockean and Scottish principles from the specific intellectual environment of the 18th Century. What we see here is a biblical scholar taking a position that owed more to the singular ideological circumstances of the early American nation than to the timeless truths of Scripture (Baker *et al*, 2002:15-16).

Thirdly, one can identify a tradition developing in RM thought that promoted a literalist and legalistic stance toward Scripture. The RM has often been charged with *legalism* which some have defined as the tendency to observe the letter rather than the Spirit of the law. The RM's quest to carry out the commandments of God and seeking scriptural proof for everything that is practiced has led the movement to observe the letter and in the process neglect the Spirit. That is why some have labeled the people of the movement as "gnat strainers" (Matthew 23:24) (Hawley, 1976:146). As Toulouse (1992:61) points out, their passion for the Bible did often degenerate into an unfortunate biblical literalism that tended to worship the words more than the message. Some have commented on the RM in words that suggest that RM followers had long been held captive by dry rationalism that belittled piety and subjective insight. To put it simply, the movement's approach towards the letter of the law has led it to digress into a religion of head and no longer of heart (Harrell, 2000:202-203).

Hermeneutics is a complex science. This complexity lies at the heart of the RM. The RM had a noble quest, but perhaps an unrealistic one. "Unity in Truth" is a convoluted task and history shows over and over that it is not promising. The two should work together and be compatible, but often they end up being antagonistic (North, 1994:55). To unify on the basis of the letter of the law is not as possible as unifying on the Spirit of the law. It is not the Bible, but the view that people had of the Bible that allowed the infiltration of factions. Therefore, the task of responsible hermeneutics would have been the saving grace of the movement (Harrell, 2000:205).

2. Analysis of Restoration Movement Ecclesiology

More will be commented on this in the next section, but it is the task of every generation to investigate anew the essence of the Early Church through the lenses of its current culture. The Early Church in this sense serves as a "calibration tool" for every generation in order to remain

most effective with the Gospel mission in context. The Restoration Movement placed its central emphases on this endeavour. The quest of investigating the Early Church is influenced by various factors, interpretive factors. These will be extrapolated in the second half of this chapter, but some factors have already been noted in chapter 3. In particular, the restoration leaders were influenced by Enlightenment paradigms which in turn influenced their interpretations of the Biblical text. These anthropogenic paradigms not only influenced Stone and Campbell without their knowledge, but they insured a time-and-context-specific interpretation of Scripture in relation to Early Church ecclesiology. From the perspective of the 21st Century we can thus identify some discrepancies in the RM interpretation of the Early Church. It is the purpose of this section to identify the RM ecclesial elements that differ substantially from the Early Church ecclesial elements outlined in chapter 2.

One of the major factors that skewed the RM's quest for defining 1st Century Christianity was the initial motif that brought the movement to a reality. This motif was a reaction against the many denominations of the day. Restoration leaders in many ways were more concerned with "not being like the denominations" than with "simply being like the Early Church". Their interpretive methods were more concerned with elevating the errors of the denominations than highlighting the nature and essence of the Early Church. As Hughes (2008:115) points out "preachers in the Campbell tradition seem to labour more specially to reform the churches of other denominations over to their views, than they do to reform the wicked from their ways". This trend together with the fundamentalism and legalism produced by a scientific worldview catered for a wanting emphasis of true Early Church life.

Chapter 3 does not provide an all-encompassing description of RM ecclesiology, but what has been noted is all that is necessary for now. Campbell wrote a series of articles in the *Christian Baptist* which he entitled "The Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things". It entailed 32 articles that outlined the "pattern" or "order" of the ancient church in regard to organisation, worship and congregational life (North, 1994:134). He believed his interpretation of Scripture would lead him to the undeniable structure and practices of the Early Church that should be practiced by every church in every generation. He concluded with some of the following: Baptism was essential, the true church would partake of the Lord's supper every first day of the week; the supper was a simple memorial feast; each congregation would be autonomous, governed by a plurality of elders, with deacons serving in various capacities, and that worship would consist of five basic acts – preaching, praying, singing, giving and communion (Hughes,

2008:24). The movement also held onto the doctrine that Christ is the only Head of the Church, it would have no creeds and there would be no name but Christian (Hines, 2014:24-25). Bible things were to be called by Bible names. Dr. Abner Jones left the Baptist tradition because he could not find the name “Baptist Church” in the Bible (North, 1994:25). What we notice here is that many of the doctrines were stated in such a way as to be different from the prevailing denominational ideas of the day. Christ is the only Head, in other words there should be no human authoritative structures over the Church. The name of the Church should be Biblical otherwise it is man-made. Many more such parallels can be drawn, but I wish to point out that these elements are Biblically true yet they are slanted with the agenda to stand in opposition to the “errors of the denominations”.

