The Characteristics of the New Charismatic Churches

Introduction

This document was produced by a group of church leaders from what has been described as the *New Charismatic Churches (NCCs)*.[1] It was created in an ecumenical environment, arising out of a series of Conversations held at the offices of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU). This is the latest version of the document which, although forged in an ecumenical context, is not an ecumenical document as such, as the authorship has been the work of the NCC group alone. It is an attempt to respond to the question asked by the PCPCU, 'Who are you?' Answering this necessitated the use of reasonably plain language to demystify terms and concepts which have developed in the New Churches over the past sixty years.

Concepts which were clear to the NCC group, as part of their lived experience, were not always easy to describe in unambiguous terms. There are many elements of NCC life which through familiarity had (wrongly) been assumed to be self-evident. It is reminiscent of the joke where one fish asks another, 'How's the water?' The other fish replies, 'What's water?' The Conversations with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity have highlighted, at least to some NCC leaders, how much their familiar church environment, their 'water', is taken for granted and how difficult it is to describe to others. Individual NCCs emerged as part of a broad movement, but the coherence of a movement is not always easy to understand from the outside. The goal of the Conversations was to create a shared understanding of those elements which characterise NCCs.

These Conversations were intended to clarify the theology and praxis of the New Churches. This paper is the outcome of an iterative process, which is described below. It is primarily autobiographical; a self-description of NCCs provided by a group of leaders drawn from a moderately wide cross-section of the newer churches. The content draws on the NCC group's first hand experience as participants in, and observers of, the newer churches. It is hoped that this paper will contribute towards paving the way for greater understanding, local conversations and collaborative partnerships between the historic denominations and the newer churches.

1 The term 'New Charismatic Churches and Networks' was used in Hocken P. (2009). *The Challenges of the Pentecostal, Charismatic and Messianic Jewish Movements*, Farnham, Ashgate Publishing, p.29.

The Background to this Document

Since 2001 NCC leaders and Catholic Charismatics have met for ongoing dialogue at the *Gathering in the Holy Spirit* conferences (GHS), a biannual gathering held in Rome.[2] Open discussion and the deepening relationship between the sixty to eighty invited participants have generated an increasingly strong sense of unity in these gatherings. The conference always includes a visit to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. This fraternal visit updates longstanding attendees and introduces first-time attendees to the work of the Council. Early in the 2000s some NCC participants asked to have a more in-depth discussion with the PCPCU and this request was made to Bishop Brian Farrell. After several informal meetings with a small group of the NCC leaders, the PCPCU decided to invite participation of the NCC leaders in formal Conversations, beginning in May 2014. Because these Conversations have been held in a supportive environment, it has been possible to forge a more precise articulation of the characteristics of the NCCs, as described in this document. NCCs highly value relationship and there has been a sincere appreciation of the warm hospitality of Bishop Brian Farrell and his team in hosting the ongoing Conversations.

What follows is a working document. It is based on what originally was a very short paper presented to the PCPCU at a two day meeting in 2012. This paper in its various versions formed the basis for ongoing discussion. Several points of clarification, made at the four PCPCU/NCC formal Conversations held between 2014 and 2018, resulted in changes and additions to the document to make it more understandable in an ecumenical context. Hence, the content of the paper has been expanded and refined following extensive feedback received in the setting of the Conversations and more widely. The 2014 version of the paper was circulated worldwide to over fifty NCC leaders for their comments. It was considered to be a representative document with minor changes made. It was then presented at the GHS conference in 2014 and attendees also provided feedback. Some attendees themselves sought feedback on the paper including from several major leaders in the NCC constituency. The 2017 version was presented in Augusta, Georgia at the Charismatic Leaders Fellowship (USA), a national ecumenical conference.[3]

The NCC leaders involved in the Conversations are from Europe and the USA, but many NCCs have strong links with churches overseas, in Africa, Asia, Latin America and other parts of the world. Efforts have been made to gain input from a wide range of churches (including the Chinese churches), in order to ensure that the content of this document represents a broad consensus. The document has been scrutinised by NCC leaders from the global South to

2 The GHS conferences are sponsored by Fr James Puglisi, director of the Centro Pro Unione.

3 Extensive feedback on the content of the paper has been sought. The document has been sent to senior leaders in several NCC networks, including RevivalNOW, Harvest International Ministries, Catch the Fire, Global Awakening, Pioneer, Vineyard, Together and others.

ensure that such churches feel they are accurately represented. Feedback from these regions has, in fact, been less easy to obtain, as it is not always easy to identify churches in Africa and Asia as being very clearly NCC. Some have been influenced by New Churches but have their roots in Classic Pentecostalism and have features of both. In Latin America churches are predominantly either Catholic or Pentecostal, with fewer NCCs. Although this document focuses mainly on NCCs in the West, NCCs from other regions of the world are invited to share their stories.

This cycle of feedback, making further changes, then seeking feedback on the revised document, has resulted in a degree of confidence that the result represents a broad consensus. In summary, there is general agreement that several criteria are involved in NCC identity. These include features such as having: a shared history emerging out of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit; common patterns of leadership with the recognition of apostolic and prophetic ministry; an emphasis on holistic mission; and operating through relational networks. The Bible is seen to be authoritative and core beliefs of these churches are consistent with orthodox credal formulations of the Christian faith. These features are characteristic of the churches described here as NCC. In addition, many NCCs are keen to embrace Christian unity and now seek to work with other churches for the sake of mission.

Ecumenical Conversations and the NCCs

There are particular features of NCCs which affect the nature of any ecumenical discourse. Firstly, there is the issue of finding those that can accurately represent such churches. The historic churches and many Classic Pentecostals have more centralised denominational structures, while the New Churches are organised in numerous networks, some of which are formal and structured while others are much less formal. The existence of so many networks mitigates against official representation at ecumenical gatherings, since there is no central body to elect representatives for the whole movement. The Conversations, therefore, involved a *representative sample* of NCC leaders, rather than officially appointed representatives from a central denominational body. The use of a representative sample is common in theological research and, therefore, has some legitimacy as a way of conducting NCC/Catholic discourse.

Membership of the NCC group includes: Bob Garrett (USA), Billy Kennedy (UK), Ian Nicholson (UK), Richard Roberts (UK) Patrick Sparrow (USA). Past members include Ulf Ekman (Sweden), Lonnie Laughlin (USA) and John Noble (UK). This group is drawn from several networks within the overall NCC umbrella. Some NCC networks are not represented, partly

because a few networks tend to limit their ecumenical engagement to the local level, as in the case of New Frontiers, and because of practical considerations.

Another factor which affects the nature of ecumenical dialogue is that NCCs have not produced widely circulated statements of faith. This means that producing a joint doctrinal declaration with the historic churches is not a realistic possibility. However, this does not mean that it is impossible to outline the broad contours of NCC beliefs and practices, as attempted here. This document can contribute to ecumenism by demonstrating that the New Churches hold orthodox views on the nature of the Trinity, the centrality of the Cross and the unity of all those who profess faith in Christ. It is hoped that this will dispel concerns about the core beliefs of those in NCCs. The document also attempts to outline the praxis of NCCs in ways which might pave the way for greater understanding of the commonalities and differences between the newer churches and the historic churches. Such understanding can create the possibility of mutual benefit, the 'exchange of gifts', between the NCCs and other traditions.

NCC Self-Identity and Terminology

Several others have provided descriptions of NCC history, ecclesiology and practice. Interested readers would find the writings of William Kay, Miller & Yamamori and Andrew Walker well researched academic sources.[4] Fr Peter Hocken was an extremely insightful Catholic observer of the NCCs. Given the large number of NCCs worldwide, it is surprising that more has not been written about this movement by the academic community. Primary (more popular) sources which help understand the origins of the movement include the writings of John Noble, Gerald Coates and John Wimber.

