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**Proselytism, Retention and Re-affiliation:  
The Hybridisation of an Assembly of God Church**

**by**

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## Abstract

This study provides a qualitative analysis of an Assembly of God Pentecostal church in the North East of England. The research employed an ethnographic framework incorporating overt participant observation and in-depth interviews over the period of one year at the City Christian Centre. In addition, a number of other churches (of varying denominations) were visited and observed.

In this work, former interpretations within the sociology of religion, regarding membership and recruitment, are challenged and new perspectives offered. Few ethnographic studies of conservative evangelical Christians in the United Kingdom exist and quantitative work on this group, generally, has failed to define significant concepts such as *salvation* and *conversion* adequately.

While such concepts remain foundational to the conservative evangelical believer, a significant transformation of religious expression is taking place within contemporary British Pentecostalism. This thesis gives an account of a synthesis between classical Pentecostals and the Charismatic movement that is creating a distinct form of spiritual expression resulting in a *hybrid* church. This fusion of traditions affects congregations in a number of important areas. Expressions of praise and worship, theological interpretations and church leadership each reflect the dynamics of the hybrid church. So in addition, does a shift in class composition. Once the preserve of the working classes, Pentecostalism in Britain is now much more socially and economically diverse in its membership.

This thesis comes at an interesting time for the sociology of religion. Much is said about a resurgence of interest in religion, this is partly due to its persistence in society. Much work has focused on church demographics and secularisation, this work, however, shifts the emphasis away from religious decline to religious adaptation and change.

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**"In The Beginning"**

The purpose of this thesis is to explore changes over time within a fundamental Christian church and to do so within a distinctive ethnographic context. The first component of this aim draws upon many prevailing concepts within the sociology of religion and attempts to offer new perspectives on such notions as conversion, church membership, church 'hopping' or 'switching', and the changes which are taking place within the Pentecostal movement as it synthesises with the Charismatic and Restorationist strands of contemporary Christianity. The second component offers a new approach to the study of religious groups in that it adopts many of the underlying principles found in feminist research methodology.

Few sociological studies of fundamental Christian groups have been undertaken within a British context. Noticeable exceptions are found in the work of Beckford (1975), Calley (1965), Toulis (1997), Van Zandt (1991), Wilson (1961).

Elsewhere we may look to the work of Ammerman (1987), Blumhoffer (1989a, 1989b, 1993), Jules-Rosette (1975), Lofland (1981), Neitz (1987), Poloma (1989), Warner (1988). Within these studies, issues relating to the subjectivity of the researcher in relation to their subject matter have elicited familiar sociological stances. The methodology developed within this project challenges some of the former social scientific taboos concerning researcher objectivity and bias and

opens up the possibility of a distinctly new approach to the study of congregations and religious phenomena.

This thesis is a case study of an Assembly of God church in the North East of England. The Assemblies of God are currently the largest Pentecostal denomination in England and Wales. The Elim Pentecostal Church has a higher membership than the Assemblies of God in Scotland and considerably more in Northern Ireland with over 14,000 Elim members in Northern Ireland compared to 1,200 in the Assemblies. The total membership within the United Kingdom of these two Pentecostal denominations has been estimated for the year 2000 at 61,150 in the AOG and 69,320 in the Elim churches. The number of actual church congregations is higher within the AOG: 664 compared to 613 Elim churches, so too is the estimated number of ministers serving in each denomination: 836 (AOG), 688 (Elim). Appendix 1 provides statistical information for both the AOG and Elim Churches since 1980 onwards. I include the figures for the New Testament Church of God to show a comparison of size. The New Testament Church of God is currently the third largest Pentecostal group in the United Kingdom but numerically much smaller than the other two.

Statistical information of this kind is necessary to provide a general context of the wider research field. The greater part of this work however, shall be micro in nature and will focus primarily on the dynamics of a single case study - the City Christian Centre (formerly the Fig Tree Gospel Hall). In this chapter, I will

discuss the methodological approach to my research after outlining the direction this thesis will take. Later in this chapter (and drawing from distinctly feminist developments within ethnographic study) I will include a short autobiographical account. In so doing I will be acknowledging my own subjectivity regarding this project and including myself as part of it. In chapter two I will review the sociological literature and concepts pertaining to fundamental religious affiliation. Specifically, I will suggest that secularisation theory has reached a stage of conceptual entropy and can no longer claim to be the dominant theory within the sociology of religion. The chief contender to take its place is rational choice theory; I will attempt to show however, that this innovation from the field of economics is limited in its application and ultimately falls into the same rut as secularisation theory - both approaches aligning themselves with a positivist framework of analysis. In conducting research of a qualitative nature, an alternative to the rational choice and secularisation theory approaches is pursued throughout this thesis and I am concerned with Verstehen and analysis on the level of 'meanings'. The second part of chapter two focuses on the very subjective experience of conversion amongst believers and provides an example of an event that is repeatedly undermined by sociologists who adhere to a more quantitative approach. To understand the life and mindset of the Pentecostal Christian, it is imperative that this area be thoroughly explored. Only when the significance of conversion to the believer is perceived, will it be possible to understand how every strand and fibre of their lives ties in to that experience.

Having established the conversion experience as the sine qua non of the believer's life, chapter three challenges the categories imposed upon Christian groups in relation to church membership by sociologists of religion. In particular, I will draw upon the work of Reginald Bibby and Merlin Brinkerhoff and their *Circulation of the Saints* studies in which they introduce the categories of *proselyte*, *retained* and *re-affiliate* in relation to church membership. I will argue that their definitions of these particular groups are under developed and would benefit from a more qualitative understanding of the perceptions the members themselves hold of the proselyte, the retained and the re-affiliate. In redefining categories, there exists the possibility of simply replacing one static concept with another. The City Christian Centre and indeed the Pentecostal movement as a whole, is in a process of great flux. The concept of *transition over time* is a central component of this work and the effects of a synthesis between traditional Pentecostal practices and the wider Charismatic/Restorationist movement have created what I have termed the *hybrid church*.

Chapter four draws upon my observations of three Sunday morning services at the City Christian Centre each representative of the format and programme specific to a particular epoch witnessed at the church over the last twenty years. In highlighting and documenting the changes between Sunday services from 1979, 1986 and 1998, we will be able to see most graphically, how a process of hybridisation has radically altered, within a very short space of time, the expression of this once traditional Assembly of God church. Chapters five and six

carry on this theme of change and consider, in greater detail, the effects of theological change brought on by the synthesis between the traditional and the new (chapter five). In Chapter six a brief summation of the history of the City Christian Centre is given along with some analysis of contemporary issues relating to its organisational policies and the election of pastors and church workers.

In the penultimate chapter (seven) I provide an analysis of the socio-economic status among believers and suggest that a shift has occurred in the social class structure of the City Christian Centre. Significantly this finding re-evaluates many previous sociological interpretations of fundamentalism and social class. The predominant notion has been that fundamental Christianity is comprised mainly of those individuals on the lower end of the class scale. Whereas this *was* so within the City Christian Centre, the past twenty years have witnessed a dramatic increase in the attendance of middle-income families. This transition reinforces the notion of hybridisation; by considering the much altered class structure as a characteristic of the hybrid church we are presented with a significant, tangible change in the overall structure of British Pentecostalism.

First, however, let us consider the focus of my research and questions of methodology.

## **Methodology**

During a qualitative research workshop close to the beginning of this project, the students attending were asked to pair off and conduct a mock interview. The results were recorded and then assessed later in the session. Typically a number of interview styles were displayed, many students adopting a very structured model of data collection, others less so. My own technique elicited a number of comments from my colleagues, which subsequently caused a reassessment in my ethical considerations in the area of qualitative research methodology. The responses from the other students largely focused on the conversational style of my approach and how an exchange of ideas seemed to be evident between both me, as researcher, and my partner as the respondent. My technique was not something I had consciously developed, on the contrary, I was simply 'being myself', I suppose in the simplistic hope that my respondent would be the same. The exercise provoked much discussion and has since had a profound effect on my thesis.

Any study of fundamental or conservative evangelical Christianity presents the sociologist of religion with a plethora of methodological challenges, many of which enter the ethical arena. How should one approach a group of people who profess a firm belief in an entity that, in this age of scientific rationale, seems most non-rational? I refer to this age as being *rational* in that the West would appear to be still firmly entrenched in its adherence to a scientific explanation of being. I hold this position fully aware of the reaction this view may evoke in

advocates of postmodern social theory. I do not doubt that we are witnessing a fragmentation of society and the disintegration of many of the social scientific models that have attempted to explain the dynamics of society. I do not see, however - on a grass roots level - a major paradigm shift away from scientific reasoning in favour of alternative modes of understanding<sup>1</sup>. In his book *Understanding Social Science*, Roger Trigg (1985) suggests that,

The prestige of the physical sciences has not only ensured that the social sciences have tried to adopt their methods. It has also resulted in scientific standards of rationality being assumed to be the only ones. It appears rational to believe whatever science can establish and to dismiss as unscientific and hence irrational belief in anything beyond its scope (Trigg, 1985: 83).

During the early stages of scientific development, that which could not be 'perceived' presumably fell outside of the discipline's jurisdiction and was ultimately deemed 'irrational'. For many, the notion of God would fall into this bracket. Today however, much scientific work studies, what was once, seemingly intangible matter, leaving scientists having to justify their positions on something other than the authority of science, 'Science itself needs a metaphysical underpinning. It cannot be taken for granted that scientists are indulging in anything more than the local practices of a particular group of people' (Trigg, 1998: 77). William Alston (1992) puts forward an argument defending a belief in

God based upon religious *experience*. He sets out by asking the question, 'Is the experience of God, ultimately, the sole basis of religious belief, or, somewhat more modestly, does it play as fundamental a role in the grounds of belief as sense perception plays in the grounds of belief about the physical and social world' (Alston, 1992: 87)? Both Alston and Trigg here suggest similarities between religious and scientific endeavours to defend their respective claims. In this 'affinity', the notion of rationality no longer exists in terms of a crude *positivism*. Trigg argues that, '...a rational space can be made, in which it must be understood that religion is still making substantial claims' (Trigg, 1998: 5). He then goes on to suggest that, 'In a defence of the possibility of human rationality, both science and religion should recognize that they are allies and not opponents. The chill wind of nihilism can sweep both away' (ibid).

That said, it is my aim, in this chapter, to challenge some of the harsher interpretations of positivism within sociology, with particular reference to the study of fundamental religious belief and to advance a methodology that draws from contemporary research developments within feminist sociology.

How does one study a person, or group of people, who believe in God? The researcher is, more often than not, instantly out of his or her depth, for it is generally taken to be the job of the social scientist to quantify their observations into an almost tangible understanding for their prospective readers. Unfortunately for the sociologist, religious belief and spiritual concepts are not easily

quantified, although this has not stopped a whole tradition of attempts to make it so – *secularisation* theory and the more recent *rational choice* theory being examples<sup>2</sup>. This *dilemma* for the social sciences was expressed by Phyllis Shaw during one of my interviews.

**Phyllis:** I believe fundamentally that a church is not a secular organisation. You can't just study as a sociological exercise because it is not an organisation based on secular goals and basically if God is love it would have to be based on love and that's not really a sociological concept.

*(Phyllis Shaw, retired school Head teacher in her mid sixties. City Christian Centre member for four years)*

In many ways the sweeping claims of 'institutionalised' sociology has served to obscure that *insight* it so fervently attempts to reveal. How is it possible to explore the complexity of interaction between members of a given social situation, to any great effect, with so much social scientific baggage at one's side? To adhere to a scientific model while researching a peculiarly unscientific phenomenon, could indicate that the outcome be little more than an attempt to 'explain away' religious conviction in the crudest of functionalist ways.

The adopting of a post positivist stance, however, has not been a new 'turn' or outlook for me. Over the course of time I have become convinced that

sociological research that adheres to a purely scientific model is inappropriate when one considers its subject matter - people. Max Weber illuminates this argument in his essay *Science as a Vocation*. Weber's emphasis centres on 'meaning', a phenomenon that cannot be analysed in the form of the scientific experiment. He states,

The second great tool of scientific work, the rational experiment, made its appearance at the side of this discovery of the Hellenic spirit during the Renaissance period. The experiment is a means of reliably controlling experience (Gerth & Mills, 1991: 141).

Here we can see the work of science as having a limiting effect upon the understanding and subsequent description of human social life. This science stifles meaning within human experience and regards anything it cannot explain as irrelevant and of no consequence. It strives for causal laws and relieves the individual of his or her initiative to ever 'do otherwise'. Weber clearly recognised the importance of the inclusion of *meaning* within social theory. Only with its inclusion can understanding (Verstehen) be reached.

This distinction between the study of society in positivist terms and sociological research as an interpretative discipline is a cause of great tension in Weber's work and one in which we get a remarkable glimpse at the maturity of his thinking. Weber realises the importance of objectivity in science; this is a

necessary prerequisite if one wants to produce valid scientific results. Yet, he is faced, as we are still, with the ultimate inadequacy of science to justify its own validity. The following, taken from *Science as a Vocation* illustrates this dilemma.

Science...presupposes that what is yielded by scientific work is important in the sense that it is 'worth being known'. In this, obviously, are contained all our problems. For this presupposition cannot be proved by scientific means. It can only be interpreted with reference to its ultimate meaning, which we must reject or accept according to our ultimate position towards life (Gerth & Mills, 1991: 143).

The diverse elements and nature of a human being cannot be prodded and manipulated in a similar fashion to the physical matter in the natural sciences. Nevertheless, sociology has traditionally held on to its claim of scientific objectivity, desperately trying to draw level with other disciplines yet always being the poor relation to the physical sciences. Of course, schisms within sociology have created differing schools of thought that have challenged some of the claims of a *scientific* sociology. The cost of joining such a camp has often been high and the move regarded as a step off the ledge of objectivity into the pit of subjectivity. This 'step' not being simply academic - the practical implications manifest themselves in terms of hard cash, or the lack of it as the case may be, for

those wishing to undertake a research project which addresses, or indeed facilitates the subjective element in their work (Kirsch, 1999).

The contemporary situation, however, has witnessed a re-evaluation within the social sciences. Something of a gnawing doubt as to the validity and efficacy of science itself is beginning to challenge its hitherto infallible status. For a sociologist to conduct his or her work purely within a positivist framework suggests a total adherence to a scientific model of enquiry. This researcher places all their eggs in one basket, as it were, in that the validity of their conclusions can only be understood within the precepts of a scientific rationale. For a long time this has been seen as a given prerequisite for social science research (sociology intent on 'keeping up with the Jones', as I mentioned earlier). Increasingly, however, the conclusion is drawn that the researcher (no matter how stringently the efforts are to nullify their own role in the data collection process) affects the action being observed or the answers being given in an interview. In short, we can say that the researcher is part of the action. Naturally, therefore, we need to think again about the question of objectivity and the great emphasis the scientific model has placed on the transparency of the researcher and the research process.

For Liz Stanley and Sue Wise a more adequate methodology lies *not* in simply switching from a deductive approach to an inductive one however. Here they assess the problems with each.