Although these aspects of the Early Church supported by the RM are quite accurate, they were enforced and promoted with a legal tone. Yes, the Early Churches were autonomous, had a plurality of elders, Christ was the only Head, they were not called “Baptist”, they partook of the Lord’s Supper frequently and they carried no man-made name. But, as my analysis of the Early Church has found, these practices and leadership structures were not imposed legally by the Apostles. My investigation into the Early Church found that it was communal, everything revolved around relationship. The church was a family, they shared their possessions, kissed each other and opened their homes to one another. The early churches were small and met in homes. The small nature of the churches promoted authenticity, love and intimacy. If there was any legality associated with the movement it was Baptism and the Lord’s Supper which were both practiced across the spread of the ancient churches. These were prescribed by Christ Himself and continued by the Apostles. The Lord’s Supper was however a real meal, and not just a bite and sip. Worship services were far less liturgical, it allowed spontaneity whilst being orderly. Worship was an everyday way of life. Leadership was often situational and functional rather than legal. Leadership emerged to take care of the needs of the flock in community. All of the elements of organisation and location came about as the church developed and attempted to fulfil its divine mandate of mission. Indeed, the Early Church was not institutional, neither was it ritualistic or legalistic. It operated organically and naturally. Fellowship was not confined to a time, date and place. Instead the church shared life every day and everywhere. There were no church buildings. Everything centred around Christ and His work on the cross.

These are elements the Bible emphasises. Stone & Campbell didn’t emphasise these aspects in the same way because they were reading Scripture with the pre-determined quest of finding a

legal “pattern” revealed by God to which every Christian must submit in order to be part of the “true Church”. In the process the RM churches emphasised the legal aspects of the Early Church at the expense of simply being the 1st Century Church. Perhaps an illustration of a body might explain the issue at hand. The RM outlined the “skeleton” of the Early Church. It promoted and emphasised the external form of the church and said all denominations should restructure into such an Early Church “shape”. In the process the RM neglected to fill in “the flesh” around the skeleton that covers the bones and gives the bones purpose and ability to function. Ecclesial doctrinal structure was emphasised and ecclesial life was minimised. Having the right form was cardinal to the movement, but having the right heart was left by the wayside. The RM was therefore a movement primarily concerned with the legal structures of the church as they perceived it to be. It practiced an institutional restoration, but not a relational or communal restoration that the Early Church was.

Although the quest for a purely biblical structure emerged as a reaction against the institutional elements that have evolved with the church through history, the RM still practiced institutional elements despite claiming to be a non-institutional movement. The RM churches continued to make use of church buildings and pulpits. Preachers were also legalised and admittedly or not the movement created an informal creed or set of propositions and doctrines that characterised the movement. In many ways Campbell’s investigation into the Early Church missed the life and heart of the true Church. His preoccupation with the errors of the denominations coupled with his intellectual ideologies blinded him from seeing the organic, spontaneous and living nature of the Early Church.

It is this wanting Early Church analysis together with the contradictory institutional practices that has caused much confusion, ineffectiveness and division throughout the history of the RM. I suggest one example to illustrate the point further. The RM leaders accurately underlined the Pauline instructions to Timothy and Titus regarding the appointment of Elders. The RM accurately promoted the plurality of elders at the local congregation. RM leaders also set out accurately the role of elders with their purpose in the Christian community. Throughout RM history, RM churches have opted for the leadership structure of elders believing that it is a divinely-mandated practice of the true Church. We see here how the RM fought for and demanded the practice of Early Church leadership in its original form. On the other hand, the RM churches continued with the institutional forms of corporate church. Christianity entailed a meeting once a week, at a building, for a time. Corporate worship was less ritual, but still

very structured and less spontaneous. Followers came to church as an audience⁵⁵. Preachers received salaries. Budgets were to be in place. What we notice is that the church remained institutional in its practice. It carried with it the very same elements as their denominational neighbours. What we see here is that a “primitive leadership” was promoted to take lead over an “institutional church” structure. Elders were to be shepherds of the flock, fathers to children. They were not meant to be large-scale corporate leaders that can strategically manage an institutional church. The very nature of the criteria Paul sets out to Timothy and Titus refers to character traits an elder must have. He must simply have the ability to love and lead in relationships, not manage a financial and program-driven institution. One can continue to extrapolate the consequences of such a contradictory approach to Scripture and practice. But the point is clear, the RM did well in promoting a return to the simplicity of the Early Church, the only problem is that an extrapolation of what exactly the Early Church was, was left incomplete.

At the heart of Campbellism lies the fundamental erroneous belief that the practices of the church have been outlined by God in a similar fashion as the Temple worship was outlined to the Jews. As noted in chapter 2, the Old Testament terms used for worship are spiritualised in the New Testament in reference to the worship of the church. There were thus no cultist rituals commanded from above for the Church to practice in the fashion of Judaism. What the church did flowed naturally out of the new grace they have found in Christ. The New Testament Church does not have a model or divinely mandated order of functioning such as the Jews received from God. Christ has come to abolish the Law. There is freedom in Christ. Despite this fact, the RM leaders nevertheless desired to have a set of doctrines and practices of the Early Church that could be applied to all times. Campbell used his interpretive abilities on the New Testament in order to formulate his 32 articles that contained the content of original God-

⁵⁵ The Puritans believed the setup of the furniture in a church building preached a non-verbal sermon. The churches before the Reformation had an altar at a central point since it communicated that you needed a priest to mediate between you and God. The Reformers replaced the altar with the pulpit to emphasise the centrality of God’s Word. The only other furniture in the room were the pews set in straight rows, but what that communicated to people is that they were an audience. We see quite a different picture of the assembly in the New Testament. People prayed for each other, they sang songs spontaneously, engaged in the activity of communion as a community, brought words of encouragement to one another, and responded to prophecy among other things. It was a participatory occasion and not an observational meeting (Jones, 2013:187).