The term *New Charismatic Churches* (sometimes referred to as 'New Churches') is used here. This is preferable to alternatives such as 'non-denominational charismatics'. 'Non-denominational' defines NCCs negatively, by what they are not rather than by what they are. It also implies that not being in a denomination is the most important feature of NCC life, which is misleading. The alternative term ‘independent charismatics’ also has rather negative connotations. *Interdependence*, not independence, is a prominent feature of many NCC networks. Local church leaders are often mentored by leaders from their wider network. Churches are shaped over time through visits from others in their network and through conferences. This is expressed through networks, rather than through denominational

4 Kay W. (2007). *Apostolic Networks in Britain.* Carlisle, STL; Miller D., and Yamamori T. (2007). *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Involvement.* Los Angeles, University of California Press*;* Walker A. (1998). *Restoring the Kingdom.* Washington, Eagle. These authors are more focussed on sociological, rather than theological, issues.

structures, so although interdependence may be less immediately evident to those outside observers who are used mainly to denominational structures, it is none the less real.

It is important to be aware that NCCs view themselves as distinct, outside the historical denominations and Classical Pentecostalism. Several of the more academic books and articles which describe the newer churches, particularly sociological or historical studies, classify NCCs as an offshoot of Pentecostalism. Yet most NCCs would not self-identify as 'Pentecostal', so this is questionable. Certainly the use of terms such as 'Progressive Pentecostals' or the description of certain NCCs as 'centres of Pentecostal activity' does not resonate with those being described.[5] These terms tend to mystify rather than clarify the nature of the New Churches. Social anthropologists are usually aware of the need to take into consideration how those studied view themselves, but this is often not evident in the descriptors used by those outside the NCCs.[6] In fact, most NCC members would see themselves as belonging to a new movement, rather than an offshoot of an older movement or of one particular church. The NCC pioneers were drawn from a wide range of church backgrounds, but what emerged was a distinctive pattern of church government and praxis. This pattern was not seen as 'novel', but rather as reflecting ancient ways of being church, organised in a new configuration to fit current cultural contexts, with particular antecedents in the New Testament.

This document later suggests that NCCs are broadly evangelical in theological orientation. They may also be seen as 'Protestant', if the latter is a category of exclusion (neither Catholic nor Orthodox). Many NCCs would identify more with historical movements positioned outside the mainstream, such as Brethren or the Anabaptist tradition, rather than with mainline Protestant denominations. Hence, 'evangelical' or 'Protestant' would not be terms most naturally used by NCCs to describe themselves, even though such categories fit from a theological or sociological point-of-view. In fact it is the charismatic element of church life which is key to their self-understanding, as is emphasised by the term New *Charismatic* Church. NCC spirituality is similar to that of the Charismatic Movement within mainline churches, though differing in historical origins, structure and traditions. Individual local churches are often organised into groups, known as 'networks'. Many of these churches and networks have their origins in the Charismatic Movement of the 1960s,1970s and 1980s in various parts of the world.

NCCs do not consider their different networks to be 'churches' in the sense of the Catholic Church or the Presbyterian Church. When NCCs use the term 'church' they are referring to the

5 For examples of this see Miller D., and Yamamori T. (2007). *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Involvement.* Los Angeles, University of California Press *and* Christerson B. and Florey R. (2017) *The Rise of Network Christianity.* New York, OUP, p.vii.

6 This is termed the 'emic' approach to anthropology. None of the NCC team in the Conversations regard themselves as Pentecostals. It is also the case that although some prominent NCC leaders have had Pentecostal backgrounds, this is by no means universal; more leaders were drawn from other traditions, including the Salvation Army, the Quakers, the Brethren, Baptist and Methodist churches.

gathered local church (or sometimes to the Universal Church). Local church is constituted by having: regular gatherings, recognised leadership, biblical teaching, the celebration of communion (Breaking of Bread) and the administration of believers' baptism. It is, however, the idea of *the church in mission* that is central to the way in which many of these characteristics have taken particular shape. In more theological terms, missiology has given rise to ecclesiology. Such a mission-centred approach requires cultural awareness and resulting flexibility in developing church structures.

The Centrality of Mission to NCC Identity and Praxis

The centrality of mission affects the ways in which New Churches approach leadership roles, the use of charismatic gifts, the creation of church networks and the relationship of NCCs to contemporary culture. These aspects of church life form the basis for further discussion in this document, but in order to appreciate how these characteristics have evolved, a discussion of NCC approaches to mission is now explored.

NCCs see mission both as integral to the calling of the church and intrinsic to the nature of the church as the Body of Christ, which, as with any body, exists to do the will of the head. Christ's expressed will was that the Kingdom of God should come on earth and that the church must pray and work towards that end (Matt 6:10). The church (in the words of Lesslie Newbigin) is the 'sign, foretaste and instrument of the Kingdom'.[7] Mission is, therefore, not viewed simply as one activity which requires attention alongside other facets of church life, such as pastoral care, teaching and counselling; but rather such activities are employed to 'prepare God's people for works of service', that is, for mission (Eph 4:12). Because mission is seen as fundamental to the nature of the church, 'it is not so much that the church has found a mission but that the mission of God has a church'.[8] The church partners with God in His mission to the world, a mission He both initiates and sustains. This emphasis on the primacy of God in taking the initiative in mission, as is seen in the Gospels and Acts, is reflected in many NCC gatherings. As a result, strategic planning goes alongside an emphasis on discerning God's activity within the locality where a church is based.

The Acts of the Apostles is given special place, as it provides examples of mission and growth.[9] The stories of the Early Church inspire and instruct churches today as to how they might take their part in the continuing story of God's mission to the world. These vignettes are regarded as

7 Newbigin L. (1995). *The Open Secret.* Michigan, Eerdmanns. p.110

8 This quotation originated with the author Alan Hirsch: http://www.vergenetwork.org/2012/04/03/alan-hirsch-what-is-a-missional-church/

9 Acts describes the church in mission and, therefore, is a rich source of case studies of the early church in action; when it comes to healing, however, NCCs are likely to draw on the Synoptic Gospels.

'case studies' which need to be contextualised, rather than models to be imitated exactly. They contain principles which need to be allowed to shape contemporary church structures. Acts 2:46, for instance, describes larger gatherings and meeting from 'house to house' and shows the wisdom of having both larger and smaller gatherings for discipleship formation; Acts 13:1-4 indicates that we need flexible leadership structures which can be disrupted by the action of the Holy Spirit; the structure of Paul's church planting team in Acts, consisting of persons with complementary gifts, is taken as a good example for mission teams today.

Acts 2:42-46 is seen as being particularly axiomatic to church life. NCCs seek to outwork this today in ways which often include midweek home-groups (devotion to fellowship 'house to house'), eating together to share 'table fellowship', biblical sermons and extemporary intercessory prayer. The 'apostles teaching' (Acts 2:42) is seen as foundational for church life. For NCCs this highlights the importance of the New Testament, as it contains the teachings of the founding twelve apostles, unique witnesses to the person and teaching of Christ. These various elements are seen as essential to the type of spiritual formation which will create disciples who are able to engage in effective mission.

This orientation towards mission is balanced by an emphasis on the devotional nature of discipleship, so the church is not viewed merely as instrumental in working with God to see His Kingdom come. Since Scripture also describes the church as the Bride of Christ (Eph 5:25-27), an emphasis on the importance of a living relationship with God is often evidenced in sermons and songs. Some of the components of mission are described in more detail later, as this is more naturally examined in the context of the history of the New Churches and their structures.

Origins and History

There are many churches outside the historic denominations with charismatic elements incorporated into their life and worship; yet not all would conform to what is described here as NCCs. Many NCCs regard their origins as part of a worldwide outpouring of the Holy Spirit from the 1960s onward and believe that they continue to exist due to the ongoing activity of the Spirit in the congregation (the terms 'outpouring', 'filled with' and 'baptised in' are used somewhat interchangeably). Some of the historical background to the emergence of NCCs, using the UK and North America as examples, will follow.