Deductivism treats experience as a 'test' of previously specified theoretical hypotheses: and so within it theory precedes both experience and research, and these latter two are in a sense predicated upon theory. In apparent contrast, inductivism specifies a model of research in which theory is derived from research experience and is often referred to as 'grounded theory'. As ideal types these models have analytical validity; however, neither model has experiential validity as an actual description of how research is conducted and knowledge produced. Researchers cannot have 'empty heads', in the way that inductivism proposes; nor is it possible that theory is untainted by material experiences in the heads of theoreticians in the way that deductivism proposes (Stanley and Wise, 1990: 22. See also Stanley and Wise, 1979).

Stanley and Wise have been at the forefront of 'feminist standpoint' epistemology (Stanley and Wise, 1990: 25), a term used to describe feminist research that is, '...not only located in, but proceeding from, the grounded analysis of women's material realities' (Stanley and Wise, 1990: 25). This position adopts a largely inductive, grounded approach to theory but with some noticeable exceptions within actual research practice.

By abandoning the positivist ethos are we reducing sociological research to little more than accounts of our own interpretations of what we observe? Possibly, but it is only our conditioning to a scientific rationale that would suggest such

accounts are worthless. Within feminist research this radical reinterpretation of sociological enquiry has challenged the scientific paradigm and its insistence on impartiality. It also opens up a whole range of possibilities within that sociological camp which encompasses theories of meaning such as ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism.

...ethnomethodology and other variants of phenomenological sociology offered feminists, if used in a discriminating way, useful tools for unpacking such analytical processes, because these approaches share a concern with methodological issues as well as those of theory (Stanley and Wise, 1990: 23. See also Stanley and Wise 1984).

A major driving force behind feminist research methodology is a critique of positivism (Fonow & Cook, 1991) and how, traditionally '...research *on* women was not necessarily beneficial *for* women' (Kirsch, 1999: 1). For most within the social sciences, questions of beneficence do not usually apply; a preoccupation with such a concern would go against the grain of scientific impartiality. Feminist research therefore is, in essence *partisan* in its aims and research goals. Within my own research I am able to relate to a similar partisanship in two ways. Firstly, I am a Christian researching Christians and subsequently I have a particular religious persuasion and set of beliefs that are in common with my subject group. Their message is *my* message, their lifestyle, my own.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, my religious convictions are such that I have no desire to do harm to my faith. Inherent in this

fact, is a form of partisanship with the whole of Christendom. Secondly, although connected spiritually with the wider body of the Christian church, I am also connected personally with many people within the City Christian Centre itself. My involvement, both with the congregation and with the various activities and ministries promoted by the fellowship, has been substantial. Although I left the church officially in 1989 to attend another, many strong links remain. To propose a research agenda that did not incorporate a level of intimacy and empathy between me and my Christian family at the City Christian Centre would be unacceptable (see Reinharz, 1992, chapter 3).

The above observations would, for many sociologists, sound the death knell for my project as far as the value of objectivity is concerned within social science research. Yet, my subjectivism can serve to strengthen my research in that a common pool of knowledge and experience exists between me as the researcher and those being 'researched'. Stanley and Wise write that '...despite our ontological distinctness none the less we assume we can, and indeed we *do*, "share experiences" such that we recognise ourselves in others and they in us and can speak of "common experiences"' (Stanley and Wise, 1990: 23). The dialogue between the two parties is, in effect, elevated in a much shorter time.

Generally, research that corresponds to feminist standpoint epistemology is qualitative in nature but considerable diversity does exist and some argue for a more quantitative approach (see Charney, 1996 and Harding, 1987, 1991) while

others adopt multiple techniques to enhance their research (See Reinharz, 1992 chapter 11). For my own project, data will be collected using an ethnographic approach, some statistics will be used at various points, but participant observation, interviewing and literature reviews will dominate. As far as possible I have applied the 'techniques' and principles of feminist research to my method and sought to initiate the 'democratisation of relationships' (Kirsch, 1999: 2) between myself and the people whom I would interview.

The interviewing techniques within feminist research are comprised mostly of semi-structured or unstructured interviews (Graham, 1984). This allows for a more conversational flow of information and a breaking down of the authoritative role of the researcher. The aim, according to Kirsch is to '...make it easy to establish rapport with women and to validate their concerns, values, and experiences (e.g., Janet Finch<sup>4</sup> found that because she shared a similar background with the women she interviewed, they readily trusted her with personal or confidential information' [Kirsch, 1999: 25].).

This approach seemed wholly appropriate to my own work given the subjective involvement I had/have to the group being researched. Coinciding with extensive participant observation in which my role as 'sociologist' was known but not really understood, were a series of unstructured, open ended interview sessions. Many were recorded and transcribed, many others were not and I relied on note taking<sup>5</sup>. Each session was long and a great deal of material was covered although

I went into the interview with few set questions to ask. Within feminist research, Reinharz has written that,

Some feminists who engage in intensive interviewing label their method "phenomenological interviewing," an interviewee-guided investigation of a lived experience that asks almost no prepared questions (Reinharz, 1992: 21).

Although my own interviews followed particular themes and areas of experience to be covered, considerable room and flexibility, on my part, allowed the respondent to think through issues on a much broader level than they possibly would have outside the interview. This was one comment made to me by many of those I interviewed.

In developing these very practical techniques (which resulted from major theoretical, foundational shifts), my aim also coincided with those of feminist researchers in their own fields of study. Reinharz identifies three goals:

(1) to document the lives and activities of women, (2) to understand the experience of women from their own point of view, and (3) to conceptualise women's behaviour as an expression of social contexts (Reinharz, 1992: 51).

Whereas feminist scholars apply such goals to women-specific research agendas, I have, in my own work, applied them to Pentecostal Christians.

By emphasising the subjective, a possible danger lies in the tendency to throw out the baby with the bath water. I am not suggesting here that *all* social science research of a quantitative nature, when applied to the field of religious phenomena is of no worth at all and cannot produce solid sociological results. Such a suggestion would be misleading in the extreme. The reason for my adherence to (primarily) a methodological framework, which attempts to answer 'why' as opposed to 'how', lies in my own worldview. It is a view shaped, largely, by the experiences of my past which have produced in my own subjectivity my 'ultimate position towards life'. Such a disposition, whatever its social, political or religious stance, necessarily colours our research; we are the authors and editors of the research we undertake and our hidden agendas are always, at varying degrees, never too far from the surface.

A further component of feminist research methods is that of oral history and biography. This avenue of research is a way of including data on the character and therefore the personal disposition of the interviewee or *other* in the case of a biographical account. Sherna Gluck writes of three strands of oral history - '*topical* (similar to an open-ended interview,) *biographical* (concerns an individual other than the interviewee, or follows a life history format), and

autobiographical (the "interviewee's life...determines...the form and content of the oral history")' (Gluck, 1979, cited in Reinhartz, 1992: 126).

It is to my own 'position towards life' that I now turn and consider the history of myself. Why have I chosen to study the Assemblies of God? Why have I decided upon a particular methodological approach that favours qualitative methods over quantitative methods? - Because I am predisposed to a particular worldview. Subsequently my own history becomes part of the research. Sasha Roseneil, in her paper 'Greenham Revisited', writes,

My subjectivity, my feelings, and my experiences, public and private, could not be wrenched from it [her research] because they provide both the motivation and much of the material for it (Roseneil , 1993: 186).

We have seen how Weber implies that an 'inner devotion' exists within the scholar who wishes to pursue science as his or her vocation, yet we must ask; from where does this inner devotion originate? Where could it possibly originate but from the person's own 'worldview' or belief system, which can, of course, take on a number of different expressions? The significant point to be made, however, and one which is echoed in the epistemological framework adopted by Roseneil, is that the 'inner devotion' comes first. Subsequently the inclusion of the researcher's autobiography plays a significant part in the project as a whole.

## **My Intellectual Autobiography**

Conflicting messages were the norm within my family. My father, an engineer in the merchant navy, seemed to appear only a few months each year, his work taking him all around the world. His absence made him a formidable figure for I never truly felt as if I ever got to know him well. My brother and I were raised by my mother and we were left pretty much to our own devices. This proved problematic for the family whenever my father was on leave for our general behaviour had to change for fear of incurring his wrath, which we nearly always did. From the age of five or six, I was aware of serious problems between my parents and my childhood seemed to be little more than a waiting period. I knew that as soon as my brother and I were old enough to fend for ourselves my parents would separate.

My early teens were very rebellious and traumatic. The mid 1970s witnessed the arrival of 'Punk Rock' and I was quick to jump on the bandwagon. I had little idea of the politics behind this new craze and what little knowledge I had was somewhat confused. There was a lot of anger within me. Much of it was directed towards 'authority', or at least my understanding of who or what constituted 'authority'. Looking back I can see that there was much in my behaviour which was used solely to shock, to kick against my frustration and those conflicting messages.

The political stance of my family, even then, seemed to me contradictory. On the one hand we were Labour through and through. Kingston was then and is now, a safe Labour seat. Our family, our 'kind' reflected a stereotypical working class image. The world was divided between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots', between 'them' and 'us'. Such was the content of the largely rhetorical discussions within which I found myself. Increasingly I began to see the 'cracks' in the political ideology of my family and discovered that what I had taken as being 'left-wing' was, in actual fact, closer to the extreme 'right' than I had ever thought imaginable.

The political persuasion of my family, and indeed of my larger society, was that of 'The Sun' newspaper. I can recall so vividly, for instance, the vehement hatred my father would express when talking about members of ethnic minorities and how they were "overrunning the country". His was a hotchpotch of ideological convictions that had little claim to a systematised political logic. His prejudice, fuelled by the tabloid threat to his status, created in him an indignation that produced a kind of blinkered panic. Such was the orientation of my community.

By the late seventies my father had left the merchant navy and secured a job on land. The increased close proximity of my parents to each other became intolerable and the strain of their unhappy union brought renewed pressures to bear on the family. Periods of tense silence were interspersed with moments of frenzied anger and sudden outbreaks of violence. With little outside stimulus and

a seemingly hopeless family situation I sought (although not consciously) some means of distraction. By the age of eleven I had become a seasoned drinker and for the following three years continued to consume alcohol at a frightening rate.

What happened at the age of fourteen takes some explaining. However, I am aware of the fact that I have entitled this section *My Intellectual Autobiography*. I am convinced in myself that a religious conversion experience can hold its own intellectually but only up to a certain point. It is a point of belief that conversion to Christianity necessarily entails a 'step of faith'. Yes we can explain the background to that step and have an explicable theological framework, yet there remains a mystery. *Faith* and *mystery* are two concepts that do not sit well with many in the field of sociology. As a Christian and a sociologist, my academic training seems, at times, 'unevenly yoked' with my faith. The reflexive nature of my proposed research introduces an element of risk; how will I be regarded by my academic colleagues, both now and in the future, if I deviate from a seemingly atheistic norm? Are my career prospects in jeopardy because of my conservative Christian beliefs? Within her own context, Roseneil faced these same concerns. Before including in her own autobiography an account of her first love relationship with another woman, she writes,

That I should choose to reveal the following despite warnings that it may harm my prospects of an academic career is indicative of the methodological importance I attach to the demand that the researcher

place herself on the same critical plane as those she is researching.

Reflexivity can be a frightening demand (Roseneil, 1993: 185).

I share those sentiments. If my own reflexivity produces worrisome implications for my future prospects as a sociologist, then at least I will feel that I have pushed at the boundaries a little; an act not wholly nugatory.

After reading the message of the Christian gospel in a book which was loaned to me by a young couple proselytising on a street corner, I became a Christian; the Bible calls it being *born again*<sup>6</sup>. The term describes, very well, the effect of my newly found faith within my life for I did, indeed, feel like a new person starting all over again. My conversion was not a covert thing; my family and peers witnessed a dramatic change (for the good) in me, as I no longer had the desire to drink excessively or to conduct my behaviour along the same lines as before. I was quite a puzzle to those who had known me before my conversion, not, however, to my new friends at the Assemblies of God church I had started to attend. Amongst that small group of believers I was proof positive of the saving power of God. I have placed much emphasis on the fact of my conversion. To not do so would be considerably less than honest for it is from a distinctly Christian belief and a fundamental Christian one that my worldview has been forged.

After approximately ten years within the Assemblies of God, in which I became an experienced preacher and proselytiser myself, I left my local fellowship to

become a member of the Church of England and joined the same village chapel my fiancée attended. Desiree and I were married at that same chapel, but although we fellowshiped with Anglicans, our religious roots were firmly entrenched within Pentecostalism. Desiree had, in fact, attended the same Assemblies of God church (the City Christian Centre) as myself for many years before leaving the area for a while and then returning and becoming involved with the Church of England.

In 1991 Desiree was killed in a terrible motorway accident just one year after we had been married. Seeking to fulfil long term plans that Desiree and I had already set into motion regarding further education, I left Kingston and became a mature student at Birmingham University studying History and Sociology. After graduating in 1994, I successfully applied to Warwick University to study for my Masters Degree. Since leaving Kingston, I have attended an independent evangelical church. I am unable to frequent many services at my own fellowship, however, as I am invited to preach, sing and testify in churches of different denominations throughout the West Midlands on most Sundays and also at midweek Bible studies.

My commitment to a more empathetic methodology necessitates that I draw upon my own history. I have experienced life as a Pentecostal believer and can identify significant inaccuracies in much work within the sociology of religion that has attempted to explain or understand religious commitment and church life. In

conducting further research within this field, my hope is to offer a perspective from a different angle. Some would call it a distinctly partisan approach, which is flawed by its own subjectivity, and yet my intention is not to introduce my own subjectivity through the back door. The inclusion of an autobiographical account allows the reader of the finished work to glean from it what they will, fully aware of the author's worldview. It is my contention that the adherence to the guiding principles of feminist research methodology, within my own ethnographic study of an Assemblies of God fellowship, will reap greater authenticity and ethical integrity. Pamela Cotteril and Gayle Letherby write,

The general agreement is that the 'conscious subjectivity' of much feminist (and other) research which has replaced the 'value-free objectivity' of much traditional research is not only more honest, but helps to break down the power relationship between researcher and researched (Cotteril & Letherby, 1993: 72).

## **The research**

Having established for myself a satisfactory methodological position, the practicalities of my research entailed an ethnographic framework incorporating participant observation and in depth interviews. For a ten-month period in 1998 I relocated to my hometown and reacquainted myself with my former church, the City Christian Centre. Before the relocation I had contacted George Young (the current pastor of the church) and spoken at length, both over the telephone and in

person, about my aims, objectives, and what it was I wanted to undertake. Early in our discussion, I officially asked his permission to carry out my research in the church and make the City Christian Centre my case study. This was granted quite enthusiastically but at the time I was left feeling some concern, for I was not convinced that Pastor Young had fully understood just what it was I was trying to do in his church. I had, to the best of my ability, explained my objectives with clarity and yet I began to doubt whether I had articulated my position well enough. The experience with George Young found me honing my communication skills for subsequent introductions to members of the church.

Those of whom I sought to interview were asked permission and I did my best to make people feel at ease during the interview sessions. Further permission was sought allowing me to tape the interview and a number of people indicated to me that they would feel uncomfortable with that. Given the nature of the research, my selection of potential interviewees utilised *purposive* sampling, as opposed to non-random, strategies (Dixon, Bouma & Atkinson, 1987). I attempted to interview members and ex-members of the City Christian Centre who were representative of a cross section of ages, gender and race, education and occupation. In this I was largely successful, although due to scheduling difficulties (on both our parts) I was unable to interview ('officially') the only member of the church who was Afro-Caribbean. We were able to talk at length though on a few occasions after church services.