inspired church principles. Frank Viola (Viola, 2009:18) calls this approach “Biblical Blueprintism”. He continues to state that the New Testament is not a rule book. It is a record of the DNA of the church at work. In relation to this notion he quotes T. Austin-Spark who says: *“The fact is that, while certain things characterized the NT Churches, the NT does not give us a complete pattern according to which churches are to be set up or formed! There is no blueprint for churches in the NT, and to try to form NT churches is only to create another system which may be as legal, sectarian, and dead as others. Churches, like the Church, are organisms which spring out of life, which life itself springs out of the Cross of Christ wrought into the very being of believers. Unless believers are crucified people, there can be no true expression of church”*⁵⁶(Viola 2009:19).

The New Testament is not designed to deliver a blueprint on the Church. The Book of Acts is about the Church from beginning to end, yet it doesn’t provide a template for church growth. Acts surpasses time and culture by refusing to provide a church model. Instead the text lists basic components that every healthy church should have: breaking of bread, sharing with those in need, continuing in teaching, meeting together often, praying and so on (Acts 2:42ff). But it never goes any further than that in telling us how to have a church service (Jones, 2013:29). The New Testament does not define or otherwise specify “essential” Christianity. What it presents is a dynamic faith functioning effectively in a socio-cultural situation (Webb, 2014:33). When one thus seeks to create such a legal set of church structures one reduces the dynamic nature of the church to a stagnant body regulated by anthropogenic structures. This is what Campbell did, his rational bent led him to systemise the teaching of Scripture in a way that moved inevitably toward conformity and orthodoxy (Hughes, 2008:99). Rudolf Bultman would say that “legal regulation (when seen as constitutive) contradicts the church’s nature” (Banks 1984:37). Extracting scientific principles from Scripture in order to draft a church constitution simply leads to the creation of another set of regulations that elevates law over grace. This does not mean that principles need not be extracted from Scripture. Identifying the timeless, enduring realities of the Christian faith within its setting in the time period of the 1st Century cannot be avoided or neglected (Webb, 2014:34). The Apostolic witness exists to show every generation the Early Church as a calibration instrument. It is a witness, not a legal regulation. If it was, its genre would be different and precepts would have been systematically

⁵⁶ In Words of Wisdom and Revelation (st. Charles, MO: Three Brothers, 1971), 76

structured so no debate over it would be possible. This is simply not the New Testament text which projects enthusiastically a church movement that took on the world.

In summary, the RM had the right goal of restoring the Early Church in 18th Century America. They did restore the Early Church, but added some legal flavours created through the interpretive perspectives of Campbell whilst maintaining some of the institutional and anthropogenic church forms from their various inherited churches. This section has nit-picked and critiqued the RM. What remains is to draw valuable insights from RM theory and RM history that can benefit the quest of the Modern Church.

Section 2: Significance of the Restoration Movement in light of the Modern Church

1. Three Movements Correlated to Extract Valuable Insights

The Early Church, Restoration Movement and Modern Church carry some similarities and differences that are worthy of pointing out. It is the Modern Church that will benefit the most in such an endeavour since it is a current movement that is still taking shape and strategising its future arrangements. To start off with, it is important to point out that movements generally emerge out of something else that has become unsatisfactory as the status quo. Every movement is birthed out of something else, a previous movement, or the inherited church, or even another religion. The Early Church was birthed out of Judaism. The Restoration Movement was birthed out of traditional European traditions such as Presbyterianism, Methodism, Anglicanism, Roman Catholicism and the Baptist tradition. The Modern Church movements are also birthed out of inherited traditional churches. Fresh Expressions are birthed primarily out of Anglicanism. The Emerging Church flows from Evangelicalism and the House Church Movement originates from a whole host of differing traditions.

The catalyst that generally brings about the dissatisfaction with the inherited traditions is a change in society. When the paradigms of society change it doesn't take long before it has a profound effect on religious establishments. Soon pressure is exerted for the traditions to rethink its ways and re-evaluate its current trajectory. If the religious establishment ignores the changes in society it stands the risk of becoming irrelevant in that society. A church that is irrelevant in its society is a contradiction of the nature and heart of Christianity and is in dire need of some serious introspection. The Early Church situation was quite different since it involved the fulfilment of Messianic prophecy and the birthing of a new dispensation. But in terms of the Restoration Movement and Modern Church it is a reality. The New World of

America which entailed a plurality of denominations and the immigration of various people from Europe created a different society than most were used to. No wonder it caught some up in the idea of rethinking church. The restorationists were simply faithful to the call of being salt and light in society. To make this happen it did however give rise to a new movement. Similarly, as demonstrated in chapter 4, the Modern Church is a response to the postmodern paradigms in society. To ignore the reality of postmodernism is to be unfaithful to the mission of Christ to transform society.