NCCs emerged in the UK in the 1960s and 70s when they were known as 'House Churches', because they often began as charismatic prayer groups in people's homes. Many of these groups grew rapidly and moved into school halls or other rented public spaces. Names

associated with this include Arthur Wallis, John and Christine Noble, Terry Virgo, Gerald Coates and Bryn Jones. The term ‘Restorationism’ was also applied to this movement, as a major aim was to *restore* the church to a presumed New Testament pattern.[10] This included the restoration of spiritual gifts, a renewed emphasis on Christian community and developing leadership structures which embraced all five ministries mentioned in Ephesians 4. Church structure and charismatic theology were in view, rather than a reconsideration of other aspects of theology and praxis. The language used by the major proponents of this movement aimed to demystify biblical terms. So, for instance, the term 'leadership' was used to describe what the historic churches generally describe as 'ministry'.

The influences on the UK House Church movement included the revivals of the eighteenth century and the 'open' (more inclusive) wing of the Brethren movement, with its emphasis on the priesthood of all believers. Methodism influenced both Pentecostalism and the NCCs, but in different ways. Classic Pentecostals, unlike NCCs, often trace their origins to the Holiness Movement which emerged within Methodism. NCCs were more influenced by the class system of Methodism with its emphasis on small meetings for mutual growth (Pentecostals in the UK were initially often wary of such meetings).

The use of the charismatic gifts was inspired by the contemporaneous Charismatic Movement occurring within the mainline churches and Pentecostal churches. The emerging NCCs regarded themselves as being outside the mainstream denominations and Classical Pentecostalism. Even in those instances where strong ties with other churches existed, there was often a clear intention to move on to pursue patterns of church considered to be more consistent with the New Testament and to develop networks based on relationship, rather than create new denominations. In other cases, Christians with a charismatic experience were no longer accepted within other churches and were often asked to leave. NCCs were sometimes resisted by the Pentecostals, who were generally more centrally organised and who were not comfortable with certain aspects of NCC ecclesiology, particularly the emphasis on the need to recognise contemporary prophetic and apostolic ministry (discussed later).

In the USA the NCCs emerged somewhat differently. Here there already existed a strong tradition of evangelical churches which were unaligned with major denominations. The Jesus Movement, which was strongly restorationist in theology, witnessed the conversion of many young people in the 1960s and 70s. These new converts were not easily assimilated into existing church structures and this gave further impetus to the formation of New Churches. Some of these young converts became church leaders, including within the emerging NCCs. The churches which resulted were often structured along similar lines to existing evangelical

10 This term became a primary descriptor of the nature of the House Churches due to its extensive use in: Walker A. (1998). *Restoring the Kingdom.* Washington, Eagle.

churches, but with a new openness to spiritual gifts; many had a strong expectation of revival or the near return of Christ.

Early in the history of the NCCs a group of five minsters based in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, became prominent in what became known as the 'Shepherding Movement'. This was a controversial approach to discipleship which was taught from 1970 onwards and was eventually discredited (and subsequently disavowed by some of its prominent proponents). It was promoted through conferences and books and became very influential in the USA, as well as in the UK and Australia. One of the core group, Derek Prince, withdrew in1983, but despite the eventual break up of the Fort Lauderdale group they had helped facilitate the impetus towards 'non-denominational' churches. This included the establishment of some large NCC 'megachurches', mainly in the USA with fewer in Europe.

In the early days the ministry of the prophet was promoted, but from the late 1990s North American NCCs have increasingly emphasised the ministry of apostles. Interestingly, this emphasis emerged at a time when a focus on apostolic ministry had become less prominent in Europe. Like those in the UK, American NCCs saw themselves as distinct from historic Protestant denominations and from classical Pentecostals. Some North American ‘relational networks’ have become quasi-denominational in structure, with a strong central organisation and clear training routes into leadership roles. Christerson and Florey, in *The Rise of Network Christianity*, note the standardisation of the Vineyard churches, with clear organisational control.[11]

NCCs originated in predominantly white ethnic groups in the West. There have been some churches planted among other ethnic groups in the UK and USA and growth of NCCs has also been evidenced in the global South. The picture is more complex in non-western contexts, as many churches have been influenced by both Pentecostalism and the NCCs. This makes for a less clear picture in some parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America, but none-the-less there *are* churches in these continents which are clearly Pentecostal and those which are clearly NCC. The experience of many NCC churches in the UK and USA is that of relationship with overseas churches whose history includes Pentecostal roots, but who now wish to explore a fresh pattern of church life. At this time it is unclear whether such churches will become 'fully NCC', adopting all the characteristics described in this document. The Chinese House Churches have a different historical background to that described above; some of these churches would exhibit the majority of NCC characteristics described in this document, but other characteristics would be less evident. This topic is explored further in appendix 1.

11 Christerson B. and Florey R. (2017). *The Rise of Network Christianity*. New York, OUP, p.44. The suggestion that Vineyard is becoming a denomination is disputed. According to a source within Vineyard they currently see themselves as having a network structure.

The Messianic Jewish churches are a distinct entity, concentrated mainly in the USA and Russia. These Jewish followers of Jesus regard themselves as a separate grouping. They emerged at a similar time to the NCCs, with the Jesus Movement of the 1960s again providing a major impetus. They retain some traditional practices, emphasising Jewish liturgical patterns. Although they are distinct from the NCCs, there are some common features, particularly in the USA. Some, for example, use the language of 'apostolic networks' and there is a charismatic element to many, but not all, Messianic congregations.

Leadership Structures in New Charismatic Churches

Leadership is conceptualised within the framework of charismatic theology. Each individual church member is seen to have gifts which coalesce into particular servant roles, exercised either within the church or in wider society; the outcome of which is regarded as that person's 'ministry'. Leadership is viewed as one way of serving, one ministry, among the diverse range of ministries exercised by the whole Body of Christ. The leadership ministries listed in Ephesians 4 (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers) operate in order to ‘prepare the saints for the work of ministry’. As an example, a major aspect of prophetic ministry is discernment, which includes helping individuals, or even churches and networks identify their gifts and calling, as an aid to mission. Other church members will have gifts of healing, helping others, nurturing, teaching, giving financially etc., in keeping with the lists given in 1 Cor 12, Romans 12 and Ephesians 4. The anointing of the Spirit is 'on all flesh' (Joel 2:28); it is not seen as the particular possession of a few gifted leaders but rests on the local congregation as a whole. Hence, ministry is seen as belonging to the whole church, but with leaders having an important role, as they release, support and help grow the ministries exercised by each person in the congregation.

Leadership is viewed as a crucial ministry since leaders uphold 'the faith that was once delivered to all the saints' (Jude 3) through their public teaching. They are to provide an example for others to follow, by embodying Christian virtue in their daily lives (Titus 1:7-9). Leaders also maintain unity of purpose and help congregations to move forward together towards their church's particular calling.

Most NCC leaders operate in teams. These usually have a designated team leader but with a high degree of collegiality. This contrasts with many evangelical churches and some historic denominations, where leadership may be exercised by one person (accountable to a board, bishop or dean). Plurality of leadership is seen as having biblical support in the idea of a group

of elders or overseers (both plural) exercising local church leadership. Texts which are used to support this view include Phil 1:1; Ac 20:17; Ac 15:6 and also Heb 13:17, where the word 'leaders' is plural. The leadership team is responsible for major decisions in NCCs, as the ability to discern what is needed is seen as a component of having leadership ability. Although there is usually a high degree of consultation in reaching decisions, the congregational model of voting by church members is not commonly encountered.