Interview data was collected from twenty-six members (fourteen women and twelve men) and fourteen ex-members (eight men and six women). Educational qualifications and occupations in both groups reflected a broad spectrum: from those with no qualifications to postgraduates and from the unemployed, the manual worker, the clerical assistant, the self-employed to the television producer and Head teacher. Although it is possible to distinguish between 'official' interviews in which a specific time and location were set before hand, much data was collected from the hundreds of conversations and encounters with the members of the church and indeed with family members of those who had left the church.

Each official interview session lasted an average of two and a half to three hours and for some respondents (as with Brenda Smart for instance) a number of interview sessions were arranged. Brenda Smart was connected by family with Jeffrey Fuller (the first 'official' minister of Fig Tree Gospel Hall) and had known the founders of the church also (Jane Craig and Elizabeth Alan). My intention with Brenda was for her to supply me with a life history that would provide a personal account of someone raised within the Pentecostal tradition. In addition, her knowledge of the Fig Tree Gospel Hall helped fill a number of gaps in my history of the church.

Up until the mid 1980s the City Christian Centre was called the Fig Tree Gospel Hall. A fig tree, planted by Jeffrey Fuller stood some five or six feet high, to the

right of the main entrance. Few at the time would have believed that over ten years later such an innocent act of horticulture would attract considerable interest (in the form of derision) from Margaret Young (wife of George and member of the fellowship's current leadership team). A short time after George Young (the present incumbent) became the pastor in 1988, the fig tree was removed – dug up rather unceremoniously – and the comment was made by Margaret that “the fig tree was the only thing in the New Testament that Jesus cursed!” In their eyes the tree had to go.

The Youngs, as we will see in chapter six, were not the first to attempt to sever the City Christian Centre's history from its present incarnation. To newcomers, the legacy of past disputes would go largely undetected; most of the external reminders would be removed in the mid 1980s. A plaque, commemorating the opening of the then new building in 1976, was taken down from the entrance hall wall and passed on to an indignant Mrs Fuller (Jeffrey died in 1981). More significantly, however, the Fig Tree Gospel Hall became the City Christian Centre. Ten years from then, the fig tree was finally uprooted and discarded for good. Yet, as we shall see, some ‘roots’ remained.

My list of interviewees, as I have mentioned, was not limited to individuals who were still attending the church. In order to better understand the effects of Pentecostalism in people's lives, I deemed it necessary to talk with both members and ex-members of the church. Within both groups (affiliates and non-affiliates)

the assessment of the individual's current theological conviction was of particular interest. For those attending, theological viewpoints pertained to their level of agreement (and involvement) with the dominant theological position of the fellowship. Two distinct groups emerged, one I termed the 'in-group' and the other the 'out-group'. Those who had, for various reasons, stopped attending also divided into two groups. The first consisted of those who had left the church and who had switched to another. The second represented many who had left and simply stopped going to a church at all. Besides the many arranged interviews that took place, I also made notes of various comments and impressions that struck me during the course of everyday interaction with those who either were, or had been at one time, connected with the City Christian Centre.

## **Summation**

Many will query my motives for wanting to research my former church and for good reason. I am, of course, transgressing the traditional sociological call to objectivity and impartiality (the above autobiographical account, if nothing else, highlights my own subjectivity in things 'religious'). Yet I am approaching my former fellowship and the individuals within it equipped, I believe, with a unique ability to view the social interaction which takes place as both an 'insider' and a sociologist. The former reaping the benefits of pre-established shared meanings, the latter introducing and testing hypothesis and social theory. The personal element of my relationship to the subject places me in a particularly advantageous position from which to fulfil the aim of this thesis. From this

vantage point I am better equipped to give an account of the process of change taking place within British Pentecostalism, to observe and chart the synthesis between classical Pentecostals and Charismatics, and to offer fresh insight on concepts such as conversion, church membership, church 'switching', and proselytism.

While particular chapters deal with specific subject areas pertinent to the overall argument and direction of the thesis, my intention has been to illuminate most sections with accounts of observation in an attempt to bring the action 'to life' as it were. While chapters four and five include large amounts of observation data, I have not neglected to include various pictures and deeper descriptions throughout the body of this work. My aim is to present the reader with as vivid a portrayal as possible of the life and experience of Pentecostal believers. Nancy Ammerman, in her study of a fundamental Baptist church writes,

Understanding the everyday world of the Fundamentalist requires much more than a demographic profile. It requires the kind of personal encounter that is possible only when researcher and subjects meet each other and spend a part of their lives together (Ammerman, 1987: 10).

This I have attempted to do. Let us first consider some of the sociological work pertaining to the study of religion and consider, in detail, the prerequisite component in the life of a Pentecostal – conversion.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Relating specifically to developments in the study of religion, Trigg suggests that postmodernism has the potential of being something of a wolf in sheep's clothing for those seeking to defend the authenticity of religious experience. He writes, 'It is...hardly surprising that some should willingly embrace the postmodernism as a way of rescuing religion from the overbearing claims of science. This is, however, a terrible mistake. Postmodernism is itself a vague term, and some of its charm is that it can be defined in many ways. It is clearly reacting against something, and many may feel that it is a friend, because it is against the exaggerated claims of the sufficiency of human reason which accompanied the growth of science in the modern period. Yet postmodernism in its typical manifestations undoubtedly challenges the possibility of any universal rationality, or objective truth. It must, in fact, be relativistic in its conclusions' (Trigg, 1998: 2. See also Trigg, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Secularisation theory has formed much of the current thinking within the sociology of religion but is now being challenged by rational choice theorists who are now attempting to explain the persistence of religion in society. I will discuss both approaches in chapter 2.

<sup>3</sup> A great number of differing theological views and doctrinal interpretations will be considered throughout the body of this work. The sheer diversity of views expressed by the members of the same fellowship is an indication of the fact that interpretations of scripture can and do vary widely. Just as there are conflicting beliefs within the City Christian Centre, so there are between my own beliefs and its current prevailing theology.

<sup>4</sup> See Finch (1984)

<sup>5</sup> Prior to an interview I would ask permission to tape the session. I tried to be sensitive to any indication (on the part of the interviewee) of discomfort at the thought of their words being on tape. Often an initial protest would be little more than a light-hearted way of telling me that they disliked hearing themselves; after a short time, however, the machine was largely forgotten and the conversation would carry on unhindered. With a number of others the intimidation was clearly too much and it was on those occasions that I would quickly remove the tape recorder and discreetly take notes.

<sup>6</sup> John 3:3, New International Version.

2

**Conversion: "It was on a Sunday, somebody touched me!"**

It is the ability of evangelical Protestantism to survive as pockets of deviant culture in the heartland of modernity which is of central interest (Bruce 1990: 168).

In this chapter, I want to review some of the main characteristics of secularisation theory before considering its chief theoretical contender in the sociology of religion – rational choice theory. I regard both approaches inappropriate as a basis for research in this project and yet consideration of them is vital given their dominance. Later in the chapter, I will introduce the concept of personal salvation (conversion). An analysis of this experience highlights the inadequacy of both secularisation theory and rational choice theory to give an accurate account of the phenomenon, this being due to the subjectivity in which such an event is experienced. It also provides a basis from which to proceed in our attempt to understand the believer's worldview. The experience of 'new birth' informs and animates every aspect of the believer's life. Subsequent chapters will attempt to show how this concept permeates both theology and policy at the City Christian Centre. Later chapters will also attempt to explain the various changes taking place in Pentecostalism and how some of the most fundamental of doctrines have been challenged from within a broad Charismatic community. For now though, let us consider two theoretical models which dominate the sociology of religion.

## **Secularisation**

Secularization theory has gone a long way to question the relevance of the spiritual in the lives of individuals. It insists that religious belief is in decline as the characteristics of modernity are realised and consume society. It supplies an attractive explanation of why religious ritual and ceremony appears to be less potent in this day and age. Secularisation theory postulates reasons why fewer people are training to be ministers and why church buildings increasingly appear on street corners derelict and unused. These images serve only to remind those who pass by of days long since gone, in which church attendance was considered the social norm and Sunday school a way of life.

Bryan Wilson, a leading proponent of secularisation theory, presents a compelling argument by highlighting the following factors that suggest a decline in the significance of religion in public life. Firstly, an ascetic Protestantism helped to develop an increase in rational thinking, both within the individual and institutionally. Secondly, whereas society once looked to God for answers, scientific explanations replaced theological interpretations. A further factor stressed the pragmatic nature of this new rationality – science was seen to offer tangible solutions to problems within society (Wilson, 1966). Wilson also points to the decline in religious participation – church marriages, the ordination of clergy, and the influence of religion in government and policy making (see Wilson, 1966, 1976, 2001).

David Martin (1967) identifies four underlying theoretical interpretations that have contributed to the concept of secularisation. These are: 1) Nietzschean and Freudian influences that have attacked the concept of God. 2) The work of Feuerbach and Marx in which, '...man claims God's powers and attributes as justly his own' (Martin, 1967: 100). 3) Durkheim's understanding of a society in which, according to Martin, '...the increasing division of labour disintegrates society and religion along with it' (Martin, 1967: 101)<sup>1</sup>. 4) The increase in rationalisation and bureaucracy as postulated by Max Weber. Martin writes that, 'Weber sees the advance of science and of bureaucracy initiating a progressive dissolution of the myths which veil nature and social reality' (ibid). Given his evaluation of secularization, Martin, in his book *Tongues of Fire. The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (1990), suggests that secularization need not be a universal phenomenon. Heelas and Woodhead (2000) refer to Martin's framework as a '*coexistence theory*'. This approach argues that secularization may be experienced within certain social settings (predominantly European) while, '...in other contexts religions retain their vitality, even grow' (Heelas and Woodhead, 2000: 308). On this Martin writes,

...the effect of establishment and religious monopoly such as existed in Europe has been to inhibit the adaptability of religion to social change, above all to the industrial city. However, the North American paradigm seems to show that once religion is no longer a matter of a relation of a particular body to the elite and the state, religion adapts quite successfully

to a changing world. In all the proper senses of the word it becomes popular. Indeed, it shows itself endlessly inventive and actually succeeds in assuaging the anomie and combating the chaos of the megacity (Martin, 1990 cited in Heelas and Woodhead, 2000: 317)

The interesting contrast Martin uses in the above quote between the religious experiences of Europe and North America is picked up by Heelas and Woodhead (2000) in their evaluation of *sacralization* theory. Defining it as a theory that, '...focuses attention on religion gaining strength in modern times' (Heelas and Woodhead, 2000: 429), they pit secularization theory and sacralization against each other and ask,

Which is exceptional – the United States with (apparently) high levels of religious involvement, or Europe with (apparently) much lower levels? Secularization would see America as being exceptional, whereas sacralization theorists would view Europe as the exception (ibid).

Secularization, according to Bruce, entails three processes that are relevant in the undermining of religious adherence - *social differentiation*, *societalisation*, and *rationalisation*. Although Bruce concedes that the course of modernity does not always run smoothly (Bruce & Wallis 1992:8) these factors so permeate society that reliance upon a transcendental god is gradually dissolved and alternative modes of thought, ideology or belief appropriated. *Social differentiation* refers to

the emergence of institutions that deal with functions and roles previously under the jurisdiction of one institution. Bruce writes:

An obvious early site of such specialisation is the family which cedes most of its roles as a unit of production, education and social control to factories, schools and police forces (Bruce & Wallis 1992: 12).

Whereas the church *would* have been active and responsible for providing education and social control, the increasing diversification of institutions and those trained to work within them, brought a distance between the influence of the church and society. Under such conditions, conceptions of 'being' became pluralistic and the adherence to a generalised belief, in the plan and design of one God, was effectively shattered. Understandings of meaning and moral and ethical codes become 'up for grabs' in this secular climate. How one conducts oneself, in the world, is negotiated through consensus and the individual becomes situated within a growing market place of ideas. The absolute standard of religious observance is removed along with the notion of god; a process of sacred dehabilitation and secular rehabilitation takes place.

*Societalisation* also contributes to the fragmenting of a single religious and moral system. Drawing from the work of Bryan Wilson (Wilson 1966), Bruce recognises the significance of localised communities for religion. As

communities become absorbed into a de-personalised society, religious cohesion is weakened.

The Societal system relies less on the inculcation of a shared moral order and more on the utilisation of efficient technical means of eliciting and monitoring appropriate behaviour (Bruce & Wallis 1992: 13).

This view is echoed by Yinger (1961) in his suggestion that '...migration and culture contact are an important cause of a "secular" mode of thought and a stimulus to the development of rationality' (Yinger, 1961: 72). This understanding finds its impetus in the work of Toennies and Durkheim. For Toennies the shift from *Gemeinschaft* (pre-industrial society – 'community') to *Gesellschaft* (industrialised society – 'association') (Toennies, 1955) describes the breakdown of smaller rural communities that shared a strong value system based upon unity in religious belief. Industrialised society is characterised by impersonal association and competition in large urban centres in which the cohesion attributed to shared beliefs is eroded (see also Redfield, 1947 and Wirth, 1938). Durkheim's concept of 'organic solidarity' (1964) also foresees the weakening of ties based upon shared religious orientation. Cohesion is maintained through an intricate division of labour in which individuals become interdependent upon each other to provide economic and material needs.

Although the above concepts have been widely adopted within sociology, contrary views have recently challenged the notion of the breakdown of community and the rise of impersonal, egotistical individualism that characterises relationships within urban centres. Recent work has focused on subcultures within cities (Fischer, 1976), strong ties within neighbourhoods (Choldin, 1985), and networks of interpersonal communities (Wellman and Berkowitz, 1988).

Yinger's suggestion that a link exists between migration and secularisation can be directly challenged when we consider the growth of African and Caribbean churches in the United Kingdom (see Calley, 1965 and Toulis, 1997). Although migration may contribute to the erosion of a *shared* value or belief system, it does not necessarily follow that the result will be the secularisation of society.

Bruce's third element, *rationalisation*, denotes the 'changes in the way people think and consequently in the way they act' (Bruce & Wallis 1992: 14). The acceptance of monotheism in the Judeo-Christian faiths made a distinction between the natural and the supernatural, between God and humanity. To see God as a divine being set apart from the world allowed a secular plane on which humanity dwelt. Bruce states, 'Monotheism encouraged ethical rationalisation - the attempt to reduce theology to a consistent rational system of ideas...' (Bruce & Wallis, 1992:14).

Ironically, belief in a single divine Being allowed that which would undermine the very existence of God to gain a foothold. Yet, religious expression has not obliged the proponents of secularization theory with quiescence, far from it. Instead, society (and therefore sociology) is faced with not only a few religious stalwarts set to depart once and for all with the passing of time, but religious, or spiritual revival. Either the onslaught of modernity has slowed up or broken down in some way, thus halting the complete subjugation of belief in God, or secularization theory has not accounted for some social (or spiritual) dynamic which has rendered the theory obsolete. Critics of secularisation theory would argue that however one views the claims of secularization theory, we come back to the simple fact that religious belief has not gone away.