A few important notes need to be highlighted in regard to the reality of these truths. Firstly, any movement can expect birthing pains. The Jewish Christians experienced it, the restorationists experienced it and so does the Modern Church today. Moving out from another existing tradition is a fearful venture into unknown territory for the departing and a hurtful experience for the status quo tradition. As Phil Potter (2015:10) notes on pioneer ministry: “change can feel uncomfortable and risky...” but change is here to stay. If birthing does not take place, the church will lose much of its impact in society. Secondly, any new movement will face the paradox of “maintaining tradition” versus “motivating mission”. Some will favour either side. The RM minced no words about its understanding of this paradox. It proactively lambasted tradition and encouraged the deconstruction of traditions. The Modern Church is perhaps taking a more Scriptural approach. The Biblical approach shows how Judaism complemented the new Christian movement. Without Judaism Christianity would be null and void. Most if not all of the Early Church practices flowed from Judaism: The Lord’s Supper is connected with the Passover, Jesus is the High Priest, the earthly Tabernacle is represented as a heavenly reality, eldership flows from Jewish family patriarchy, Early Church worship was very similar to synagogue worship, and the list goes on. The Modern Church is taking on a similar view. Fresh Expressions is an addition to and not a replacement of the inherited church (Church of England). The Emerging Church, although countering traditional evangelicalism is defined as “post-evangelical”. In this sense it values the contribution that evangelicalism made in its time, but is moving on and in some ways building on it.

As new generations develop, new movements can be expected because new intellectual and societal paradigms will emerge. The Modern Church is thus not just a new fad, but a true pneumatological movement, seeking to remain effective in postmillennial culture. Thirdly, these movements teach the truth that the church must stay in touch with current culture. Unfortunately, the RM did not do so and with time became outdated. The Modern Church will

do well to stay in touch with changing paradigms, especially as we live in the information age. The future will see more rapid societal change which signals the call to the church to be wide awake and actively ready for even more modification. Len Sweet (2001:15) illustrates the pace of this change by saying that the future is the primary time zone for living: “If the dominant time zone of the modern world was the present (before that it had been the past), the dominant time zone for postmodern culture is the future”. Further in the same writings, Sweet continues to extrapolate on the realities of the rapidly changing culture of the 21st Century. The Modern Church must be aware of this or risk the possibility of pulling the trigger on a target that has moved by the time the bullet reaches it (Sweet, 2001:15).

Another similarity between the movements is that of ecumenism. I will leave a detailed discussion on this topic for the next section, but there is something to mention here. The Restoration Movement based its originating premises on the goal of uniting the different denominations. Its intention was unity. This noble goal however ended up creating a fractured movement. The Modern Church on the other hand did not emerge primarily out of ecumenical intentions, but out of missional intentions. As stated already, the Modern Church arose out of an awareness that traditional forms of church were not connecting with postmodern culture. The result however of this missional intent ended in greater ecumenicity. Fresh Expressions has spontaneously evolved into ecumenical relationships between Anglicanism, Methodism, in South Africa the Dutch Reformed Church and in Europe various other traditions. The inclusive postmodern mentality of the Emerging Church and the “church without walls” nondenominational perspective of the House Church movement has also stimulated greater ecumenicity. I mention this phenomenon to point out that when churches focus unequivocally on mission, greater ecumenicity inevitably takes shape. If the Modern Church continually focuses on mission, it will remain a catalyst for the unification of denominations.

Another rampant theme that touches the movements is that of institutionalism or as Banks (1984:37) calls it “Early Catholicizing”. The Early Church was an organic movement. In time it received anthropogenic additions that had various negative effects on the life and mission of the church for centuries to come. The restorationists sought to deconstruct these man-made additions and thereby took a strong anti-institutional stance. In the Modern Church it is the House Church movement that opposes institutionalism most vehemently. The Emerging Church also promotes organic Christianity over organised Christianity, but still practice some organised forms of church. Fresh Expressions on the other hand hardly ever uses terms like

“the institutional church” and views it as a tradition to be maintained without letting it hinder the mission of Christ. The spectrum of these stances towards institutional Christianity provides perhaps a balanced perspective. Institutional elements are anthropogenic, but it doesn’t necessary hinder the mission of the Church. Sometimes it even benefits the Church. Once again the lesson is clear, the Modern Church should focus on mission and aggressively remove all institutional and anthropogenic elements if they hinder this mission. The RM in many ways became preoccupied with war on anthropogenicism to such an extent that it lost focus on its mission. Restorationism emerged as a means to an end and evolved into an end in itself. The Modern Church should thus always remain cognisant that the mission is to reach the world not to reform institutional churches.

2. Five Suggestions to the Modern Church

Apart from the lessons mined above, generally from the movements investigated in this research, I have extracted five fundamental lessons from the Restoration Movement I believe to be highly relevant for the Modern Church on its quest to introduce Christ in the current postmodern culture.

2.1. Maintain a Healthy Suspicion

It has been stated frequently in this research that at the heart of restorationism lies a hermeneutical dilemma. The restorationists wanted to reproduce the Early Church in the 19th Century. In order to establish what the Early Church looked like they had to engage a process of interpretation. From the perspective of the 21st Century one can clearly see where the interpretative stances of the restorationists took on a slanted perspective which in turn led to a wanting analysis of the Biblical Church. Ernst Conradie⁵⁷ (2008) neatly outlines seven guidelines for adequate interpretation. Although all of them are important, I choose to mention only those relevant to my argument.