Apostolic and prophetic leaders are recognised alongside more the traditional roles of pastor, evangelist and teacher.[12] Apostles and prophets may be local church leaders but they often exercise leadership in a wider sphere. In some quarters the terms 'apostle' and 'prophet' are used to describe functional roles rather than being used as titles. In fact, the terms 'apostolic ministry' and 'prophetic ministry' are most commonly used, although there is a trend in North America to use 'Apostle' as a title (and this usage now extends beyond NCCs circles).[13] Describing someone as 'apostolic' does not suggest he or she is on a par with 'the twelve'; rather it implies being called to a specific ministry role. Barnabas, Timothy and Silas are cited as examples of apostolic ministers who followed the twelve. The biblical warrant for this is taken from Acts 14:14, where both Barnabas and Paul are described as apostles, along with passages such as 1 Thess 1:1 with 2:6 (Paul, Timothy and Silvanus could have made demands on the Thessalonians 'as apostles of Christ'). People who have been sent by the Lord to start and establish churches and/or networks and to lead them towards maturity are regarded as having an apostolic ministry. The authority of these servants of the churches is not seen as approaching that of Scripture, nor do their views have automatic precedence over those of pastors or evangelists.

Leadership may not necessarily be life-long and it is often seen to operate within a given context, sometimes referred to as a 'sphere'. Some leaders are bi-vocational, with careers alongside their church leadership role; others may lead for some years, with interspersed periods of secular employment. Some NCC streams see all leadership roles as equally open to women and men; this includes both local leadership roles and wider trans-local ministry. Several prominent NCC networks have married couples leading them. Other networks have a more complementarian theology, seeing women as 'equal but different', and as such, are more restrictive in the roles available to women.

12 In previous generations apostolic and prophetic ministry would have been seen as particularly needed in pioneering missionary settings overseas. The West has become a mission field in the Modern and Postmodern eras, so these ministries are now much needed in that context.

13 See Wagner P. (2006). *Apostles Today.* Bloomington, Chosen Word.

Appointing New Leaders

New leaders are appointed in various ways, the most widely used of which is that of holding a church service. This involves congregational recognition of the person being called to leadership, underlined publicly by the prayer of existing leaders for the incoming leader.

There are various ways in which people take on a leadership role. Leaders are sometimes appointed by the leaders of their network; they are then confirmed in that role through the 'laying on hands' (2 Tim 1:6), sometimes in conjunction with local leaders (1 Tim 4:14). Many of these leaders, however, will have been 'locally grown' within a congregation. In some streams leaders are appointed by the congregation or its leaders without the involvement of national leaders. Yet others will be in a position of leadership, having planted the church themselves (1 Cor 3.6). In whatever way the role is recognised, it is done with the belief that leadership is a God-given charismatic endowment and this factor determines appointment to a leadership role. The term 'recognised', rather than 'appointed', is often used to describe the confirmatory service in which individuals are publicly acknowledged to possess the calling, charismatic gifts and natural endowments that are necessary for leadership. 'Recognised' emphasises that a church or network has discerned that God has taken the initiative in calling someone into leadership.

NCC leaders may be young and well educated, with experience in work settings outside the church. Often their primary education is in areas other than theology. Their faith has been exposed to life situations, in areas such as medicine, education or business. Hence their Christian understanding has been formed in different ways to that gained through inherited models of leadership training. Their life experience is enhanced by training which emphasises personal formation, leadership skills and practical wisdom acquired through apprenticeship models of leadership development. While there is no requirement for ordination, as in traditional forms of church, education is valued and some leaders pursue higher degrees in theology. Those who do seek more formal theological training have often been in leadership roles for many years before undertaking their studies, so they are able to evaluate what they are learning against their prior experience of leadership and their experience of professional or other work settings.

Several NCCs develop young leaders by intensive training programmes, based on the example of Luke 10:1-12, the sending out of the 72 disciples. This involves biblical teaching and practical training, followed by community outreach assignments, where students put into practice what they have been learning. This model of training reinforces the missional nature of the church and has a strong affinity to the approach honed by Youth With a Mission, a well established evangelical missionary organisation.

Leadership Models

In general terms, there are two main models of leadership commonly seen within NCCs. These models are not mutually exclusive and what is described below represents the two ends of what in practice is a continuum.

1. *The Transformational Leader* tends to be enterprising, perceptive of opportunities and good at initiating and managing change.[14] He or she articulates a picture of the future and then recruits people to that vision. This suits a 'charismatic' (in the secular sense) style of leadership and tends to see leadership as operating in a 'top down' fashion. Such leaders are often competent people who generate enthusiasm and easily attract others to join them. They may be good communicators and people commit to a vision because the leaders are trusted. They are usually personable and caring and their style of leadership reflects an outgoing personality, clear vision and the belief they should firmly hold the reins to achieve certain goals. Churches led by transformational leaders tend to have an attractional model of mission – the message is 'come to us!' Mission takes place as church projects are resourced by new or existing members.

2. *The Servant Leader* has a less specific outcome in mind when it comes to the future of their church or network. The main task of the servant leader is to equip and empower people to fulfill their own personal calling in their daily lives within the context of their communities and places of work. In this model, the path taken by the church is built around the gifts of those within that church. This depends on leadership discerning where the Spirit is leading individuals and groups within the church. This might involve creating new projects within the church, with such projects being clearly centred on the particular gifts of individuals in that particular church, rather than being determined by the leadership's pre-existing idea of what should be achieved in an 'ideal church'. In fact, church projects are often initiated by people other than the main leader or leadership team. These sorts of leaders invest more in sending people out into their daily lives with the resources needed to be effective as missionaries. The mission field is seen as being mainly where people work or live. The church is the base to which they return to be formed and supported as disciples. It is also the community where members can bring people who are attracted to the faith to experience Christian worship firsthand. Effectiveness in mission is judged in terms of local influence, rather than by the size of the church or the number of projects it initiates.

To some extent these models can reflect the social demographic of the church. Transformational leaders may appeal to those who feel anxious in a rapidly changing society

14 The terms employed here are commonly used in leadership studies but it should be noted that a 'transformational leader' denotes a style of leadership that would that would, in keeping with Matt 23:11, still be exercised as a servant of the church.

and want the degree of certainty provided by leaders with a clear vision. Servant leadership models work well when church members are highly competent, used to taking initiative in their work or family and want a more facilitative style, and are unused to more hierarchical forms of leadership. Both leadership types, however, have a focus on equipping people for mission, even if their approach is somewhat different.

NCC 'Networks'

Churches commonly refer to belonging to a particular network, in order to describe their affinity to other NCCs. It is important to clarify the nature of networks as they are a prominent feature of NCC life and express a sense of kinship and belonging. This term 'network' is used in the sense of familial groupings. This is not the 'networking' of the business world where the goal is to gain personal advantage; rather the term refers to connections between leaders and churches based on relational ties, shared values and the sense that God has joined them together.[15] Leaders have the important function of maintaining unity within their networks and between the various distinct networks. The term 'stream' is sometimes used as an alternative to 'network', implying that each has its own individual character, but ultimately all flow into the river of the Universal Church. The oversight provided by the leaders of these networks is taken seriously and considered thoughtfully, as being more than simply the giving of advice. Even in churches which do not formally belong to a specific network, there are usually strong informal links with other similar churches, through conferences, joint ventures and close personal friendship.

Dr William Kay, in his book *Apostolic Networks in Britain,*[16] studied the major NCC networks in the UK and described how many NCC churches have developed new models of overseas missions by using air travel and Skype to be in regular contact with churches planted in other countries. The use of Skype is an example of a global approach to creating networks which utilises contemporary communication. Relationship and community is also maintained by regular visits or, for example, by leaders choosing to live in the location of the newly planted NCC for several months or years at a time. This means that mission is not limited by national boundaries. Some of these international apostolic networks have started churches with local leadership being supported and supervised from a distance.