Not only has religion survived a period of rationality and adherence to the scientific paradigm, but also its potency can no longer be thought of simply in crude functional terms. James Beckford has stated that, 'Religion has come to represent a source of disorder in a world increasingly dominated by advanced industrial societies' (Beckford 1989:12).

A contradiction exists: former understandings of religion have often regarded its role in society as a stabilizer (Durkheim, 1995: Malinowski, 1948; Parsons, 1964). Religious adherence promoted continuity, routine and a constant reminder of tradition, even when that tradition was effectively lost with the sweeping changes brought on by the industrial revolution in the early nineteenth century.

Today such attributes can no longer be ascribed to transcendental belief systems. Religion now encompasses an ideological diversity of vast proportions and refuses to oblige society with an elementary cement. It is possible, for example, for individuals and groups to hold deep religious convictions while occupying a place at either the far right or left of the conservative - liberal scale, or at any point in between. It would make sense to surmise that a moderate ideological framework would provide a more stable building block for continuity and political capitulation. Religion, however, according to Beckford, is '...coming to be seen as a direct threat to the prevailing order, an indirect challenge to its constitutive values, or a declining source of social integration' (Beckford 1989:12). Religious belief has, on the far right, fundamentalists who staunchly defend their inflexibility, and on the left, those whose social Gospel challenges the inequalities and contradictions of contemporary society.

The polemical clash between Western societies negotiating (and accommodating) social assimilation, pluralism and an ensuing political correctness is plain to observe in the USA with its high proportion of Christians, particularly in the southern States. These believers profess not just a peripheral belief in some ultimate Being, but a strong conservative belief in the God of the Christian Bible. They are seemingly unambiguous in their understanding of who God is and what it means to experience salvation. They use such terms as being *saved* or *born again*. Church attendance, prayer and personal Bible study are activities that form an integral part of their daily lives.

The significance of conservative Christianity in the USA should not be understated. One need only spend a short time in 'small town' America to become cognisant of the grass roots Christian culture one is immersed into. There is a normalcy, an acceptance of church membership and activities. To be non-churchgoers or hold no religious affiliation places you in a minority group - the complete reverse of how religious belief is negotiated in the United Kingdom. Will Herberg, in his book *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (1960), makes the point that religious affiliation in North America, whether it be in a liberal or conservative sense, is considered the norm. The reason he gives for this focuses on '...the social necessity of "belonging,"' (Herberg, 1960: 41). He then suggests that, '...today the context of "belonging" is increasingly the religious community'<sup>2</sup> (ibid).

To go back to the discussion of fundamental Christianity, the temptation for some would be, simply, to argue that religious fervor is a geographical/generational phenomenon - the 'Bible belt'. That just as Bluegrass music is big in the Appalachians or Country music is big in Tennessee, so 'ole time religion', its tradition, history, and force, is big in a certain part of America too. Yet, the conservative Christian lobby is not confined to the domain of 'small town' or 'back-water' America. Its influence is far reaching. So much so that Presidents, whether by choice or design, are obliged to hear the voice of evangelicalism<sup>3</sup>. James Davison Hunter (1987), in his book *Evangelicalism. The Coming Generation*, supplies an impressive list of areas in which conservative Protestant

denominations in North America were displaying a healthy vibrancy in the 1980s. There is no evidence to suggest that these denominations are not still thriving. In the area of membership, Hunter states that, 'Evangelical denominations have *increased* their membership at an average five-year rate of 8 per cent' (Hunter, 1987: 6). The same conservative Protestants have, '...increased their per capita annual church donations every five years since the end of World War II as measured in constant 1970 dollars' (ibid). Hunter also points to the growth of private evangelical schools, an increase in the publishing of evangelical material and the significant number of missionaries sent out 'in the field'.

In 1980, the United States sent abroad thirty thousand Evangelical nationals as missionaries, constituting nearly eleven times the number of American liberal Protestant missionaries and twice as many as the combined number of Protestant nationals sent abroad from all the other countries of the world (Hunter, 1987: 7)

Hunter concludes that, 'Together these facts point to a movement that is far from pale and lifeless' (ibid). The contemporary Christian scene in Britain would, in fact, appear to pale in comparison with the American experience. Although Hunter's account of the combined conservative evangelical movement in the United States is really quite gushing, he waxes cold in his assessment of the same in the United Kingdom and Western Europe. Here he suggests that there has been

a decline in the adherents of evangelical Christianity since the early 1900s, '...in the United Kingdom and Western Europe there was drop of over 4 per cent – to 10.2 per cent of the population' (Hunter, 1987: 4). This decline has prompted Hunter to conclude that,

While it is true that much of the speculation about the demise of this expression of Christianity in the world has been based upon wishful thinking, there has been, in brief, some empirical grounding for these pessimistic forecasts. Its future remains justifiably in question (Hunter, 1987: 5).

Given the compelling arguments for the case of secularization, some pointers would indicate that a modest conservative evangelical fervour does exist in the United Kingdom and some would even suggest that fundamental Christianity is widely thought to be undergoing something of a revival<sup>4</sup> (Brierly, 1998/99; Cox, 1995). Religious groups generally (which exhibit fundamental tendencies), are numerically greater in Britain than in other Western countries according to Barker (1982). Also, while most of our discussion will focus on religious belief and church attendance, research has shown that many people who consider themselves *spiritual* are placing less significance upon church attendance and collective worship (Roof, 1999). Religious belief need not be expressed in institutional participation. On this, Voye and Dobbelaere (1993) suggest that a consequence of secularization is the subsequent move to individualistic

expressions of religion and spirituality. Speaking of the 'religious field' they suggest,

Here, as elsewhere, the individual himself claims to define in what way he is religious and the content he lends to his religiosity...He retains what seems to respond to his needs and combines it with elements foreign to this religion, borrowed from other religions or philosophies, or even from other fields – ranging from psychology to the occult sciences. This explains the acceleration of the sharp decline in mass attendance on weekends during the late sixties and early seventies (Voye and Dobbelaere, 1993: 95).

Significant pieces of sociological research have been carried out, mainly in North America and Canada (Bibby & Brinkerhoff 1973, Kelley 1972), which have sought to inform the seeming contradictions we are faced with. In the area of religious beliefs and affiliation, are churches growing, remaining static or declining? I will consider the work of Bibby and Brinkerhoff in more detail in chapter three. The conclusion often drawn has been that conservative churches have grown while liberal churches have witnessed a decline in attendance and membership. Indeed, a strong argument exists which suggests that the new members of conservative churches, those who constitute the growth, are former members of more liberal churches. Heavily institutionalised religious ceremony and tradition does not appear to have the capability to either attract new converts

or retain former ones. Whereas, it would seem, the conservative Christian groups that demand a high level of commitment from their members are much more successful in their proselytising efforts.

Kelley suggests that such churches supply their members with 'meaning' (Kelley 1972). Their interpretation of the Bible and its implications for the individual demands that a person's life be totally 'given over' to God. The world of the conservative Christian is a world in which ambiguity is slight. There are few, if any, gray areas. Life is black and white in that there is one truth, one narrow path down which to tread. To deviate from that path is to deviate from the will of God. This is the picture projected to the outside world.

Such an experience can differ drastically from that of a member of a liberal denomination. In many mainstream Christian churches (Church of England or Methodist for example)<sup>5</sup> the demands of the Gospel tend to be far less severe than in the conservative mission or chapel. One is very often given a number of definitions as to the nature of God relating to what He requires from each individual. One person's religious walk is permitted to take on a completely different expression from that of someone else. God becomes all encompassing and, compared to the Pentecostal church across the street, He demands little from those who attend a liberal church. Its members are left to interpret God in their own way. Clear, concise codes of living are not forcefully pushed from the minister giving the address on a Sunday morning. Messages lack that singularity

of vision when it comes to interpreting the Scriptures, that singularity which is evident in the sermons of fundamentalist preachers.

Steve Bruce accepts that liberal denominations are generally in decline. He is not in agreement with Kelly's thesis, however, regarding the idea that more conservative religious groups *demand* more from their members and thereby better meet the deep seated spiritual needs of an individual. He, in fact, questions the possibility of an 'outsider' being able to evaluate levels of satisfaction at all.

While I take the view that conservative Protestantism is more demanding and more satisfying, I am an outsider. Given the ability of one culture to maintain beliefs which another finds fanciful, it is dangerous to suppose that liberal Protestantism is intrinsically unsatisfying (independently of the believers showing us, by their actions, that this is the case). Hence there is a need for caution in attributing the decline of liberalism to its failure to satisfy fundamental needs and desires (Bruce, 1990: 152-3).

Bruce's explanation for the decline of the liberal denomination focuses on the 'success' of liberalism's ability to instil in its future generations the ethos of '...tolerance, its implicit universalism, and its faith in the social gospel and in vaguely moral behaviour' (Bruce, 1990: 153). This suggestion also has ramifications for those who subscribe to the argument that the more conservative denominations are witnessing an increase in attendance and that their new

members are those who have left liberal churches in the search for a religious experience that is both more demanding and fulfilling. If liberalism is so successful in socialising its members in the ways of religious vagueness, '...the extreme liberal has no reason to remain active in a liberal Protestant denomination' (ibid), or for that matter, in any denomination at all. As Bruce states,

In the absence of a large increase in the support for conservative Protestantism, the decline of liberal Protestantism suggests that, far from having failed, it has done its job so well that those who accepted it feel no further need for it (ibid).

Given the very compelling arguments that the secularization thesis brings into the debate regarding the nature and *future* of religion in modern times, it is still necessary to ask the simple question: why do people attend a church service? Certainly, there are a number of answers to this. Sociologists, in one form or another, have been positing answers to this for years. As an initial response to this problem, however, we could say that *some* people attend church services to have questions answered - questions that relate to themselves and their existence.

In what Heelas and Woodhead consider to be, '...one of the best known essays on the theme of sacralization' (Heelas and Woodhead, 2000: 471), Daniel Bell

(1977) envisions the 'sacred' as rising Phoenix-like from the ashes of a secularized society. He states that religion is

...a constitutive aspect of human experience because it is a response to the existential predicaments which are the *ricorsi* of human culture... The ground of religion is existential: the awareness of men of the finiteness and the inexorable limits to their powers, and the consequent effort to find a coherent answer to reconcile them to that human condition (Bell, 1977: 444-7).

Significantly, (for many) the answers to questions pertaining to ultimate meaning have not been forthcoming within the framework of our present scientific paradigm. In his paper *Science as a Vocation*, Weber accepts that science is unable to answer questions of *meaning*. He writes:

I may leave aside altogether the naive optimism in which science – that is, the technique of mastering life which rests upon science - has been celebrated as the way to happiness. Who believes in this? - aside from a few big children in university chairs or editorial offices (Gerth and Mills 1991: 143).

Then, drawing on the words of Tolstoy, he states:

Science is meaningless because it gives no answer to our questions, the only question important to us: "What shall we do and how shall we live?" (Gerth and Mills 1991: 143).

So, we are faced with a peculiar situation. On the one hand, empirical evidence of declining rates of participation in mainstream religious organizations is plentiful. Yet, on the other, there is also evidence of increasing rates of participation in the activities of conservative evangelical and charismatic groups both inside and outside mainstream Christian churches. In the midst of modernity, that is characterised by a distinctly scientific rationale and (as many references in this section have sought to argue) a process of secularization, many within society are still looking elsewhere for something which falls outside the boundaries of modern thought. Something that would answer that fundamental question of life and bring meaning to their existence. It would seem reasonable to assume, therefore, that many attend church services to seek God in the hope that their questions may be answered. The very fact that some individuals within Western society still seek answers to such questions from sources outside the scientific paradigm of modernity demands the attention of sociologists. Clearly, a need exists for a readjustment within the field of the social sciences. The sociology of religion can no longer rest on its laurels or hide behind the all too convenient secularisation theory. Some people still seek God, they still attend churches and they still ask questions that have not been satisfactorily answered within the framework of modernity.

A recent attempt to provide a more adequate theoretical approach to the study of religion has been the introduction of *rational choice* theory.

### **Rational choice theory**

The most significant move within the sociology of religion over the last decade has been the appropriation and development of *rational choice* theory. I use the word 'appropriation' rather deliberately for the rational choice model of analysis owes a great deal to the field of economics (Becker, 1986, 1975; Iannaccone, 1990, 1991, 1995, 1997). Any discussion within the sociology of religion would now be incomplete without acknowledging this particular model of analysis that has attempted to provide explanations of an increasing number of situations pertaining to religious adherence and practice. Areas touched by this approach include issues relating to church funding and 'giving', church growth (and why some churches and not others experience growth or decline), interfaith marriages, and the effects of religious markets versus religious monopolies (Young, 1997). Rational choice theory employs the principles of economics to explain religious behaviour. From the angle of the discipline of economics, rational choice theory can be summed up quite simply. Anthony Heath describes it this way,

It [rational choice theory] merely assumes that the individual can rank all the alternatives open to him in order of preference and will then select the one that comes at the top of the list. This is sometimes called the principle

of 'utility maximization'. To choose the most preferred alternative is to choose the one which yields the most utility and to maximize utility is therefore to select the alternative you like best (Heath, 1976: 8).

This assumption places a particular emphasis upon the ability of the subject to think comprehensibly about her or his own best interests as self-defined. Participation in religious action is considered to be totally rational in that believers, within a faiths market place, seek to maximise the benefits that accompany adherence to any given church or denomination. The guiding principle that underpins rational choice theory is the assumed *rationality* of the individual and the ability to calculate accordingly. Martin Hollis writes,

Rational Choice theory begins with a single, ideally rational individual, classically Robinson Crusoe alone on his desert island. He has three components: *fully ordered preferences*, *complete information*, and *a perfect internal computer*. He acts rationally in as much as he chooses the action which he correctly calculates to be the most instrumental in satisfying preferences (Hollis, 1994: 116).

A major problem within rational choice theory lies in the notion of 'complete' or 'perfect information' which Hollis goes on to describe as 'will-o'-the-wisp' (Hollis, 1987: 127). And then continues by suggesting that, '...theories of rational decision-making cannot be predicated on a limiting, ideal-type case

where perfectly informed agents make ideally rational decisions' (ibid). To imply an innate rationality on the part of those who seek a religious experience however, is a significant step. Iannaccone, a leading propagator of rational choice theory writes:

For most of a century, sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, historians and political scientists have scrutinised religion from every angle except that of rational choice. Explanations of religious phenomenon have stressed socialisation, indoctrination, neurosis, cognitive dissonance, tradition, deviance, deprivation, functionalism, the role of emotions, the impact of culture and more. But rarely has anyone viewed religion as the product of cost benefit decisions (Iannaccone 1995: 76).