Conradie accurately suggests that there are numerous factors that influences our interpretations. I would like to point out three. Firstly, he speaks of “reading in front of the text”. Here he refers to the role of tradition in interpretation. When one thus comes to the Scripture you need to ask yourself if your interpretation of the text is being influenced by your preconceived and

⁵⁷ Ernst. M. Conradie is a professor in the Department of Religion and Theology at the University of the Western Cape where he teaches systematic Theology and Ethics (Conradie, 2008: Back Cover).

predetermined views that were engrained in you by your inherited church (Conradie, 2008:72-83). Secondly, he speaks about “reading the contemporary context”. Under this rubric he states that there are factors such as political convictions, economic situations, social groups, gender, culture and ethnicity, language and educational background that influences a person when he reads the Bible. He quotes a Chinese Proverb to illustrate the point well: “*Ninety percent of what we see lies behind our eyes*” (Conradie, 2008:84). And thirdly, Conradie challenges interpreters to “investigate the world beneath the text”. Here he takes note of the reality that there are pervasive ideologies that can distort biblical interpretation. Ideologies can be equated with one’s worldview, perspective or point of view. The problem with ideologies are that they are not always innocent. One’s interpretation of the Bible might be used to justify one’s particular point of view. A dangerous aspect of this is that ideologies often remain hidden (Conradie, 2008:27). This observation informs one that there needs to be a suspicion that there are other hidden factors at work in biblical interpretation. This world beneath the text may not always remain visible. What appears to be rational may be ultimately no more than rationalisation. In this way established power relationships can be maintained without being challenged. This makes a systematic suspicion or mistrust regarding the apparent “givens” a necessity. Interpreters are thus not as “innocent” or as neutral as they would like to be (Conradie, 2008:104-105).

I mention these three areas that informs interpretation because they clearly influenced Alexander Campbell in his hermeneutical quest to delineate the pure Biblical Church and her practices. That Campbell carried underlying Presbyterian perspectives in his interpretation is evidenced by the fact that he supported and implemented some of its practices. One can mention here the catechogue system he perpetuated in the Brush Run Church. The contemporary context in two ways had a profound effect on Campbells interpretations. Firstly, the religious and societal context of antebellum America probably had a profound effect on his interpretation. The American context was one of religious pluralism. And since the timeframe coincided with the Age of Reason a rational perspective of Scripture served as an effective method to lead people out of religious pluralism and into simple Biblical church practices. Secondly, Campbell’s personal education instilled paradigms in his intellectuality that influenced his interpretations. He was a proponent of Scottish Common Sense Realism, Lockean Epistemology and Baconianism which produced powerful strains of biblical literalism, sectarianism and exclusivism (Hughes, 2008:48). The reality is that Campbell was probably not aware how much his own thinking was influenced by his Presbyterian

background. He was also unaware of the powerful influence American societal paradigms and Enlightenment perspectives influenced his approach to Scripture. If he was suspicious of his own biases and aware of his intellectual slants he would have produced a different picture of the Early Church with emphases on other factors rather than the legalities of church form.

As the Modern Church is taking on the quest anew in this generation to establish a contemporary ecclesiology relevant in form and content it will be necessary to maintain a healthy suspicion. More will be extrapolated on this further on, but the Modern Church should be careful of giving too much ear to postmodern paradigms in its interpretation of Scripture. Modern Church leaders should be aware of their inherited church biases and the pressure that popular societal paradigms exerts on their interpretation as they seek to set out an appropriate ecclesiology for the 21st Century based on pure Biblical theology. Such a healthy suspicion will allow interpreters to evade an eschewed church form that will cause more damage than good in the long run.

2.2. Avoid the concretisation of Ecclesial Forms

Central to the Restoration Movement stood the ideal to empirically extract from Scripture a model of the Early Church in order to “copy and paste” it in 19th Century America. It was noted above that the “empirical extraction” that took place was in itself an incomplete hermeneutical endeavour, thereby leaving the “copy” of the Early Church not as original as RM leaders believed it to be. Not only was the restoration ideal a “looking back” but also a “projecting forward”. Not only did the RM re-establish a “lost, real and true” church, but it also created “a perfect church” to stay for generations to come. The RM leaders believed that the Church forms which it identified were all permanent structures and elements that contributed to creating an “infallible ecclesiology”. In their understanding they restored the Early Church once and for all time and for all generations. It would not need tweaking, reform, restructure or re-evaluation ever again. In one sense one would sneer at the arrogance of a group of leaders thinking their representation of the Early Church is infallible and that their understanding has produced the “perfect church” from the past and for generations to come.

Nevertheless, the point I am aiming at is to demonstrate how the RM has fallen victim to creating a concretised ecclesiology. The RM freed many from the restraints of dead traditionalism, but in the process created ecclesial marks that turned into a set of calcified standard procedures and automatically expected beliefs. Let me quote an earlier quote again to

strengthen the idea: “*Restorationist movements are sometimes marked by considerable self-congratulation at having broken through the stultifying bonds of tradition. Yet when such groups proceed to establish the particular forms of their restoration as “traditionless traditions” they can become every bit as inflexible as the supposedly corrupt traditions that the movement came into existence to overcome*” (Baker *et al*, 2002:14-15).