15 Relational networks exist in other contexts, including movements within historic denominations. Some movements, such as the New Wine network in the Church of England, have sought to replicate many of the features of NCC networks ('New Wine', as the title suggests, is modeled on the Vineyard network). NCCs have *some* similarities to those networks aiming at social change described as Segmented Polycentric Integrated Networks (SPINs). A useful introduction to the concept of SPINs is found at: https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1382/MR1382.ch9.pdf

16 Kay W. (2007). *Apostolic Networks in Britain.* Carlisle, STL.

There is variety in the way in which leadership operates in different networks, so that networks are not homogenous. Tighter and looser networks exist, with differing expectations of the churches which are linked in. Some networks see themselves as existing to provide resources, such as conferences and advice, for the churches, with few demands made on those churches. Others have stronger connections and greater expectations of their churches. There is a flexible element to such network structures. Recently, a large international NCC network has divided into five smaller networks following the retirement of the senior apostolic founder. This illustrates how networks can continue to evolve over time without, as Max Weber indicated, an inevitable shift to a more bureaucratic structure.[17]

Practices of Local Churches

The local church is characterised by regular worship with biblical preaching and the exercise of charismatic gifts, such as healing, words of knowledge, spiritual discernment and prophecy (1 Cor 12:7-11). NCCs practise believers' baptism and regularly take Communion (known as 'breaking of bread'): these are regarded as sacramental and are normally administered by either church leaders or local home group leaders. Some NCCs also regard the dedication of infants in a sacramental way. Many recognise the validity of Christian initiation in other churches, as long as the person concerned clearly understood that rite (e.g. confirmation) to be an expression of their personal intention to live as a Christian disciple.

The concept of Christian community is prominent in many NCCs. This was a particularly strong emphasis in the 1960s and 70s, evidenced in teaching and in the songs, such as *Bind Us Together*, that emerged at that time. The relational nature of Christian community has contributed to the emphasis on the importance of small groups. Churches with more than 40-50 members may have midweek groups for prayer and Bible study, which provide mutual support, in practical ways and prayer for one another. Each participant is seen as having the ability to contribute, in keeping with the concept of the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet 2:5). Bible study gives an opportunity for learning together and for discerning the application of what is being studied.

The emphasis on community makes possible a deep sense of common life in Christ and includes working together to enable each person to engage more effectively in mission as the People of God. This is in keeping with the Pauline emphasis on *koinonia,* rooted in a shared faith (1 Cor 1:9) and partnership in the Gospel (Phil 1:5). The centrality of koinonia for NCCs ensures that community has a spiritual and sacrificial basis. It is not based on the secular

17 For a discussion of this see: Christerson B. and Florey R. (2017). *The Rise of Network Christianity*. New York, OUP, pp.41-4.

koinonia, common in St Paul's day, of persons united purely by mutual self-interest. Partnership between churches is also an expression of koinonia. This is not meant to imply that koinonia is experienced only with other NCCs and there are often strong ties with local denominational churches.

There is variety in the ways in which churches regard the concept of 'membership'. For some, it involves an expressed commitment to a particular church with clear expectations, such as tithing and attending small groups; other NCCs are more flexible in their approach and have less clear boundaries.[18] But whichever approach is adopted, it is expected that those who are committed will actively contribute to the life of a church in practical ways.

Prayer movements are prominent in the New Churches. The 24/7 prayer movement was initiated in 1999 within an NCC network in Chichester, on the south coast of England. It is now a global and interdenominational prayer movement. This was started within a few days of the International House of Prayer (IHOP) in Kansas City. In addition to intercessory prayer and seeking God for guidance, some churches also emphasise 'spiritual warfare'. This views the Christian life as a conscious battle against forces of evil (Eph 6:10-12), where Jesus' prayer for the coming of the Kingdom of God (Matt 6:10) is outworked through one's personal struggle against temptation, overcoming evil with good, holistic mission and prayer for healing. Where individuals are experiencing demonic oppression, it can involve prayer for deliverance. 'Spiritual warfare' also encompasses prayer against evils seen to be embedded in the structures of society. Some employ a systematic approach towards such structural evil involving the discernment of specific demonic strongholds believed to dominate geographical areas. Concerted prayer is then targeted towards breaking the grip of these 'territorial spirits'. In part, this approach lies behind the theology of March for Jesus. Some believe that the unity demonstrated in the March plays a part in defeating the 'powers and principalities' which dominate the towns and cities in which the Marches take place.

There is a variety of ways in which church discipline is administered where, for example, someone engages in damaging behaviour towards others, or teaches doctrine which conflicts with orthodox Christian teaching. In keeping with Matt 18, the aim of church discipline is always reconciliation wherever possible. Resolution is usually attempted initially in private and at a local level. Networks do have mechanisms for dealing with such issues at a higher level where more senior leaders are brought into the situation. Whereas churches see themselves as autonomous to some extent, this is held alongside the recognition of interdependence, including strong connections to other churches within their network. Where there is moral failure on the part of a local leader, help may be sought from leaders in the wider network. In these circumstances it is

18 Conforming to the so-called 'centred set' model of community.

seen as appropriate that the person in question steps aside from public ministry, sometimes for a specified time, sometimes permanently.

Theological Orientation

The majority of NCCs are evangelical in their theological emphases; they stress the centrality of the Cross, the need for personal faith and the central role of Scripture in theological understanding. Yet, many NCCs would be reluctant to describe themselves as 'evangelical'. This is because the term can have associations from which many NCCs would wish to distance themselves. Most 'Conservative Evangelicals', for instance, do not accept that the charismatic gifts are for today. 'Evangelical' can also have political overtones in the USA, with pastors aligning themselves with particular candidates. Although many members of NCCs are individually politically engaged, they hold views across the whole political spectrum and their churches usually would not direct their voting.

Most churches and networks do not have a written confessional statement, but in practice, all would adhere to the content of the Nicene-Constantinople Creed and New Charismatic Churches are strongly Trinitarian. One example of the use of the creeds in NCCs is the way in which the Apostles' Creed has been put to song by Graham Kendrick (*We Believe*) and Stuart Townsend (*We Believe in God the Father*).[19]

Many take seriously the example of previous generations of Christians. For instance, Wesley's approach to mission, with a strong emphasis on discipleship, provides a framework for the life and mission of many NCCs. The main source of authority, however, is always seen to be Scripture, so Evangelical tradition, in itself, does not form the final basis for belief and practice unless it is judged to be clearly aligned with Scripture. Creeds and tradition are regarded as secondary sources and are always examined through the lens of the Bible. The Bible is used for the purposes of defining doctrine, but Scripture is also expected to be used by the Holy Spirit to help individuals and churches negotiate current challenges and opportunities.[20] It is expected that the Spirit will speak to individuals and churches using both good exegesis and by highlighting certain verses to give meaning in a particular contemporary circumstance.

19 The Hillsong YouTube video of 'This I Believe', based on the Apostles' Creed, has at the time of writing had over 21 million hits. Although Hillsong is not NCC, its songs are commonly used by NCCs.

20 A helpful summary of this sort of charismatic hermeneutic is given in Cartledge M. (2006). *Encountering the Spirit,* London, DLT, ch. 7. This has close parallels with the approaches of both Local Theology and Practical Theology, which start from a concrete situation and seek to understand it theologically.

Engagement with Culture

NCCs take surrounding culture very seriously. They have sought to be attuned to their cultural landscape and contextualisation of the Gospel has been a priority. Seeking to be ‘all things to all men’ (1 Cor 9:19-23) means that contemporary means of communication, globalisation and holistic thinking help to inform the way that mission is undertaken and churches are formed. This results in a high value being placed on the ability to be flexible, creative and relevant, so that church structures can be attuned to local context in an appropriate way. Willingness to adapt to context takes effort and may involve risk.