Although the move away from explanations of religious activity such as 'neurosis', 'deprivation', and 'indoctrination' etc. is welcomed, the concept of religious behaviour and adherence as a product of cost benefit decisions ultimately limits any explanatory power this new theory offers. The rational choice model of analysis fits well within the framework of *scientific* sociology, but is inadequate in the field of interpretation. Mary Jo Neitz and Peter R. Mueser (1997) provide an example of how the rational choice approach fails in the area of interpretive analysis. By advancing a feminist critique, they suggest that rational choice theory provides an account of the world, '...that is astonishingly

ungendered' (Neitz & Mueser, 1997: 107). They cite the work of Chodorow (1978) and Gilligan (1982), who suggest that a distinction should be made between the underlying philosophy of men and women that informs the basis upon which they make decisions. 'Women interact with their environment based on feelings of connection to others and, consequently, make moral decisions differently' (Neitz & Mueser, 1997: 108). A specific kind of rationality is imposed upon the actor within rational choice theory, one that assumes (and thereby reduces) the actions of the individual to an innate process of instrumental rationality. But this 'rationality' over states its claim.

One may acknowledge that many individuals engage in certain activities that would provide a maximum utility value to themselves, but it seems wholly inappropriate to use economic theorising as a means to understand and explain human behaviour in generalised terms. As Hollis puts it, 'It is not true that all the world's a shop and all the men and women merely shoppers (Hollis, 1987: 146). A certain incongruity arises when one considers the aligning of rational choice theory with accounts of religious experience, the former explaining the latter. In applying a totally secular model of analysis to religious expression, the true essence of religion is eclipsed. That which is *spiritual* is explained in the *physical*. For many in the field of the social sciences, this would present few, if any, problems, for spirituality, some may say, is nothing more than a distortion of our natural cognition of the world. Put differently, the spiritual within a person does not really exist so, necessarily, the means of explaining the same lies in the

physical and the secular. And yet the need exists for a more qualitative approach within the sociology of religion given that theories relating to the secularisation of society have failed to engage successfully the phenomenon of spirituality and the role it plays in the social world. If secularisation theory is now going to be eclipsed by the new paradigm of rational choice theory (Warner, 1993), the sociology of religion will still be limited to the same dominant scientific model of research, albeit along the lines of economic and not primarily sociological principles (see Stark, 1997).

Major problems of definition arise within this approach. Although rational choice theory is keen to present the believer as rational, the rationality only 'kicks in' after a process of osmosis has taken place. Only after the sacred has been discarded in favour of the profane, does the theory work. Adherence to the *sacred* is, albeit indirectly, denigrated back to the ranks of the irrational, for only when rational choice theory has redefined religion in its own terms (a commodity) do we see it producing results. By that time, however, the behaviour it seeks to explain has, by its own making, been exorcised of its core ingredient - spirituality. The dynamic which makes the study of religion so tantalising (and baffling) to sociologists is effectively ignored or worse still, explained away. Under rational choice theory, the truly religious essence of believers must be inevitably understood in terms of 'neurosis', 'deprivation' or 'cognitive dissonance' etc. -- categories which adherents of rational choice theory must (by definition) reject, yet, through the back door, retain.

There are many situations within 'church life' which have attracted the attention of rational choice theorists. Much of the data in this thesis will conflict with them. Indeed, an initial review of the main texts advocating this new analytical approach has revealed a great many instances in which the theory has simply been at odds with the empirical data I have collected. It is necessary to take into account the fact that all the main developers and advocates of rational choice theory live, work and have built their ideas around data collected predominantly within the United States. As my study focuses on the experiences of an Assembly of God fellowship in England, empirical findings relating to the supply-side of religious pluralism are quite different. In recognition of the differences between American church life and that of other societies, Stephen Warner goes so far as to suggest that '...the new paradigm applies explicitly to religion *in the United States*' (Warner 1997: 88).<sup>6</sup>

Given certain anticipated differences, however, it is worth noting that, generally speaking, the cultural climate in America as far as religious 'packaging' and consumerism goes, is far more extreme than in the United Kingdom. One can turn to any number of religious broadcasting channels on the television, for instance, and, apart from the religious terminology used, wonder just how different it is from the Shopping Channel! The point to be made here is that, although much of the overall look of contemporary Christianity in America projects a certain business expression, rational choice theory seems only to

analyse the outward appearance and misses what is taking place in the 'heart'. Just as the Bible informs us that 'man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart'<sup>7</sup>, indeed it could be said that the advocates of rational choice theory 'look on the outside' too, when all the time, a much more beneficial pursuit would be to explore the internal dynamics of the individual and their interaction and how such dynamics impact on their given communities. It has been suggested that there may be salvageable aspects to rational choice theory with regard to religion, specifically in the area of understanding organisational interaction and the notions of supply and demand within a competitive religious market (see Beckford, 2000). The potential strength of this insight however, remains in the domain of the 'external' and it is inappropriate to regard (as do advocates of rational choice theory) the instrumental rationality of organisations in the same way we would regard individual motivation. A significant contradiction arises here because of the reductionism within rational choice theory that it necessarily needs to maintain. Although the emphasis is placed firmly on social action at the level of the individual (Coleman, 1990), the approach must work within the set parameters of instrumental rationality and it does so by reducing all human motivation and subsequent action to a matter of optimising the preferences that individuals establish for themselves. To some, this is what makes rational choice theory so attractive. According to Coleman and Feraro (1992), it is the notion of optimisation, within rational choice theory, that gives it its 'power'. We find that the default mode of human action is the rational calculation of our self defined costs and benefits pertaining to any given

social setting in which 'maximisation' may occur. Inherent in rational choice theory's conception of the individual is the pre-programmed drive to 'optimise'.

Rational choice theory contains one element that differentiates it from nearly all other theoretical approaches in sociology. This element can be summed up in a single word: *optimization*. The theory signifies that in acting rationally, an actor is engaging in some kind of optimization. This is sometimes expressed as a maximizing utility, sometimes as minimizing cost, sometimes in other ways. But however expressed, it is this that gives rational choice theory its power (Coleman and Feraro, 1992: xi).

Proponents may argue that Kelley's (1972, 1978) understanding of religious commitment fits into the rational choice model. Kelley suggests that high demands and cost to the individual; their giving of money, time, energy, and other sacrifices, are rewarded with that which is paramount to them – they obtain 'meaning'. In many cases, they obtain more tangible commodities also. Stark and Bainbridge speak of 'direct rewards' (Stark and Bainbridge, 1980). Writing on the recruitment methods of the Mormon Church, they conclude that,

...examination of the 13-step Mormon program for gaining new recruits reveals the priority given to showering tangible rewards upon potential new members. The notion of showing how rewarding it is to be a

Mormon is not meant metaphorically or in only a theological sense (Stark and Bainbridge 1980:1394).

Yet, there is a distinct teleology in the overall rational choice position on the part of the subjects and the question of giving of themselves. One could always consider a person's actions to be a 'trade-off' in some way or another. In so doing, rational choice theory takes on a particularly cynical persona. Even the most philanthropic acts of sacrifice, giving or moral decency could be said to have derived from a basic desire to gain. Of course, in a way this is true, for altruism has its yield. However, the generality of this observation broadens (or stretches) the rational choice model to such an extent that its promise of being able to predict (a major claim within deductive, scientific sociology) becomes untenable.

An extreme example would be that of a person who, through some severe circumstance, sacrificed his or her own life to save the life of another. The act of self-giving, although final for the individual concerned, can be regarded, still, as an acceptable cost given the outcome had they *not* intervened in such a way. In one sense, this explains the 'action' but it is far too abstract conceptually to apply with any clarity of definition. Certainly, to attempt to relate this model to an understanding of religious commitment with any level of specificity would be to over stress the basic principles of economics in the subjective being of humanity.

A catch all premise may do just that, but our understanding of the social and religious dynamic within society is advanced very little.

In Rodney Stark's book *The Rise of Christianity* (1997) he writes, in chapter eight, about martyrdom in the early church and links it directly to rational choice theorising. He sets out to supply an answer to the intriguing question, '...how could a rational person accept grotesque torture and death in exchange for risky, intangible religious rewards?' (Stark, 1997: 179). My concern in reviewing this work comes not from the ideal of rationality; the notion of rewards for the Christian martyr outweighing the cost of his or her own life is one that is logically consistent. The problem for rational choice theory, as applied in this analysis lies in the relativity of the concept of rationality *and* individual perceptions of costs and benefits. Consider the following passage quoted at length.

*People differ greatly in their relative evaluations of specific rewards or benefits. Were I to stick closely to formulations from economic theory, I would have worded this to note that people have different "preference schedules" and therefore some people will evaluate any given reward or benefit more highly than will some other people...I include this proposition here in large part to counter critics who claim that by postulating the rationality of religious behaviour, I exclude all behaviour*

that is not selfish or hedonistic, and that I thereby dismiss the power of religion to animate those altruists and ascetics who people the community of saints. This is simply wrong and trivialises the very behaviour it ostensibly praises. To say that people differ in terms of their preference schedules is simply an uninspired way of saying that Mother Teresa may well be elevated to sainthood one day, not because she avoids rewards and pursues costs, but because of *what* she finds rewarding. To call Mother Teresa an altruist and thus classify her behaviour as nonrational is to deny the finest of human capacities, our ability to love. Thus although rational choice theories restrict behaviour to that which is consistent with a person's definitions of rewards, it has very little to say about the actual content of those rewards. This leaves all room needed for people to be charitable, brave, unselfish, reverent, and even silly (Stark, 1997:170,171).

One interpretation of Stark's 'different preference schedules' suggests a level of subjectivism which surely renders the notion of deductive theorising quite futile because of the infinite number of variables attached to subjective definitions of rewards and benefits. The grounding concepts used within rational choice theory – rewards, benefits, rationality – become too atomised within the 'relative evaluations' of the individuals making their choices. In the light of the infinite and changing conceptions of these 'building blocks', it seems unlikely that the

rational choice claim to a formula for the discovery of social scientific laws pertaining to the study of religion will be realised as hoped.

So far, I have considered rational choice theory (and attempted to critique it) within its own frame of reference. A much more fundamental flaw exists however, and that is its initial assumption that human beings are driven by instrumental rationality and seek in all things to 'optimise'. Is it appropriate to suggest that in every area of our lives, every relationship, every concern, human beings operate solely in terms of a 'means to an end'? Archer (2000) makes the observation that

...Ends...to which we are ultimately committed are those things we care about the most. As such, they are not only extensions and expressions of ourselves, but also ones which can be irreducibly social. In other words, those social relationships to which we are committed as our deepest concerns (marriage, family, career, church, community) are not for any agent the 'means to his flourishing but its constituents (Hollis 1989: 174). Here there is no sense in asking why it pays someone to give their partner a birthday present or to help their friends out, for these actions are expressive of their relationship, not matters of investment and quid pro quo (Archer, 2000: 54).

We have mentioned earlier that the rational choice approach fails in its ability to interpret social phenomena within any micro or qualitative framework. This too can be said of the secularisation approach. Both theories introduce (and impose) broad categorisation on individual actors and effectively control experience, to echo Weber (Gerth & Mills, 1991). In the remainder of this chapter, I will introduce the notion of *conversion*. This will serve to highlight the very subjective nature of the experience and reinforce its significance in the life of the believer. Before that, however, I want to make some general comments regarding my research at the City Christian Centre.

### **Researching the City Christian Centre**

The potential in researching a community such as the City Christian Centre relies on the analytical acceptance of the many contradictory strands of data collected through participant observation and interviews. Researchers in the field of religious belief tend automatically to include in their work the disclaimer on how the real picture is far more complicated than the one they have attempted to describe. While this acknowledgement is welcomed, its over use has decreased its status somewhat. Not only should we stress the point that the reality we observe does not always fit neatly into our theoretical framework, but the need exists for us to actually accept the contradictions we are presented with and include them in our final analysis. It is only when we start to allow for the fact that not all of our data will find a 'home' that we will retain a level of integrity and openness in our sociology. What we cannot explain, we can at least describe.

The lives and experiences of those who attend the City Christian Centre certainly present the researcher with a plethora of seeming contradictions. How do we understand the Pentecostal 'believer'? Who are they? Where do they come from? How do they survive in a society that is largely hostile and skeptical towards them? As such the problem and the challenge of understanding the dynamics of a conservative Christian fellowship present themselves to us. In addition to the above questions we need to explore also what part internal mechanisms play in reinforcing and sustaining that particular way of life. Of course, secularization theory may talk about spiritual 'enclaves' that will eventually succumb to the foreign territory outside. Rational choice theory may subscribe to the idea that believers are innately rational in the choices they make and in the God they worship. Yet, I argue that neither theory allows there to be significant advancement in our understanding of this 'peculiar' people. Greater analytical tolerance is required in this area.

This thesis will present the sociology of religion with an account of a Christian group, the experience of which refutes the theoretical and substantive claims of rational choice theory, *and* the advocates of secularization theory. Although it will be possible to identify elements of Berger's *Sacred Canopy* (Berger 1967) in that the world of the Pentecostal believer is a specific environment, the conservative Christian milieu is not the sole defender and maintainer of the faith. My contention is that the religious context of any group of people is merely an

*Conversion: "It was on a Sunday, somebody touched me!"*

outward expression. If we focus too much on that, we will fail to gain real insight into how and why these people survive in the 'heartland of modernity'.

Paramount to the experience of the Pentecostal believer is salvation; it would be futile to attempt any analysis without first recognising the vital nature of the conversion experience. For it is from this cathartic change that believers acquire their mindset and way of life.

### **Conversion - its significance to the believer**

An old chorus was often sung at the City Christian Centre. It involved a lot of congregational participation although there were few words. It went like this,

It was on a Sunday somebody touched me,  
It was on a Sunday somebody touched me,  
It was on a Sunday somebody touched me  
It must have been the hand of the Lord.

The chorus was repeated seven times (at least) and each new round would substitute a day of the week (Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday etc.) until every day had been covered. The actions to the song were simple, when your day was sung, you would stand to your feet while the rest of the congregation remained seated. In a congregation of saved people, every one would take a turn in standing, for all (with few exceptions) could name the day on which they were born again.

Conversion, for the traditional Pentecostal believer, is a clearly defined event, devoid of ambiguity. It is the central turning point in a person's religious experience and the prerequisite of a Christian life. The significance of the salvation experience should not be understated. There can be no true relationship with Jesus, no walk with God, no authentic spiritual journey (in the Christian sense), until a person has appropriated the redemption of Jesus Christ that is offered to all. One of the Bible verses most often quoted by Pentecostals is found in John's Gospel:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.<sup>8</sup>

The 'belief' referred to in the above verse is not a passive acceptance or general, broad belief in God and His precepts, quite the contrary. To the saved believer it entails a conscious act of the will to place one's trust in God. It is a pro-active belief that requires the individual to surrender his or her life totally to God and become born again of God's Spirit. The scriptural basis for the doctrine of new birth is found also in John's Gospel, chapter three. Nicodemus - Pharisee and highly regarded Jewish ruling council member - visits Jesus at night and the following encounter takes place.

[Nicodemus] "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no-one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."

In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

"How can a man be born again when he is old?" Nicodemus asked.

"Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."<sup>9</sup>

Conversion is, therefore, an essential doctrine within Assembly of God churches. A person who is saved, born again or redeemed is regarded as a 'brother' or 'sister' instantly upon revelation of that fact. It denotes a universal acceptance and invokes a whole dimension of meaning that is quite baffling to the outsider. Wuthnow identifies conversion (along with baptism and communion) as a key factor behind 'communal initiation' (Wuthnow, 1998: 22). Wilson too, identifies the significance of the salvation experience and subsequent acceptance within the body of believers. He states, 'Conversion experience and the acceptance of Jesus

as a personal saviour is the test of admission to the fellowship' (Wilson, 1967: 27).