It is understandable why the RM created such a stultifying perspective of the Church. It believed that the Scriptures provided timeless and universal church principles that are relevant in every culture and generation. By no means do I disagree with this notion. The problem lies in the differentiation of form and content (or substance). Campbells scientific worldview that motivated him in the direction of “Scriptural Blueprintism” resulted in the extraction of ecclesial forms from Scripture that he believed to be eternally binding and applicable. We see this reality in Campbells assertion that “*doctrine divides, and practice unites*”. He was overly concerned with form and practice and neglected content. I submit that “church forms” cannot and should not be canonised and concretised, but that Early Church substance is indeed relevant, applicable, mandated by God and meaningful in every time and every generation. I will extrapolate more on this notion in a following section.

I must humbly submit that Campbell was faithful to the intellectual paradigms, societal issues and the Biblical call to unity amidst religious pluralism as he progressed in outlining his perspective of 1st Century ecclesiology. His perspective was effective and relevant in the context of the day. From the 21st Century perspective we would disagree with him on most of his basic tenets, but if we were there right with him we would probably have supported him. That is just the point. Culture and societal forces should always have a bearing on ecclesial form. And because culture changes as time progresses the church must remain re-imagining, restructuring, and reforming its forms in order to remain in a communicative state with the dominant culture. Otherwise the church becomes irrelevant, directly effecting mission. Although culture has changed, American paradigms have changed, and postmodernism has infiltrated every space of life, RM churches remain concretised in 19th Century ecclesial forms. That is why most RM churches have grown stagnant. concretised ecclesiologies creates a widening gap between church and society as time progress. So the consequences of concretised ecclesiologies are seen in the third and fourth generations (in the future the church might change every generation) whom experiences a restriction of spontaneity and an end in real freedom. As noted previously, perhaps the biggest concern with movements that concretises a

universal and once and for all set of doctrines, is that follow-up generations become less concerned about continuing the search for truth and more occupied with defending the conclusions previously reached by their tradition's ancestors (Hawley, 1976:213). The RM has been labeled as being more concerned with restoring the Restoration than restoring the Early Church. Society and culture should influence church form, but not church content. Pure biblical theology informs church content and substance, but allows ecclesial, flexible form.

Hawley (1976:213) notes that in any religious reformation there is a tendency to crystalise and concretise doctrinal positions. It should thus be an element that the Modern Church is aware of. One of the hallmarks of the Modern Church which I identified is "Ecclesial Fluidity". The postmodern paradigm of relativism has infiltrated Emerging Church mindsets. Relativism in itself rebels against anything concretised. Not only do Emerging Churches represent a fluid or flexible intellectuality, but it also practices a very flexible liturgical experience. Fresh Expressions are missional in nature and therefore is at its core "incarnational". The very nature of Fresh Expressions is to formulate church forms anew in every new context and culture. House Churches are generally flexible in all areas of its form. Although all three these Modern Church movements promote flexible ecclesial forms, there is always a danger for any movement to concretise some of its elements and core components. Forms that are relevant today might not be in the future. House churches for example need to be careful to concretise the place of worship as always having to be in a house. The Emerging Church for example need to be careful of concretising a theological paradigm of relativism. Yes, relativism is not a form of church, but it influences the form of church. The time might come when culture seeks something solid and a more structured worship experience. The point is quite clear, we don't know how culture might evolve from this day forward and how it might challenge us to change the dominant church forms that are modern and new to us today. Therefore, the Modern Church will do well to keep its flexible and fluid ecclesial forms and in so doing avoid any form of concretisation that is not discovered through pure biblical theology.

2.3. Circumvent Sectarianism and/or Spiritual Elitism

A major societal contributor to the emergence of the Restoration Movement was the religious pluralism that was transplanted from different parts of Europe to antebellum America. Religious diversity was a stimulating force for a return to the Church of the Bible. Noble men stood up to pave a way for ecclesial unity. In their search and discovery of the Biblical Church in opposition to all the other "man-made" churches a spirit of ecumenicity was soon converted

to a spirit of sectarianism, legalism and exclusivism. Alexander Campbell in particular often attacked the denominations with their missionary societies, high class clergy, and ecclesiastical institutions. Although his chief interest was ecumenical, his rhetoric often sounded sectarian and legalistic (Hughes, 2008:11-12). His followers unfortunately embraced his sectarian tone and expanded its effects. In the 1830's the movement gradually separated from their religious neighbours and by the 1840's a sectarian spirit became the virtual substance of the movement (Hughes, 2008:13).

The restorationists held the view that they were the only ones interpreting the Bible correctly. Those who didn't agree with them did not love the truth and were blinded by the paradigms of the inherited churches they have come from. The "we are correct and you are wrong" attitude fostered division and set the movement apart as being antagonistic. Even if the RM had valuable and useful perspectives, such an arrogance closed the doors of influence on the "denominations". According to RM thought unity could only be achieved if all denominations submitted their interpretation of 1st Century ecclesial forms. RM leaders came to see themselves as the only bearers of truth, the spiritual elite of the day.