One feature of the NCCs is an emphasis on starting new churches through the activity of 'church planting' (a phrase which is inspired by Paul’s words in 1 Cor 3:6). Church planting is often seen as a way of reaching people in particular locations who have little awareness of the Gospel. Experimentation is employed in a spirit of hospitality towards those who are not at home in existing inherited forms of church (many younger people, for instance, find organ music outmoded). There are a variety of models of church planting in operation, varying from the 'mother-daughter church' model, which allows for smaller but similar daughter churches to be planted at some distance from the mother church, to church plants which focus on specific homogenous people groups, such as bikers, surfers or even the de-churched. Increasingly, NCCs are considering what it means to develop church in a multicultural and multi-faith society.

Cultural engagement and creative approaches have been aided by patterns of leadership selection within NCCs (as mentioned above). Since leaders have often outworked their faith in business, education, medicine, etc., this experience is brought into the churches. They are used to problem solving in their previous roles and realise the value of being flexible in their approach. As a result they are often willing to experiment in worship as well as in mission. There has been a fresh approach to creativity in worship, with myriads of new songs flooding across the world from NCCs. These songs often mirror the style of music that is reflected in the culture of those whom the church is seeking to reach. Dance and the arts have also been incorporated into some NCC church services in a variety of ways. Worship often reflects creativity and a willingness to draw on elements of more traditional, as well as contemporary forms of liturgy. This can involve drawing on different models of Christian spirituality across a wide spectrum. In some quarters there is a growing interest in exploring expressions of community and mission which draw inspiration from certain aspects of monastic practices of prayer and life together in the Spirit.

Experimentation is welcomed, but not for the sake of change itself. It is not the case that everything changes frequently, but there is the recognition that at times adaptive change is

necessary. It is sometimes important to find a relevant and workable way ahead. There is a willingness to find authentic forms of worship which will not be a cultural barrier to the surrounding community. This accords with the centrality of the missional approach for NCCs. Engagement with the surrounding culture is also expressed in a holistic approach to mission, engaging with people's material as well as spiritual needs.

Holistic Mission

How did an emphasis on holistic mission develop, given that it was not always an early feature of all NCCs? Many NCCs began in the 1960s and '70s. At this time the focus was sometimes centred on the internal life of the church. There was an emphasis on creating authentic community based on heartfelt worship and committed relationships. The terms 'restoration' and 'fullness' were often used to capture the inner dynamic of this process; the church was seen as being restored and coming into the 'fullness' which God intended.

In the early days a common aspiration was to recover the simplicity and vibrancy of the Early Church. This was subsequently viewed by some as a detour from mission; but others regard it as a phase of strategic introversion, building a stronger base for effective mission. Church members needed to discover afresh their deep roots in God and in the Christian community. The focus of mission at this time mainly concentrated on evangelism, obeying the command 'to make disciples of all nations' (Matt 28:18-20). Churches had the expectation that a high degree of commitment to the church would almost automatically result from conversion.

This rather one dimensional view of mission, with little emphasis on meeting people's material needs, gradually changed to a more holistic approach. A major influence was the writings of the theologian George Eldon Ladd. In 1975 he published his *Theology of the New Testament.*[21] Ladd presented the Kingdom of God as being already inaugurated in the present rather than being primarily a future hope. This view was widely popularised in the mid 1980s in books and conferences by John Wimber, the founder of The Vineyard movement, an influential NCC stream. This brought into focus the here-and-now element of the Kingdom of God, including the importance of meeting practical needs. This focus contrasted with the contemporaneous view of eschatology which promoted 'the Rapture'. The idea, expressed in the theology of the Rapture, that God would ultimately remove believers from this world had become very widespread and it downplayed the importance of people's material and social needs. As well as having an eschatology which fosters engagement with contemporary social issues (the Kingdom of God being seen as both a current reality and a future hope), some NCCs teach bodily resurrection

21 Ladd G. (2007). *A Theology of the New Testament.* Cambridge, Lutterworth Press. First published in 1975.

and the ultimate renewal of the Earth. This provides a positive approach to the world and its ultimate destiny. In addition, Isaiah 61:1-2 was widely used in preaching and became a paradigm for holistic mission. This focus on meeting the whole range of human needs was interpreted not just as a call for 'inreach', to meet the needs of God's people, but for outreach. These factors contributed to a more rounded approach to mission becoming mainstream within the NCC movement in the 1980s and 90s. It is now almost universally accepted that evangelism and social action are the two indivisible sides of the church's missionary mandate.

Localism is another factor contributing to the development of a holistic approach by NCCs. Particularly in the UK, many New Churches began as small home based groups. Members were often encouraged to live in close geographical proximity in order to foster genuine community with others in their church. As an unintended consequence, many nascent New Churches became firmly rooted in their particular locality. This meant that they were well placed once an emphasis on local engagement emerged as an integral component of the Church's missionary mandate. In addition NCC leaders are usually local people developed from within the congregation. Without an established ministry career path these leaders have often remained committed locally over many decades and know their locality well. This may be less the case in some of the large 'mega-churches' which have developed, particularly in the USA. Here leaders and members may be drawn from a large geographical area and local neighbourhood engagement is less likely. Such churches, however, often have an emphasis on being a blessing to their city or wider region, so locality is not unimportant.

Mission at home sits alongside an emphasis on mission overseas, with the emphasis being on church members living their daily lives as missionaries in whatever situation they find themselves. As missionaries they 'seek the good of the city' (Jer 29:7) by showing practical care and by looking for opportunities to communicate their faith to a needy world. This is with the understanding of the Gospel as encompassing the healing of minds, bodies and communities, not just of souls. The changing context of the postmodern Western World has also necessitated a change from activities such as street evangelism to more presence-based 'incarnational' approaches to mission. Churches realise that they need to 'be' good news, not just to proclaim it in words. Effective local mission occurs when the Gospel is expressed in words, in practical care and through the use of spiritual gifts. These three together, expressed by the phrase 'words, works and wonders', are seen as the pillars on which mission is securely based. 'Wonders' might include prayer for healing, or having revelation from God about someone's past or about their current circumstances.

The 'works' in which many NCCs are involved, often in partnership with other churches, include the provision of childcare, debt counselling, food banks and as 'street pastors', who provide care

for vulnerable young adults who are out late at night on city streets. NCC church members also work with other churches in the protection of the vulnerable in society (such as the unborn child). This is predicated upon the mission of Jesus (as described in Luke 4:18-19), where the marginalised are seen as being of particular concern to the Lord.

The encouragement for people to discover their own individual calling and to use their God-given spiritual gifts adds impetus to those who believe they should be involved in education (as teachers or local school governors), medicine or politics. Such people are seen to be exercising Christian ministry in the wider secular arena. Some churches also have their own schools, which may aim to provide good education for a particular locality or may function as an alternative educational environment for church young people. (The OASIS Trust in the UK is an example of the former).

NCC involvement with environmental issues tends to be more piecemeal. Many churches use fair trade products, such as tea and coffee, in their gatherings, and green issues get some exposure, but this tends to be implemented only on an individual church basis. As a broad generalisation, NCCs are less prominent in addressing the root causes of wider cultural or social justice issues, but tend to focus on alleviating the effects. Political involvement is also often piecemeal. It is undertaken by individuals, rather than by high profile campaigning; although the latter is more common in the USA than in the rest of the world.

Unity & Wider Reconciliation

A call for unity in the body of Christ is seen as being important by many New Charismatics, particularly in the light of John 17 where effective mission and unity are clearly linked. This was evidenced by the active participation of NCCs, along with Catholic, Pentecostal and other denominations, in the landmark 1977 Kansas City charismatic conference. A more recent and growing trajectory towards unity is in keeping with the nature of the move of the Spirit in the latter half of the twentieth century, when there was a strong ecumenical dimension to both the Charismatic Renewal in the historic denominations and the emerging NCCs. Unity is not, however, limited to those who share a charismatic experience; it is inclusive of all who know the Fatherhood of God, actively seek to be disciples of Jesus and are open to the Spirit. This is evidenced by the ways in which Christians, including New Charismatics, join together in projects aimed to alleviate human suffering, involving prayer together as well as action.