There is a distinct collectivity among those who are saved. A person's name is added to the 'Lamb's Book Of Life' upon salvation and only under the most extreme of circumstances could it ever be removed<sup>10</sup>. The centrality of this concept within the conservative Christian's experience makes it of particular interest to sociologists and much work has been done on it (see Beckford, 1978; Dixon, Lowery & Jones, 1992; Lofland & Skonovd, 1981; Seggar & Kunz, 1972, to cite but a few). As we have already mentioned, some regard it as a prerequisite to membership of the group in question and, as such, conversion is deemed functional in this respect. Accounts of the conversion experience provided by members of the City Christian Centre, present us with a much more diverse understanding of the concept. A brief review of some sociological understandings of this phenomenon will broaden our discussion and (I believe) focus our attention upon some of the 'gaps' within many sociological interpretations of this phenomenon. Ammerman, in her ethnographic study of a fundamental gospel church in the Northeast United States, writes:

Only when people are surrounded by believing friends, family, and people they admire; only when they are quickly integrated into the church's round of activities; and only when they finally begin to think and speak

and witness like a Fundamentalist is the conversion complete

(Ammerman 1987:166).

In many ways, this view provides an adequate account of conversion, and yet it presents the reader, ultimately, with a purely social understanding of the term and one that ultimately regards the experience as a product of construction. While Ammerman's observation is valuable as far as our sociological understanding is concerned we are distanced from the possibility of considering further the vital dimension of spirituality. Of course, the inclusion of an investigation into such a subjective entity falls outside of sociology's 'job description' which limits research to the social interaction of groups. The task of researching actual spirituality falls on the shoulders of theologians. However, it is imperative that the *intangible* is at least recognised or even described more fully because of the significant influence it exerts within and on individuals. Such analysis has been difficult, for the inclusion of a subjective experience places the concept under study to be clarified outside the sociologists own (arguably) preconceived understanding of the concept<sup>11</sup>.

The issue of how a phenomenon is viewed by the individual or group affected by the event needs to be taken into account - and not in some token way. A major concern of this project is the proffering of a detailed description of the believer and the world he or she inhabits, participates in, and shares with others. To pursue this objective it is necessary to devote much space to the area of meaning.

Within the realm of sociological analysis it is often the case that we become acquainted more with the predisposition of the researcher rather than with the minutiae of the subject. This can only be acceptable if the researcher's subjective experiences are included in the work. In the end, sociological discourse is an arena for the battle of validity in ideas and beliefs. No sociologist is without their own worldview that colours the conclusions of the research and the research methodology itself.

Along with the open identification (and inclusion) of researcher bias, more emphasis must be placed on the interpretations of those who are the focus of the study if we are to understand the uniqueness of the subject and how the meanings attached to their experience affect the social world around them. The act of conversion, or 're-birth' - to continue in the light of a distinctly Pentecostal expression - is, in itself, a phenomenon which touches each nomos of our human constitution. Glock and Stark describe the concept of conversion this way,

...the word conversion denotes a major discontinuity in behaviour, a wrenching of the personality, associated with such descriptive phrases as "rebirth," "finding the light," "visitation of the Holy Spirit," and "attaining true class consciousness," all of which indicate that the convert has apparently experienced a drastic shift in the orientation of his valuation of reality (Glock & Stark, 1965: 7).

To understand the process of rebirth (from the viewpoint of the Pentecostal), believers identify three elements within the makeup of each individual, each of which are affected during conversion. A human being is made up of the body, soul and spirit. The body simply refers to our physical matter along with motor functions and instincts. The soul is very often confused with the spirit even within Pentecostal circles<sup>12</sup>. The tendency is to assume that the soul is that intangible emanation which, upon death of the physical, is received into God's presence<sup>13</sup>. To clarify, however, the soul consists of our psychological and emotional being. It is our spirit which, upon death, departs the body and enters eternity. The spirit is understood to be the most significant element within our makeup, for it is that part which is regenerated at salvation. Before conversion, the spirit is regarded as something of a vacuum. It is sometimes described as a 'God shaped hole', and said to be a void in the very depth of our being in need of fulfillment. Upon conversion the vacuum is filled; salvation has not at this stage entered the realm of the physical (this is what Nicodemus had trouble comprehending). It is, primarily, a spiritual event. The void is filled with the Holy Spirit and re-birth is therefore a spiritual experience.

We have mentioned how the initial act of being born again excludes the physical. The soul, however, has already been active in accepting the spiritual revolution that takes place during conversion, for it is only by an act of the will that one reaches a place of acceptance. The body too, is soon affected by the change. It is the belief of Pentecostals that before a person receives Christ and is born again

the elements that constitute our being operated in a distorted manner. The unregenerate individual is controlled by the emotions and base functions of the body. Out of the three parts, the spirit - dormant and empty - is dominated by the body and the soul. Conversion changes this order and places the spirit into prominence; the 'flesh', from then on, is continually brought under subjection throughout the life of the believer. Salvation involves a re-prioritising of the 'building blocks' of our humanity, once our spirit has been regenerated.

Conversion then, is a significant constituent within the experience of Pentecostal believers. Indeed, the concept is paramount. It is the prerequisite to a Christian life and a point of departure from the 'world' (Ammerman, 1987; Heriot, 1994; Roof, 1993). It is also a move away from the religiosity of the Church and the start of a relationship with God. There is a plethora of sociological literature on this phenomenon and so my reading and comment has had to be rather selective. To give us an overview of the substance of sociological writing on the subject, Kilbourne and Richardson (1988) and their paper *Paradigm Conflict, Types of Conversion, and Conversion Theories* give us a good place to start.

Kilbourne and Richardson consider two conceptual modes (paradigms) which have dominated theoretical thought regarding the phenomenon of individual religious transformation - 'passive' and 'active' conversion - the former, they suggest, being historically more predominant than the latter. Steve Bruce (1984) provides an analysis of two former approaches to the passive conversion model

found in the work of William Sargent, *Battle for the Mind* (1957) and Robert Thouless, *An Introduction to the Psychology of Religion* (1971). Fear, according to Sargent has a direct correlate with conversion, especially when the message of the Gospel is frightening enough. Sargent states that, '...various types of belief can be implanted in many people, after brain function has been sufficiently disturbed by accidentally or deliberately induced fear, anger or excitement' (Sargent, 1957: 132, cited in Bruce, 1984: 105). With Thouless, a major theme is that of *suggestion* – a potent force for conversion when combined with a 'hypnoidal state' (Bruce, 1984: 105) brought on by the preaching technique of an evangelist. 'The closed eyes, the monotonous singing, and the repetition of the word "come" tend to produce in the audience an approach to the hypnoidal state' (Thouless, 1971: 26, cited in Bruce, 1984: 106). Bruce himself argues against the views of Sargent and Thouless. He suggests that conversion is simply a form of 'public commitment to a view of the world...which [converts] have grown up with or acquired gradually through their social interactions with other Christians' (Bruce, 1984: 112). Bruce's own view actually falls within a deterministic model of conversion.

Let us now consider in some detail both of these models as put forward by Kilbourne and Richardson and consider their use in describing the experiences of the believers in the current study. The attributes of the passive conversion type describe very well the overall experience of many of the members of the City Christian Centre:

1) Sudden and dramatic change, 2) irrational or magical in nature, 3) involving a powerful, external, and impersonal force, 4) usually a single event, 5) the negation of the old self and the affirmation of the new self, 6) change from one static state to another static state, 7) typically occurs during adolescence and is a 'good thing', and 8) behaviour change normally follows belief change (Kilbourne & Richardson 1988:1).

An exception would be taken to numbers 3 and 7. As it is my intention to acquaint the reader with a detailed insight into the world and mindset of the believer, I shall briefly state the position taken regarding these points. Objections would be raised to a description of God as an 'impersonal force'. It is accepted that prior to conversion, God, on the part of the prospective convert, could assume any number of concepts: He could exist or not exist, be a nebulous power behind the universe or a competing god amongst many gods. In this respect the notion of an impersonal God may be applied. However, from the viewpoint of those who have experienced conversion, God is far from impersonal. Many believers testify to the 'leading of the Holy Spirit' before being born again. They speak of God 'drawing' them or 'talking' to them. A deistic conception of God would appropriate the label 'impersonal', whereas for Pentecostals a strong theistic belief prevails. God is personal and involved. It is curious that a God described as an 'impersonal force' would be active in the conversion of an individual, an experience that is, according to Kilbourne and Richardson,

deterministic. Conversion theory remains a vast undertaking however and Kilbourne and Richardson are quick to stress that 'any typology of this nature will inevitably reduce and simplify different theories to essential features and should be viewed in that light' (Kilbourne & Richardson 1988:3).

The second point that would raise possible objections from Pentecostals is the claim that conversion 'typically occurs during adolescence'. Observational data suggests that young members are a majority in the many churches I have visited including the City Christian Centre. Relatively few members however, were actually saved in their adolescent years: the age at conversion more typically averaging between the early to mid twenties.

Kilbourne and Richardson provide the conversion of Saul/Paul, while on his way to Damascus, as an example of the passive-deterministic 'old paradigm'. Indeed this conversion account, barring the two points we have discussed above, characterises the Pentecostal salvation experience. It is 'sudden' ('...suddenly a light from Heaven flashed around him'. Acts 9:3)<sup>14</sup>; 'irrational or magical' ('The men traveling with Saul stood speechless: they heard the sound but did not see anyone.' (v7). It was a 'single event' (a specific place and time). It resulted in the 'negating of the old self and the affirmation of the new self' (in verse 1 of chapter 9 we read that '...Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples', yet in verse 20 we read, 'At once he begin to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God'). This last reference from the book of Acts also

suggests a 'change from one static state to another static state' and confirms Kilbourne and Richardson's last point that 'behaviour change usually follows belief change'. Saul, assuming from then on the name Paul, devoted the rest of his life to preaching the gospel; before this conversion experience his chief goal in life had been to persecute the Christians of the early Church.

There were many at the City Christian Centre who could give testimony to similar conversions. The cultural and historical settings were, of course, vastly different, and the proclivity to violence and persecution was no longer a factor. The same basic elements, however, applied. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the City Christian Centre experienced its most prolific growth in membership. Within a five-year period, the church had trebled in size; the experiences of these new members shared a common pattern: they had come into a relationship with God and their lives had been changed.

Countless testimonies were heard throughout the weekly programme of the church. Miraculous and dramatic conversion stories were the norm and 'testimony time' became a regular feature of the meetings. During one service the congregation would hear the 'rough-around-the-edges' story of a young man (aged fourteen) from a hopelessly broken home situation who 'gave his heart to the Lord' after reading *The Cross and the Switchblade*<sup>15</sup> (Wilkerson, 1967). In another service a couple in their mid-thirties told of their heroin addiction and how the Lord had saved them from a life of drug taking and 'brought them into

newness of life'. In a third meeting, a fifty-five year old woman, who lived close to the church, very timidly told the congregation how she had been 'touched' and how, from that moment on, her life had been changed.

Kilbourne and Richardson regard as the 'old paradigm' these conversion experiences. Although still dominant amongst theorists it has been recently challenged (Richardson 1985) by an emerging conception of conversion which emphasises the 'agency' of the individual - the 'seeker' - in the transformation process. Kilbourne and Richardson state:

The seeker is generally characterized by the following: 1) volition, 2) autonomy, 3) search for meaning and purpose, 4) multiple conversions or conversion careers, 5) rational interpretation of experiences, 6) gradual and continuous conversion(s), 7) negotiation between the individual and the potential membership group, and 8) belief change that follows behaviour change, as the individual learns the role of being a new convert. (Kilbourne and Richardson 1988:2).

These basic elements represent the 'type' and experience of an individual who is active in their search for spiritual fulfilment of some kind. Such individuals could be seen as the masters of their own ship in their quest or journey. Kilbourne and Richardson suggest that the two perspectives here discussed (active versus passive) are polemical. They write, 'In a very real sense, the 'old' and 'new'

paradigms provide diametrically opposed ways of conceptualising the same phenomena' (Kilbourne and Richardson 1988:1).

Given the opposite nature of these perspectives it would follow that the latter model would not fit well into an understanding of the dynamics of conversion for the Pentecostal believer. My research data, however, suggests quite the opposite; the 'active agency' model correlates closely to the experiences of some believers. Both paradigms therefore, are useful in describing conversion. An either/or perplexity does not arise within the framework of my own research project.

I have considered the possible areas of contention that could be raised by believers against the 'passive-deterministic' model. I now want to outline the points of difference between the conversion experience of those at City Christian Centre and the 'active agency' model. Surprisingly, albeit with some modification, it is possible to relate this model, as well as the 'old paradigm' model, to the experiences of the Pentecostal believer. With qualification on just two points (numbers 4 and 8), this 'type' also provides a useful description of religious conversion.

Point 4 talks of 'multiple conversions or conversion careers'. Of course, this could be interpreted in a number of ways; one imagines a 'seeker' who is consistent in their search for spiritual fulfilment, but inconsistent in their institutional affiliations. There is also the notion here that the tenets or

fundamentals of an acquired belief system are relinquished in favour of the next 'career'. With specific reference to those groups that are often classified as 'cultic' or 'mystical', the reasons for this journeying 'drift' may be inherent.

Colin Campbell writes:

Sociological accounts of the cult tend to describe it as individualistic and loosely structured, in contrast to the communal and cohesive organization of the sect. Also unlike the sect, the cult makes few demands on its members, is tolerant of other organisations and faiths and is not exclusivist. Members do not act in common as a group so much as share 'a parallelism of spontaneous religious personalities' (Campbell 1972:121).

In this respect, one cannot attempt to align this observation with a form of 're-affiliation', in the Bibby and Brinkerhoff sense (Bibby and Brinkerhoff 1973), and apply it to a Pentecostal. This point would be objectionable to a conservative believer because of the *absolute* understanding of truth. There can be no other truth and no better way. Churches may change or Christians may 'switch' from time to time, but the basic premise of belief and doctrine remains solid. There are, at times, peripheral changes in emphasis or interpretation but for the most part - nothing too drastic.

We could adapt this slightly, however, and proffer a new understanding. The conversion experience of believers - the rudimentary element in the doctrine of 'personal salvation' - is (for Pentecostals) supplemented with the 'Baptism of the Holy Spirit'. The emphasis placed upon this experience should not be underestimated for it is because of this particular doctrine that the classification 'Pentecostal' is distinguished, placing the movement apart from other evangelical, non-charismatic groups.

Although the baptism can not be regarded as a second conversion, belief in the necessity of the 'in filling of the Holy Spirit' is acute. Samarin (1972) even refers to the event of speaking in tongues as 'a conversion experience' (Samarin, 1972: 198)<sup>16</sup>. The newly saved are instructed on the importance of the Holy Spirit in their lives and in the steps to be taken to receive Him. Emphasis is placed upon the *gifts* of the Holy Spirit; traditionally 'speaking in tongues' was, and still is, stressed most forcefully. Assembly of God doctrine states that speaking in tongues is *the* sign of an individual's baptism in the Spirit. Other Pentecostal groups may differ on this but it is generally agreed that the baptism in the Holy Spirit empowers the Christian in their daily lives and equips them for service. All Pentecostals, regardless of denominational differences on the finer points of doctrine, share a common line on the significance of this phenomenon. In a sense then, it can be said that, for Pentecostals, profound spiritual experiences follow an initial conversion.