It is obvious that such a spirit of elitism does not represent the humility of Christ. In this regard the Emerging Church's notion of "epistemic humility" is praiseworthy. It does not claim to be right or perfect in its theology. It allows questioning. It inspires questioning. But this does not put aside the possibility that spiritual elitism could not develop. Since the Modern Church are movements that are born out of others due to their irrelevance in society it is true that Modern Church intellectual paradigms are more advanced. Whenever one has left a movement due to reaching an "enlightenment" of its errors, one stands the risk of taking on a "higher position" that could breed spiritual arrogance. The Modern Church has a mission to connect with the world. In this process it might mean the abandonment of the inherited church. Modern Church leaders should take on such an endeavour with humility, without looking down on the inherited church. It should respect the inherited church, after all, if it wasn't for her the Modern Church wouldn't have existed. The challenge of Modern Church leaders is to engage the changes postmodernism seeks whilst remaining humble children of the inherited church. In this way the Modern Church will not only have a missional influence in the contemporary world, but it will keep channels of communication open with the inherited church to continue ecumenicity.

2.4. Seek Unity in Truth

James North (1994) entitled his book *“Union in Truth”* to summarise the Restoration Movement in totality. The RM in essence is all about ecclesiology, about establishing the one true church. One of their slogans attests to it: *“The church of Jesus Christ on earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one.”* The premises of this unity came from the Scriptures. Jesus prayed for unity (Jn. 17:20-23), and the Apostles demanded it. There was to be one church (Eph. 4:4). The Corinthians were not to follow men, but one man, Christ (1 Cor. 3:1-9). All Bible believing people would agree on this unity ideal. Then why is it that unity was not acquired by the Restoration Movement? Why did a movement birthed out of a desire for unity divide in its own ranks while at the same time dividing itself from other religious groups? The answer has already been hinted at, but let me place it in the context of these questions. The RM placed conditions on unity. The conditions are simple; everyone must merely follow the unequivocal truths of Scripture. Truth in the *“Unity in Truth”* phrase therefore refers to Scripture. Any theologian will agree that it is easier said than done. To get all Christians to agree on what the Scriptures say exactly about the Early Church, without difference of opinion, is an impossibility. The reason for this is that everyone views Scripture with glasses. The RM used a particular intellectual paradigm to formulate interpretive rules in order to extract from the Scriptures an empirical shape of the true Church. Everyone agreed that Scripture should be the place for discovering the right ecclesiology, but not everybody agreed on the interpretive premises with which to approach such a Scriptural investigation. The RM believed its interpretation of Scripture was objective with no anthropogenic elements influencing it. In this way the movement set itself up for failure in achieving unity in the long run. It believed the conditions for unity were the Scriptures when in reality it was Campbellite hermeneutics.

Nelus Niemandt made a provocative statement that speaks into this reality. He stated: *“Truth is a person, not a principle”*. This statement resonates with Scripture. Jesus said *“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life”* (Jn. 14:6). RM leaders used a hermeneutic to establish a set of truth principles regarding the church. Those who submit to and agree with these “truth principles” would become candidates for unity with the RM. I am immediately reminded of Jesus’s statement to the Pharisees: *“You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life”* (Jn. 5:39-40, NIV). Already in the 1st Century a spirit that favours principles from Scripture over a relationship with the person of Christ was present. The unifying factor

in Christendom is Christ, not principles that can be manipulated depending on one's intellectual ability or hermeneutical premises. In this way it becomes evident that the RM in many ways did not live up to one of the most important slogans it promoted: *"In essentials, unity; in opinions, liberty; in all things love."* The best way to ensure unity is through substance, not form. Substance consists out of essentials (Example: Matt. 15:8 "these people honor me with their lips (form) but their hearts (substance) are far from me" (NIV)) whereas form consists often out of opinion.

In reflection of the Modern Church there does not seem to be a danger lurking for religious disunity. The opposite however might become a possibility. Postmodernism embraces all things and all peoples. It is a "free for all" and "open for all" worldview. All paradigms are welcome. All doctrines can be questioned and debated. It is doctrinally flexible. Although such a stance has merit in postmodern society the Modern Church must be weary of being too accommodating due to the fear of setting boundaries in place which might seem divisive. It will be adequately addressed in the next section, but there is always a place for drawing lines and setting up boundaries when the Gospel of Christ might become distorted. To preserve unity and promote inclusivity at the expense of watering down essential Gospel truth is not wise.

2.5. Embrace Biblical Absolutism

Thus far I have drawn lessons predominantly from Restoration Movement failures. In this final lesson I will turn to consider the most positive attribute of the RM, especially in light of the Modern Church. The RM fully embraced the typical inerrant perspective of Scripture. It took the Reformation slogan "*sola scriptura*" to a "literalist" level. The common slogans of the movement illustrate the perspective well: *No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible, no law but love, no name but the divine*", *"Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent"*, *"Do Bible things in Bible ways"* and *"Call Bible things by Bible names."* The Campbellites thus had a fundamentalist perspective on Scripture. Today such a perspective is generally sneered at since it promotes absolutes.