NCCs see themselves as part of the larger Christian family in their locality. Many belong to 'Churches Together' groups and local church leaders fraternities. There is also a growing desire

for a level of Christian unity that is more substantial and more global. Unity is based on the fact that all followers of Christ, charismatic and non-charismatic, in whatever denomination or stream, have the Spirit (Eph 4:4). Unity is not seen as based on full doctrinal agreement. This unity of the Spirit enables openness and love to be the foundation on which dialogue and cooperative ventures are built. The fact that some believers in historic churches will have had charismatic experience of some kind may lead to deeper levels of unity than that enjoyed with those who have the indwelling Spirit but without a charismatic dimension to their experience. NCCs generally seek relational unity and the experience of 'the other' as being a brother or sister in Christ is important. Alongside this, agreement on *key* doctrinal issues, such as the full humanity and divinity of Christ, the Trinity and the centrality of the Cross, would be seen as essential for genuine unity to exist. Other doctrines, such as patterns of ministry or sacramental theology, would be seen as being less central.

As mentioned, the ministries described in Ephesians 4 (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers) are seen to exist to prepare God's people for increasing unity. Such a spirit of unity fosters the desire to draw together for prayer and for practical cooperation in mission. The March for Jesus is a well known example, which, in many parts of the world draws together Christians from a wide variety of backgrounds. Unity is important for evangelism and, as has been mentioned, for the church to effectively address social and moral issues in society.

NCC members have been involved in significant initiatives for reconciliation between peoples and tribal groupings, some of which have been aimed at healing longstanding historical divisions. This has included reconciliation walks, where, for example, representative Christians have walked through the Middle East and sought to apologise for wrongs done in the past (so called 'Identificational Repentance'). There have been relatively fewer reconciliation attempts between ecclesial bodies, partly due to the fact that there is no central organising body for NCCs which could take on such a task. Reconciliation is seen as a key element of the Gospel (Gal 3:28), although this is not as prominent in practice as some other initiatives, such as prayer movements.

Conclusion: New Trends, Challenges and Opportunities

In practice, NCCs experience the same cultural influences as other churches. Consumerism has affected the approach of some, where church is seen as existing primarily to meet personal needs, rather than existing as a resource for support in outworking the call to live as the People of God. With the growth and broadening appeal of NCCs, the high degree of commitment expected in the early days has given way to a more graded picture: some people are highly

committed to their local church, investing a significant amount of time in the life of the church and its outreach programmes, but others are less committed and may be more nominal. It is also true that creativity and contextualisation are not always in evidence. But at their best, NCCs exhibit flexible contextualised approaches to mission, embracing social action and evangelism as two inseparable parts of the missionary call, seen to be the core of church life. Flexibility creates a variety of forms of NCC churches and, assuming diversity and contextualised approaches continue, it has been suggested that such diversification might be an element in the success of churches in a pluralistic society.[22]

Although the churches outlined in this document are described as 'new', NCCs are now well established and many have existed for well over half a century. This presents certain challenges, as second and third generation NCC members have been raised in a post-Christian era. They no longer share the cultural assumptions of the 1960s and 70s which were characteristic of their spiritual forebears. Their context is that of entrenched secularism, which relegates religion to the private sphere, and of relativism, which makes truth a matter of subjectivity. Millennials are also more relational than their forebears and hierarchies carry less authority than they did in previous generations. These factors present a challenge to older NCC leaders, but they also present some opportunities. The trend in society towards networks, rather than hierarchies, fits well with the structure of the NCCs, as does the emphasis on cultural engagement. These factors may favour the growth of NCCs in the medium term.

The network structure of NCCs means there is less formal control over churches than exists in many denominations, with fewer possible sanctions when churches are perceived as deviating too far from the centre. Because of this there is the possibility that some networks will morph into entities structured more along denominational lines. Max Weber's theories would suggest that, once the original highly gifted leader has handed on the baton, there is the tendency for second generation leadership to bureaucratise and to exert more control over their networks. A loss over time of the original zeal can also lead to churches becoming more 'routinised', with the expectation of God's tangible presence giving way to predictable worship services. This might happen, but the determination to continue to be charismatic and to perpetuate the network model could mitigate against the process of becoming more hierarchical. (This is not meant to imply that hierarchies are undesirable in all settings, but rather that networks and hierarchies are essentially different ways to organise churches).

Bureaucratisation may not be inevitable as prominent NCC leaders, such as Bill Johnson and Mike Bickle, are promulgating the idea that they do not wish to control a movement, but simply wish to influence others through their training opportunities and media outlets. The apostolic

22 Stark R. (2011). *The Triumph of Christianity.* New York, Harper Collins, pp.353-67.

leadership model can facilitate the continuation of the network structure, as God raises up new leaders in subsequent generations; leaders who are recognised as having that calling from God because they exhibit the spiritual authority, humility, sacrifice and suffering that were characteristic of apostolic ministry in the New Testament (2 Cor 12:12, 1 Cor 4:13, 1 Thess 2:6-7). There is the potential for those factors which have fostered the growth of NCCs, such as flexibility and creativity, to contribute to the ongoing growth and evolution of such churches without their inevitably evolving into new denominations.

One drawback of the network model is that there are few mechanisms for producing structures to effect societal change in the longer term, such as those seen in the historic churches. There is the realisation that structural injustice needs to be addressed, but the lack of central organisation makes it difficult to do this in a coordinated way. NCCs tend to produce 'downstream' solutions, tackling the effects of social ills, rather than addressing their causes 'upstream'. This could frustrate the promise of the New Churches to see society impacted, as prayer and witness alone are unlikely to be sufficient. There are, however, historical precedents of small groups and individuals creating structures for social transformation which straddle denominational and other boundaries (the notable example being the Clapham Sect in UK in the 19th century).[23] This model may be a way forward, coupled with an effective use of media as has occurred in many contemporary secular movements advocating social change. Many New Churches in the UK belong to the Evangelical Alliance or support Christian Concern and these bodies do act as advocates for changes in public policy. There is also a growing recognition of the importance of believers in positions of influence in society, but it is too early to say whether NCCs en masse will be successful in responding to the challenge of facilitating structural change in society.

For many NCCs there is a growing attitude of inclusivity towards other Churches. This involves ever more collaboration on social projects, as well as an active desire to draw on spiritualities outside of the evangelical tradition. There is a growing openness to ancient spiritual practices, a form of returning to the sources (*ressourcement*), using the past to give fresh expression to contemporary faith. Retreats are becoming more widely used by those in NCCs. These may be hosted in Benedictine abbeys or Franciscan friaries. Contemplative approaches to the Bible, including Ignatian meditation and lectio divina, have become increasingly popular. These prayerful approaches to Bible reading, allowing God to speak to people personally through Scripture, contrasts with the more traditional 'Bible study' within evangelical circles, which primarily focuses on gaining knowledge. Creeds are not uncommonly used in worship. Spiritual formation of believers increasingly draws on a wider range of approaches beyond those

23 The Clapham Sect, a group of Anglican clergymen and others based in Clapham Common in London, are famous for their moves to end slavery, but they also founded over 200 societies for the alleviation of social ills and the furtherance of the Christian Faith through missionary and Bible societies.

traditionally associated with evangelicalism; for example, the Vineyard movement has started its own school of spiritual direction.

Changes in the surrounding culture, the need to produce structures for effecting long term social change, the desire to resist increased centralisation and an increasing openness to other Christian traditions are some of the issues which currently present the New Charismatic Churches with both challenges and opportunities.