Kilbourne and Richardson's last point in their 'active agency' model (the second possible cause of disagreement in this 'type') inverts the earlier model's belief/behaviour pattern following conversion. They suggest that the belief system of the convert develops and changes after the initial 'event'. As the convert becomes acquainted with the ideas and doctrines of the group, he or she appropriates and learns a set of particular beliefs. Although this too seems to contradict the former understanding, we can see that a conversion experience, instantiated by an initial 'step' (of 'faith', in the case of most religious conversions) ultimately must draw upon some belief. This concurs with a progression of understanding and exposure to the system of the collectivity.

One is faced here with the 'chicken and the egg' quandary. Converts at the City Christian Centre heard the 'message' before their experience, yet, in many cases, what they claim follows from their initial 'step' falls into the realm of subjective transcendence and can only be imagined by the onlooker. What is of particular sociological interest is how quickly the transformation occurs. I am distinguishing here between a change in ideological knowledge (which must be learned) and the *underlying motivation, desire, inclination* to transform. Conversion, in most of its forms, entails an element of capitulation, a commitment to the re-ordering of priorities, a monumental shift in the course of one's life. True, not all of these implications are known or understood at the point of conversion for every believer, as we have said. But even with the most elementary prior knowledge of the Gospel and all it entails (as heard in a sermon,

witnessed by a friend or read in a book or tract), the appeal to salvation, in the traditional Pentecostal sense, emphasises change. Falling again into the bracket of 'the private', it is understandable that sociology - as a science - has not negotiated conversion well. Drawing on the earlier work of William James (1961), Spickard has put forward this reason as a possible explanation for this, which confirms a curious stand off between the discipline of sociology and subjective faith:

James grounded religious experience in feelings, which he treated as private...treating experiences as private, however, removes them from the social sphere. Since James the sociology of religion has focused on religious institutions and religious ideas (Spickard, 1993: 109)

Heirich (1977) has defined conversion as 'a conscious shift in one's sense of grounding'. This statement highlights a vital element in the process of religious transformation. Conversion encapsulates both the conscious and the mystical. It is the juxtaposing of the Divine and the natural, the Spirit and the 'flesh', the transcendent and the mundane, the a priori and the a posteriori. A step of faith into, what is often, largely unknown religious territory, is not totally unknown or without some prior understanding, even if that knowledge is limited or partial.

Whereas the believers at the City Christian Centre would have no problem with the conception of an integral relationship between the sacred and the social, the

same cannot so readily be said for a majority of researchers of religious and spiritual phenomena; as Spickard emphatically states, 'Sociologists have not comprehended religious experience well' (Spickard, 1993: 109). Researchers in the field have tended to interpret religious experience according to theoretical modes. It would be fair to conclude that most of the literature has produced an overall secular approach to the validity or truth claims of the group or movement under study.

A more adequate approach to the meaning and significance of conversion of the individual must conceptualise it *beyond* the preconceptions of the researcher and his or her compartmentalisms. There are major empirical diversions within the analytical categories, that have been dominant in sociological theorising, which must be emphasised and allotted a greater status. This thesis is an attempt to highlight these areas and to suggest that greater insight and depth of description is possible when we concentrate on some of the empirical anomalies that our research data presents.

Kilbourne and Richardson's observations are a case in point. They present two types of conversion which are considered to be diametrically opposed and yet both models describe the experiences of one kind of conversion (religious transformation within a distinctly Pentecostal/evangelical persuasion). With a minimum of alteration to the points presented, these opposing elements - so assumed, do not fit with the data collected: evangelical conversion presents a

complex picture. What is most significant is the conjoining of the passive and active agency models. Whereas conversion does correlate to the former, individuals are also considered by Pentecostals to be actively seeking that which is missing in their lives prior to conversion.

In the next chapter I want to consider church membership and challenge some of the sociological definitions placed upon various groups within conservative Christian churches. In order to do so it has been necessary to consider in this chapter the building block of the Pentecostal believer's life – conversion and a personal relationship with God. This, we shall see, prioritises the worldview of the Christian and, seen through the filter of this interpretation, casts new light on the imposed definitions of their membership. Later in the next chapter, I will introduce the concept of change within the City Christian Centre. In some ways, the changes taking place within the Pentecostal movement seem to contradict some of the more stalwart elements we have considered thus far regarding consistency in doctrine. These inconsistencies present, for many Pentecostals, tension and conflict as the earlier traditions within the Assemblies of God (and other Pentecostal denominations) are compromised by a process of synthesis between themselves and the Charismatic movement.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995).

<sup>2</sup> On this, Herberg makes reference to David Riesman who suggests that members of society fear not having some kind of collective identity (Riesman, 1954).

<sup>3</sup> This point has been recently demonstrated with the Clinton-Lewinsky affair. President Clinton, arguably in an attempt to mitigate the indignation of evangelicals, elected a small spiritual council as a kind of Presidential pastoral team. The team included Tony Campolo – an outspoken Christian author, speaker and sociologist who has a wide readership amongst the evangelical Christian communities in both the USA and the UK.

<sup>4</sup> During a recent conversation with a member of an Assemblies of God church in Crossville, Tennessee, I was interested to note that his impression (and indeed the impression of the fellowship generally) was that Britain is experiencing a time of great revival and spiritual renewal whereas North America is not. A significant comment from a 'believer' living in the heart of the Bible Belt.

<sup>5</sup> Although the Anglican and Methodist churches are examples of what could be considered mainstream Christian churches, the size of these denominations allows for elements of liberal *and* conservative belief within their frameworks. It is probable, however, that members of conservative denominations (The Assemblies of God for instance) would view somewhat sceptically the conservative factions within these mainstream churches because of their tolerance of the liberal teaching within their affiliation.

<sup>6</sup> This view does not sit particularly well with those advocates of rational choice theory who emphasise its deductive theoretical qualities.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Samuel 16:7 (New International Version).

<sup>8</sup> John 3:16 (New International Version).

<sup>9</sup> John 3:2-8 (New International Version).

<sup>10</sup> There is some dispute over the notion of 'once saved, always saved' within the assemblies of God. The issue is a particularly sensitive one amongst seasoned Pentecostals. In my own experience I have encountered considerable disagreement on the subject. In his book of Assembly of God doctrine *You'd Better Believe It* (Petts, 1991), David Petts (Principal of the Assembly of God Bible College at Mattersey and Chairman of the Assembly of God Executive Council) does not comment specifically on the issue. This could indicate a belief that all who are genuinely converted and who, in earnest, make a commitment to Christ, are assured of their eternal place in Heaven. The contrary position understands there to be a point at which a convert, who has since 'backslidden', is in danger of losing their place in Heaven when finally they stand before God. Hebrews 12:14 says, 'Make every effort to live in peace with all men *and to be holy; without holiness no-one will see the Lord*' (my italics). There is also the

verse in the Book of Revelation which states, 'So, because you are lukewarm - neither hot nor cold - I am about to spit you out of my mouth' (3:16). This latter verse suggests that one's final admission into Heaven is dependent upon the believer to actively maintain and build upon his or her relationship with God in this life. It suggests that the conversion experience alone is not a guarantee of an eternity with God, but that a continuing 'active' devotion to holiness is necessary. This kind of debate eventually leads to the Calvinist versus Armenianist argument and the battle rages so to speak. I will be considering, more closely, the area of theology within the Assemblies of God in chapter five.

<sup>11</sup> The argument, of course, works both ways, and I am aware that in highlighting the partiality of sociological research (given that 'objectivity' is a 'sacred cow' within the discipline) I am implicating myself also. My own partisan views are something which cannot be put aside and my intention is to not try to. A level of objectivity is reached however, in that my open admission of partisanship allows the reader to take this into account and then conclude what they will.

<sup>12</sup> The two words, *soul* and *spirit* are often used interchangeably; this is quite often generally accepted and the distinctions are only ever usually highlighted if this doctrine is considered more closely, possibly in a Bible study or a teaching session.

<sup>13</sup> The assurance of Heaven is granted *only* to those who are born again prior to their death or the Rapture which will take place when Jesus returns.

<sup>14</sup> Scriptures taken from the New International Version.

<sup>15</sup> The young man in this particular example is, in fact, the author of this thesis. The *Cross and the Switchblade* was an enormously popular Christian book which told the true story of the Reverend David Wilkerson and his ministry to members of the street gangs in New York in the 1960s. Many young men and women who had been caught up in a cycle of crime, violence and drug abuse were converted to Christianity. Wilkerson's mission to youth evangelism eventually became known as Teen Challenge. Today Teen Challenge is an international organisation with drug rehabilitation centres throughout America and Europe. After being given the book by a Christian couple who were part of an evangelical 'open air' outreach, I related the accounts of the young people in the story to my own experience and from there became a Christian myself.

<sup>16</sup> Samarín does go on to qualify his use of the term 'conversion' by saying that for evangelical Protestants (non-charismatic) use of the word would always refer to the initial salvation experience. He does suggest however, that for many believers who have experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit, they have testified to a greater '...change in life-style and orientation...than when they first became Christians' (Samarín, 1972: 198).

3

## **Circulation, Homogeneity and the Hybrid Church**

Having discussed the significance of the conversion experience in the life of the Pentecostal believer, I now want to consider some of the categories used to describe and explain the membership of conservative evangelical churches. I will focus primarily on the work of Bibby and Brinkerhoff and suggest that, in the light of a qualitative survey on the concept of conversion, definitions of membership need to be reassessed and new interpretations sought. The categories developed by Bibby and Brinkerhoff describe members as *proselytes* – new converts with no prior church experience or affiliation, *retained* – offspring of existing members, and *re-affiliates* – those members with prior church involvement who are either ‘switching’ their membership from another church, or returning to church-life after a period of non-involvement (Bibby & Brinkerhoff, 1973). Following from a redefined conception of membership, I want to introduce the idea of *change over time*. Although a significant innovation in itself, the redefining of concepts pertaining to membership categories does not go far enough in supplying an adequate description of the Pentecostal experience. Later in this chapter, therefore, I will introduce the concept of the *hybrid church* which results from a synthesis between traditional Pentecostal values, beliefs, expressions and those of the Charismatic movement. Subsequent chapters will attempt to illuminate the characteristics of the hybrid church using the City Christian Centre as an example.

The aim of this chapter, then, is to challenge two oft-assumed notions within the sociology of religion. 1) That the only true converts to a denomination such as the Assemblies of God, are those who have had no prior exposure to or involvement with a conservative Christian group. 2) That conservative churches are static in the areas of theology, practice and structures of organisation. Both of these conceptions, I will argue, are in need of reassessment. In the following three chapters I will present empirical evidence in support of my claim that in these significant areas, the sociology of religion has inadequately understood and represented the sociological crisis of conservative Christian fellowships like the City Christian Centre. From my analysis of this particular congregation I will highlight the significance of the leaders of the church. In their attempts to influence the theological and missiological outlook of the fellowship, rates of the defection, recruitment and ‘returning to the fold’ were greatly affected. Changes in styles of worship, shifts of emphasis in doctrine and practices in church politics are also indicative of leadership styles. Empirical research of the City Christian Centre refutes both the ‘circulation of saints’ and conservative rigidity conceptions, no confirmation of these two understandings are found in my research. In chapter seven, I will show that earlier work on social class and status within Pentecostal churches is also in need of revision.

### **Circulation**

This thesis draws from an ongoing argument. The chief protagonists, in the 1970s, were, on one side, Reginald Bibby and Merlin Brinkerhoff (1973, 1983,

1992, 1994) and on the other, Dean Kelly (1972, 1978). Rather than consider the cycle of ‘research paper - criticism - research paper - criticism’ in a chronological order, I will simply highlight the main themes involved. My aim is to try to break this cycle and provide new insight into this particular debate surrounding conservative church growth, denominational switching, and reasons for and against joining certain fundamentalist churches over the mainline liberal ones. Even if I do not manage to break the cycle fully, I at least hope to put something of a ‘spoke in the wheel’.

The premise of my critique lies in a weak link in Bibby and Brinkerhoff’s work. By re-examining the categories: *proselyte*, *re-affiliate*, and *retained*, I hope to suggest that Kelley’s thesis provides a far more adequate understanding of the tenacity of conservative Christian affiliation, than Bibby and Brinkerhoff would care to admit to. Following from that, I want to redefine these basic categories and focus particularly on the re-affiliate and the notion of *circulating saints*. With these categories, I will not attempt to inform the continuing debate over church growth per se<sup>1</sup>. I want to suggest that greater sociological import can be gained by considering the internal dynamics of conservative churches that have a high turn over of members - churches that see a great number of transfers ‘out’ and transfers ‘in’.

Kelley’s thesis emphasises the significance of ‘ultimate meaning’ and the seriousness of religious commitment. In his book *Why Conservative Churches*

*are Growing* (Kelley 1972), he first highlights a trend of growth for both the mainline churches (which are largely ecumenical in nature) and the smaller denominations (non-ecumenical). Having seen their memberships increase for the past two centuries, Kelley states that, ‘...at least ten of the largest Christian denominations...’ (Kelley 1972:1), gradually saw that growth slow to a stop and then go backwards. These mainline churches, or ‘nominal’ churches (see Toulis, 1997: 52) began to witness a decline in growth: among these were the Lutherans, Episcopalians, Methodists and the Presbyterians. At the same time, the smaller sect-like churches were experiencing increased growth. In an article published in defense of his original work, Kelley states:

...a number of other religious bodies continued to increase at a rate not inferior to the population increase but significantly greater, suggesting not just the momentum of procreation but the impetus of significant attractiveness (Kelley 1979:165).

The reason for this trend, Kelley ascribes to ‘meaning’. The smaller conservative denomination simply does, ‘...a better job at the essential function of religion’ (Kelley 1978: 166). Kelley suggests that the function is ‘making life meaningful in ultimate terms’ (ibid). He distinguishes ‘meaning’ here used, from other bodies of thought or ideological concepts. Philosophy provides any number of conceptual packages of notions yet few can impact upon an individual with the same voracity as a religion. Another element must be prevalent to inspire fervour

in the believer. Kelley concludes that ‘meaning = concept + demand’ (Kelley 1972:52). It is the level of demand placed upon the recipient of the concept that convinces the individual of the seriousness of a given group’s belief. Kelley writes, ‘...if it costs nothing to belong to such a community, it can’t be worth much’ (ibid: 53). He then sums it up this way:

So the quality that enables religious meanings to take hold is not their rationality, their logic, their surface credibility, but rather the demand they make upon their adherents and the degree to which that demand is met by commitment (ibid).

What Kelley stresses is the fulfilment of religious belief in its ability to provide ‘ultimate meaning’. The mainline churches too can offer this, but it is the fervour and the appearance of the lifestyle of the conservative Christian that attract those who are seeking ‘meaning’. The high demands placed upon the members of fundamental churches suggest a more serious approach to personal faith, whether this is the case or not. How it looks to the outsider is that it ‘...simply costs more to be an Adventist than an Episcopalian, not just proportionately but absolutely and not just in money but in the much costlier materials of human life’ (Kelley 1978:168). And following from that Kelley states,

It should not require any very profound insight to suspect that people interested in religious help would be drawn more to a congregation or a

denomination that was trying to be serious about its task than to one that was merely playing at it (ibid:171).