Postmodernism has already been noted in chapter 4 as taking on an opposing view to the absolutism that fundamentalist inerrant Scriptural paradigms promote. Postmodernism embraces relativism which insists that morality and religion are relative to the people that embraces them (Carson, 2005:32). I reiterate my ideas under the previous heading that the Modern Church should be careful to use its postmodern perspective too loosely. J.D. Payne

(2008:18-21) provides a reason that support my perspective. He claims that there are generally three sources of authority. Firstly, there is personal subjectivity where the source of authority is the human being. I determine doctrine based on my subjective understanding. There is no constant standard by which truth can be measured. What you believe may be diametrically opposed to what I believe. Who is then correct? According to popular philosophies today we are both correct. Of course such inconsistency is incorrect. Secondly, there is history and tradition. Much can be learnt from history and tradition, but simply because something has always been done this way does not mean it is the right or only way. And then thirdly, there is the Bible that can be trusted as the only reliable source of definitive truth. With this being said, where does the authority lie in the Modern Church? Phyllis Tickle (2015:150-151) says the Emerging Church must discover some authority base. She says that if one were to ask emergent Christians where authority lies they would answer one of two things: Scripture or Community. Some will even suggest a combination of the two: Scripture in community. Perhaps the slogan “Truth in Community” can stand at the heart of the Modern Church where the slogan “Union in Truth” stood in the Restoration Movement.

Either way, the Modern Church should not kick Biblical absolutes to the curb. Postmodern constructs of reality can empty truth of any objective content. The subjectivity that postmodernism promotes often asserts the notion that nothing can be true. In such a paradigm free reign is given to relativism and subjectivity, and all are not only free, but encouraged, to believe whatever they wish, for there are no absolutes to life. Objective truth, according to postmodernists, is a myth, a viewpoint that conveys obvious ethical implications (Anderson 2006:9). The Modern Church should refrain from totally embracing such a postmodern view in its fullest sense. As noted in chapter 4, a culture plagued by absolutism needs a dose of relativism to correct what is wrong with it. It doesn’t mean the abandonment of absolutes; it simply means a balancing out of absolutes with relativism.

The RM claimed that there are Biblical absolutes that all reasonable people could agree on. The RM was here referring to church forms. This theory has already been adequately laid to rest. There are Biblical absolutes that should not be debated. These absolutes are about content and substance. The Modern Church should tread carefully around these. One for example is that there is only one way to the Father (Acts 4:12) and it is through the Son, Jesus Christ. The Modern Church must therefore tread carefully to avoid the possibility that its postmodern emphases on relativism could even begin to challenge the validity of Christ’s sacrifice. In actual

fact, a trust in the clear propositions of the Scriptures should be a prerequisite for any adherent to the Christian faith. It is true that modernism has poked holes into the theory of Biblical inerrancy. But it must be noted that submission to Biblical absolutes can be done without prescribing to a Biblical inerrancy viewpoint. One can place the Bible in the framework of reliability instead of inerrancy in order to reach consensus on absolutes. Biblical reliability does not suggest Biblical infallibility. It simply suggests that Scripture is trustworthy in providing absolute necessary truth.

3. Final Conclusion

The New Testament Scriptures gives us ample directives to establish relevant churches in every age and any geographical location. There are timeless ecclesial elements that will not change regardless of culture. Surprisingly the Modern Church has picked up on these. They centre around relationality. Although the Restoration Movement aimed at reproducing the Early Church, I have found that the Modern Church trend is a more accurate representation of Early Church ecclesiology than the RM has ever produced. A fundamental conclusion I make is that there are and needs to be time-bound ecclesial elements in every generation. These elements come to life and are implemented in each generational church in order to remain connected with the society it is striving to impact. This principle is supported by the Apostle Paul's personal, missional method: "*...I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law, so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law, so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some*" (1 Cor. 9:19-22 edited). Paul didn't change his "substance" to reach others, he simply changed his "form". Similarly, the church must in every age take on a bi-interpretative position. It must look around at the culture and interpret what is taking place in society. Then it must look back to the Early Church and reinterpret it in order to find the substance of Early Church ecclesiology and so remain calibrated to those ecclesial elements every society needs. Although cultures change, sin remains and the need for human community and love remains. A church with the right form will interest society but not meet its needs. A church with the right content but irrelevant form will battle to communicate with society. At the moment this is where the RM churches stand. Their emphasis on 19th Century form has made them obsolete to the postmodern culture. I have found that Restoration Movement paradigms are too outdated to

provide stimulating perspectives for the Modern Church. Teaching should be the other way around. Nevertheless, the RM was extremely successful in its time since it interpreted its societal culture correctly and did seek Scriptural directives for an understanding of Early Church ecclesiology. Regardless of the hermeneutical and theological shortfalls, we can identify from the perspective of the 21st Century, it was a movement relevant in its time. The important mistake it made was to concretise its ecclesiology. Many still today battle to move out from under the grip of its sectarian stronghold. This study has made me profoundly aware of the fact that movements should be born to reach a climax and then be transformed into something else. This doesn't always happen as is the case with the RM. It was born, it hasn't transformed into something else and is dying a slow death. May this be a warning to the Modern Church. May the Modern Church recognise the time it reaches its climax and stay in step with culture in order to know when it will need to be transformed again. Reflection on the RM and the lessons learnt through the process excites me about the future of the Modern Church. Perhaps not too long from now the Modern Church will be replaced by another descriptive church term as it transforms into the church of the future.

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