APPENDIX 1 **THE CHINESE HOUSE CHURCHES**

Following the ascendancy of the Communist Party in 1949, foreign missionaries were expelled from China. Some churches became state registered (in the Three Self Patriotic Church), but many continued as small unregistered rural house churches. An important historical factor, which cannot be underestimated, is that the Chinese house church 'families' have all been shaped by their experience of suffering and persecution. The unregistered churches experienced widespread harsh persecution, but grew rapidly in China in the late 1970s and '80s, due to a revival, also widespread in its scope.

These churches exhibit some similarities to NCCs. They are evangelical in doctrine, often led by those with little formal theological training and meet in homes or, more recently, in rented buildings. There is almost universal experience of healing and deliverance in such churches, particularly those in rural areas. In the late 1980s a more robust charismatic theology became commonplace in the Chinese house churches, with thousands of leaders experiencing baptism in the Holy Spirit. Several large house church networks were created as influential leaders founded numerous churches and were sought out for their help and advice.

Rural house churches have always had an emphasis on sacrificial care for the poor and mission has been viewed in a holistic manner. For instance, house churches responded to the 2008 Sichuan earthquake and provided both immediate and long-term relief in ways which demonstrated the ability of the church to be a force for good in society. However, many of these churches differ from the description of NCCs in this document in several aspects. There is often, for instance, a less positive approach to their surrounding culture; this is understandable as their society is predominantly intolerant of religion. Leadership tends to operate in a top down manner, reflecting a society based on respect and deference. This more hierarchical style is, in fact, a contextually-appropriate leadership style, at least in the more rural and more traditional Chinese settings. As a result leadership teams tend to function as conduits for the vision of the main leader in that church or network, rather than on a collegial basis . At the most senior levels of network leadership it is men over forty who tend to predominate, although there are large numbers of women leaders at other levels. The terminology used to describe leadership roles tends to be familial (uncles, aunts etc) rather than the terminology of Ephesians 4. Most 'uncles' founded churches, helping them to become structurally and doctrinally sound, so that they actually fulfill the function of NCC apostles, albeit with a more hierarchical leadership style.

In more recent times house churches have also emerged in urban settings. This has partly been due to the migration of Christians from rural areas and partly due to the evangelistic influence of Western Christians, who entered the country as language teachers and university staff.

Whereas rural house church leaders were often farmers, in urban settings there are several prominent 'boss Christians'. These may, for example, be factory owners who in the evening use their business premises for church activities. This has interesting parallels with the Early Church, where prominent leaders were often drawn from the wealthier strata of society, putting their homes, which was also the place where business might be conducted, at the service of the church.[24] The urban house churches present a mixed picture: some churches resemble rural house churches in their structure and functioning; some are now quasi-denominational in nature (some influenced by Reformed theology); others resemble NCCs and use the terms 'apostles' and 'prophets' to describe certain leaders. Yet even in churches using ministry descriptions drawn from Ephesians 4, the concept of a leadership team based on complementary leadership gifts is not as common in Chinese churches as it is in the West.

Some urban house churches contain a proportion of highly educated members and are generally more open to addressing structural issues in society. Yet the cultural norm of deference to authority and the history of persecution tends to inhibit widespread political engagement. There are some examples of creativity in mission. The Teddy Beloved cafe in Shanghai was set up by a Christian couple who used their love of teddy bears to create an environment that communicates the love of God to customers. The two dozen staff have all come to faith themselves and are willing to share their testimony with customers. This small example demonstrates the emergence of creative and flexible missional structures.

The Local Churches Network exhibits many of the characteristics of NCCs as described in this document. It emerged from the ministry of Watchman Nee, perhaps China's best known Christian in the West. Nee's successor, Witness Lee, developed Nee's teaching in Taiwan and the Local Church network has become global in scope.[25] It encompasses both rural and urban churches. Local church leadership is exercised by a team of elders and a team of co-workers travel between churches to teach. There are lots of training opportunities through conferences, but there are no formal routes to accredit leaders, as elders are recognised by their own local local church and then confirmed by the 'co-workers'. All five ministries in Ephesians 4 are recognised but these are seen as descriptions of those who function to build up the Body of Christ; titles, such as 'pastor' or 'apostle', are avoided, so as not to imply any sense of there being a clergy/laity divide. Divine healing and prophecy (mainly in the 1 Cor 14:3 sense of upbuilding, consolation and encouragement), are embraced, but it is the transforming work of the Spirit in the life of the believer which is more strongly emphasised. Churches are linked

24 See Meeks W. (2003). *The First Urban Christians.* New Haven, Yale University Press, pp.75-7.

25 As with all networks, it has its own distinct emphases and in some evangelical circles there was widespread misunderstanding of the teachings of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee. A dialogue with eminent theologians from Fuller Theological Seminary resulted in a statement of the orthodoxy of Nee and Lee (http://an-open-letter.org/PDF/Fuller Theological Seminary Statement English.pdf). See the same site for testimonies of other respected Christians.

through mutual fellowship and joint participation in conferences and trainings. Extra-local co-workers are occasionally involved in disciplinary matters involving local leaders. There is a strong emphasis on the Universal Church and local unity is stressed by practising mutual fellowship with all Christians rather than working together in joint mission projects.[26]

With some easing of persecution there have been moves towards unity among the various Chinese house church networks. Many participate in the *Homecoming Movement*, which gathers up to 20,000 believers in conferences held in Hong Kong, including the leaders of the five largest house church networks. Some of those involved have very large networks and include the Chinese diaspora in other countries. Another focus for unity is *Back to Jerusalem*, which has caught the imagination of many Christians in China. This includes cooperative prayer and practical efforts to see the Gospel spread along the old Silk Road to the Middle East. One interviewee for this document recalled hearing the terms 'apostle' and 'prophet' used by Mandarin speaking participants in the Back to Jerusalem movement, but as descriptors of function and, generally, not as titles.

In summary, there are similarities and differences between the Chinese house churches and the description given of NCCs in the West. Although rural house churches share some characteristics with NCCs they have a different history and distinctive features, such as strongly hierarchical leadership, in keeping with their particular cultural setting. The urban house churches present a more mixed picture, with some networks conforming to the description of NCCs contained in this document.

26 Abraham Ho, Christopher Wilde and other representatives from this network were interviewed and also provided feedback on this document.

APPENDIX 2 **LEXICON OF TERMS USED**

NCC New Charismatic Church – a term used to refer to churches which emerged in the last 60 years as a result of the Charismatic Movement.

Network Describes the strong relationships which exist between churches. Many 'networks' have clear expectations of churches who join them and provide oversight for individual churches and ministers. Other networks simply provide resources, such as conferences and books.

Leaders These are the men (and, most NCCs believe, women) in the Ephesians 4 list which includes Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers (APEPT). These terms describe people who function in leadership, either locally or as extra-local ministers. The roles of elders, overseers and deacons are a different set of descriptors which apply to a local congregation. The way these two sets of terms (the APEPT list and the local ministry descriptors) relate is seen differently by different NCCs.

Apostles NCC leaders who found churches and networks or who work widely within networks to help churches, ensuring they are well founded and helping them with internal or mission related issues which arise over time. They maintain the doctrinal and relational purity of the church through the provision of ongoing oversight, support and advice.

Prophets NCC leaders who are gifted at being able to help individuals and churches gain insight into the will of God for their present and future. This is done through both teaching and through prophecy (which is 'weighed' in accordance with the biblical injunction to 'test all things').

Spiritual gifts These include healing, tongues, prophecy, discernment, words of knowledge, leadership, the ability to help others etc (as listed in 1 Cor 11 and Ro 12). Each person in the congregation will have a mixture of these gifts.

Worship Worship services (often referred to as 'church meetings') incorporate modern worship songs, biblical teaching, testimony and prayer (which may be leader-led or open prayer from the congregation). There is usually an opportunity to exercise spiritual gifts, either in Sunday worship or in home groups.

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