The above outlines the main premise of Kelley's thesis. We will come back to his work, when necessary, in order to give an answer to some of the subsequent attacks by his critics. A major volley was launched by Reginald Bibby and Merlin Brinkerhoff with the publication of the article *Circulation of the Saints: A Study of People Who Join Conservative Churches* (1973). This work focused on the issue of conservative church growth as postulated by Kelley. The Bibby and Brinkerhoff study was concerned with the apparent growth in the number of new members joining conservative Christian churches in Canada. The research was initially undertaken in the early 70s, and then assessed again at various intervals thereafter (Bibby and Brinkerhoff 1983, 1992, 1994. See also Bibby 1978), during a time in which a significant numerical increase was being reported by the smaller conservative or sect-like Protestant denominations.

The aim of the study was to investigate the apparent '...confusion about the differential growth rates among various kinds of churches' (Bibby and Brinkerhoff 1973: 273). With this objective in mind, they considered the background of new church members (over a five year period) to ascertain their previous religious affiliation (if any). Bibby and Brinkerhoff set out to define just who constituted this new growth in church membership and in so doing refuted

Kelley's thesis. Three categories of members were identified, *re-affiliate*, *retained* and *proselyte*.

Membership through *re-affiliation*, which in this study provided 72% of the church's new population, was associated with the notion of *circulating saints*; these were people who had 'switched' churches due to a geographical move or discontent with their current fellowship. A third contingent of the re-affiliated group were those who had restored their membership after a period of inactivity (Bibby and Brinkerhoff, 1973: 275).

Members who were *retained*, in this context, were the offspring of already established church members. Drawing on the earlier observations of Yinger (1970) and Allport (1950), parental influence was seen to play a significant role in rooting subsequent generations into a tradition of evangelicalism and thereby retaining their membership in later life. Bibby and Brinkerhoff did not consider individuals from these two categories -reaffiliate and retained - to be true proselytes. Membership via these channels was considered to be recruitment from within the religious community.

These categories, I have found, miss the point. While on the surface they appear to present data which (according to their own methodology) shows that by far the greater percentage of new members are either *re-affiliates* or the offspring of established members, the concepts used are poorly defined. I draw this

conclusion from my own first hand conception of the terms used and also from the many interviews, conversations and observations carried out during my ethnographic study of the City Christian Centre. Although, on one level, it would be appropriate to label these members as either re-affiliates, retained or proselytized - a standard sociological exercise in categorization - what is lacking is a basic understanding of the concepts used to define these terms. The 'meanings' attached to these categories are grossly under developed and arrived at through a crude quantitative approach. It is not that the labels themselves are totally devoid of sociological value - far from it, it is the assumptions made concerning their substance that create a weak link in Bibby and Brinkerhoff's argument. Without an in-depth qualitative investigation, into the reality of these groups, we can never do more than simply 'head count'. We need to look at the re-affiliate, the retained and the proselyte and ask, 'how does that person view him or herself?' and 'how does the *group* also view them?'

Using primary data from my study; drawing on the accounts of Assembly of God Pentecostals, I want to challenge the assumptions made by Bibby and Brinkerhoff and their understanding of these categories. If my challenge is successful, Kelley's original notion of conservative Christian commitment will be given a new lease of life, as it were.

When reading Bibby and Brinkerhoff, one becomes quickly aware of the distinction made between 'outsiders' and those who are from the 'religious

community'. These are essential components of the theory. A person who is regarded as an 'outsider' has no prior church links, ties or connections or, at least, the ideal type of 'outsider' has no prior affiliation. From Bibby and Brinkerhoff's study, however, it seems as if, in some cases, the authors gave the *proselyte* statistics the benefit of the doubt! They write:

Less than 10 percent were proselytes or converts from outside of the evangelical community, and even these were primarily recruited from churches or became members through intermarriage (Bibby and Brinkerhoff, 1973: 273).

There seems to be no explanation as to why the proportion of proselytes, in the above, were not categorised as re-affiliates. It is those within the religious community who are designated as being either re-affiliates or retained members. The true proselyte, according to Bibby and Brinkerhoff, should have no prior church connections or affiliation. Clearly, to overcome such obvious confusion, there needs to be a redefining of these key concepts along qualitative lines.

In the case of the re-affiliate, it is undoubtedly true (and certainly my own data collected from the City Christian Centre confirms the same) that there is a great deal of church 'switching' from one congregation to another (Hadaway, 1978, 1980; Kluegal, 1980; Mueller, 1971; Roof & Hadaway, 1977, 1979). Sometimes the 'switch' will be immediate, at other times there may well be a period of non-

attendance between the leaving of one church and the joining of another. The character, past experiences and motivations behind the 'switcher' are much more complex than the *Circulation of the Saints* study would have us to believe.

Not all re-affiliates are accepted instantly as brothers and sisters or 'co-workers in Christ' even if their church history is of a Pentecostal or evangelical persuasion. We need to consider their former church association in relation to the perception of the conservative church they are now seeking to become a part of. What Bibby and Brinkerhoff regard as a non-conversion because of previous church history is often regarded by Pentecostals quite differently and it is only right to give an account of this. They are interested in only one thing, whether a person is truly saved or not. Past church affiliation provides no guarantee for this for it is believed that many churches do not understand salvation in such precise terms.

The other category of re-affiliate in the Bibby and Brinkerhoff study are those who are returning to their faith after a period of inactivity. No further elaboration is given to describe this group but the believers at the City Christian Centre would regard anyone who had been inactive in church attendance to be a 'backslider'<sup>2</sup>. The restoring of a 'backslider' to the 'fold' is no casual thing and yet the Bibby and Brinkerhoff study fails to understand the significance of this. On this subject of the 'backslider', Quebedeaux writes,

Pentecostalism has vigorously promoted evangelism. And although the stress has been on “soul-winning”, sanctification, and, of course, Spirit baptism, Pentecostals have also emphasized the “reclaiming” of “backsliders” fallen from grace (Quebedeaux, 1976: 30).

During my interview with Phyllis Shaw, she emphasised the common assumption made by Pentecostals that a break in church attendance was indicative of backsliding.

**Phyllis:** I started going to the City Christian Centre because I was not attending church for years and years. In City Christian Centre ‘speak’ I would be totally backslidden. But I didn’t know that was a word then because I had a Church of England background.

*(Phyllis Shaw, retired school Headteacher in her mid sixties. City Christian Centre member for four years)*

An interesting point raised by Hadaway adds a further dimension to the prior experiences of some re-affiliates. His work *Denominational Switching and Religiosity* (1980) (an American study), suggests that, ‘perhaps 60 percent of switchers are in some sense religious “seekers” who switch as a result of a life-changing religious experience’ (Hadaway 1980: 460). Putting this observation into the context of conservative Christianity, we can surmise that some people become born again while still affiliated to mainline churches that do not advocate

that particular religious experience, or understand salvation in conversionist terms. With the proliferation of conservative evangelical literature, music, television broadcasts and Christian events (Brierley, 1998/99; Poloma, 1982; 171-190), it is quite feasible that a person in a mainline church could convert via one of the above routes. The decision to switch comes from a desire (or need) to be in fellowship with others who have shared the same experience and whose theology matches that of the prospective 'switcher'. One can only wonder how Bibby and Brinkerhoff would have assessed this subject.

A similar mistake of definition, on Bibby and Brinkerhoff's part, is made concerning the *retained* or the offspring of church members. The *Circulation of the Saints* study concludes that it is 'misleading to consider them proselytes when they are really the offspring of evangelicals' (Bibby and Brinkerhoff 1973: 275). The account of both parents and children at City Christian Centre, however, places little relevance on parentage. It is every parent's desire to see their children come to faith, but the emphasis is placed solely on the child's personal commitment and relationship with God. There is no distinction made between the salvation of offspring and that of outsiders or proselytes. In my interview with Edna Roberts, she spoke of concern for her children (Louise and Phillip) with regard to salvation.

**Edna:** We started to worry about Phillip...and with Louise, I mean, we can try to guide them but at the end of the day, it's up to them to make that decision...your life in Jesus is *your* life in Jesus.

*(Edna Roberts, a pensioner in her late sixties. Member of the City Christian Centre for twenty-two years)*

Paul Summers gave me an account of his attitude towards God as a child of ten. Although his parents were strong Christians and the entire family attended an Elim Pentecostal church, Paul acknowledges his indifference to God and speaks of a specific time in his life when he made a commitment to Christ.

**Paul:** There was a very thriving children's youth work, so I was totally happy to go in that environment but I never went to Sunday services on a morning or night time for the whole of my childhood.

**Malcolm:** How did you personally feel about God?

**Paul:** Basically, largely because of the extremely strong character of my father I didn't like the idea of God very much at all. It was all full of 'don't' rather than 'do'. You weren't allowed to play or kick a ball on a Sunday but he thought it was ok to go across the road to get ice cream that he'd ordered on a Saturday, totally hypocritical and stupid.

**Malcolm:** Did you feel antagonistic towards God?

**Paul:** Yes, just not interested basically. I enjoyed being in Sunday school and having a good time and I enjoyed singing. I enjoyed singing in church or out of it because at school I had a good voice, the school had things where you went to City Hall and sang and I was in all that sort of stuff as a youngster. So I enjoyed that part of it but God wasn't really much in the picture, except for a couple of times. Very occasionally the church had what we would call a 'crusade' and on those occasions I would be taken to church and there was a couple of major events like there was Oral Roberts on the scene. There were some films, all Oral Roberts which we were taken to see. The church took over eleven hundred people, it was packed out with people wanting to see the Oral Roberts thing.

**Malcolm:** How old were you then?

**Paul:** Quite young, under ten, round about the age of ten. They also had an American evangelist come and he was a 'hell-fire' preacher and I remember being extremely convicted and feeling terribly guilty of all the wicked things I'd done in life. I put my hand up; he made an appeal at the end.

*(Paul Summers, business manager in his early fifties. Member of the City Christian Centre for twenty years, recently 'switched' to a progressive Charismatic Anglican church)*

Although conceptualised inadequately by Bibby and Brinkerhoff, I do not want to reject their categorisations absolutely. Clearly individuals within any given

congregation can be labeled as proselyte, re-affiliate or retained. The Bibby and Brinkerhoff studies were concerned with church growth whereas my aim so far has been to redefine categories. In their work on New Evangelical movements, Perrin, Kennedy and Miller (1997) suggest that their research on conservative church growth and the issue of 'switching' from mainline evangelical churches to conservative churches, ...may not support an argument that Christianity is growing, but it does support Kelley's claims that conservative churches are growing at the expense of liberal churches (Perrin, Kennedy and Miller 1997:78).

Whether growing or not, conservative Christianity is, at the very least, tenacious and shows no signs of dissipation, quite the opposite in fact. A far more sociologically pertinent question to ask, regarding conservative Christianity would be: what is happening in the churches today? It is to that question we now turn.

### **Towards homogeneity**

Although this ethnographic study centres primarily on one Assembly of God church - City Christian Centre - my observations of evangelical Christianity are much more widespread. It is possible, therefore, not only to offer some generalisations concerning the status of the Assemblies of God nationally, but also to make some tentative, yet relevant observations, pertaining to the wider Christian community. Given time constraints, the scope of this thesis is limited when making reference to larger pictures. During the course of my research,

however, there has been a consistent overlap of church involvement – I have visited many Christian fellowships (see Appendix 2). Any work on church switching and membership will inevitably result in this. It has been possible, therefore, to draw on my experiences within the wider sphere of evangelicalism. The conclusions drawn here leave plenty of room for further research. The evolutionary processes within the sociology of religion are now bringing to light a new vibrancy within religious expression. The discipline is slowly leaving the static secularisation argument behind and, in so doing, focusing on the dynamism of the current era.

It would be a mistake simply to regard religious belief as the last traces of an age gone by. In chapter two we opened the discussion with Steve Bruce's comment on the tenacity of conservative Christianity against what he would consider the prevailing tide of secularisation. The emphasis on this particular focus has created a tendency to overlook the changes taking place even within those Protestant sects and denominations commonly regarded as being dogmatic and stoic in their beliefs. In regarding conservative groups as 'pockets of deviant culture in the heartland of modernity' (Bruce 1990:168), we run the risk of only giving description to, and postulating theories regarding, the determinants of positionality. In such instances, it would be easy to disregard the changes taking place within the 'pockets' themselves. A false impression is often cast.

Western society is thought to be entering a new phase of modernity (Giddens, 1990). While I am reluctant to use the term 'post-modernity', fearing the inference of the trendy theories attached to that particular label, Western societies are evolving into a qualitatively different stage of development. We cannot assume that religious enclaves are excluded from these evolutionary processes. While it is vital that we recognise the unique nature of these groups that are so often set apart from the 'world', it is of equal sociological importance to acknowledge the changes within the religious society also. There are many. Naturally, I want to focus upon those changes that are pertinent to this current work; some overlap, however, is inevitable.

City Christian Center is not representative of the more *traditional* Assembly of God fellowships in Britain. This was not always the case; since its inception and up to the early 1980s, it could have been identified alongside any number of other Pentecostal churches in Britain. Its style of worship, the emphasis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the style of preaching, all were indicative of traditional Assembly of God characteristics. Even the various feuds and divisions were in keeping with the vast majority of internal church political conflicts and disputes<sup>3</sup>.

Since the beginning of the 1980s, Fig Tree Gospel Hall, and then the City Christian Centre began to be transformed<sup>4</sup>. This transformation, however, is not easy to define. It is the product of many influences both within the church and without. It has been both accelerated and retarded by certain individuals and

small cliques. Its expression is a duality of intense religious ascetic fervour and spiritual liberty from the bondage of tradition. This *liberty* is not only a 'release' from the austerity of mainstream religious institutions - this has always been a defining characteristic within Pentecostalism - but a release from the Assembly of God traditions too. The changes that have taken place (and are still progressing) within the City Christian Centre are significant because they are creating a new Pentecostal incarnation that is no longer confined to the fellowship of my study. There is a 'breaking away' from even the mainstream Assembly of God tradition. New territory is being gained on the part of these progressive Pentecostals and there is great potential for future study into this evolutionary process.

It is important to note that, in most cases, the nature of the transformations taking place is subtle and does not always constitute a direct polarization between the old and the new. There are varying degrees of change present in many evangelical and Charismatic churches and many peaks and troughs of belief and expression, the contours of which largely accommodate other 'brothers and sisters in Christ'. It is from this milieu of interaction and accommodation, within the Pentecostal/Charismatic community, that the seeds of change are nurtured. Surprisingly, the often-individualistic fellowships that transpire do so in part because of a melting pot effect that is evident in Britain at this time. Advances in technologies and communications have impacted the contemporary Christian 'scene' in Britain and produced a homogeneity of Christian expression.

The last thirty years have witnessed a technological and resource revolution in the proliferation of the message of evangelical Christianity. The substance of the communications is, in fact, two fold. It is a message of salvation to a 'lost world' but it is also, and it would seem to be, more predominantly, a message of encouragement to Christians. The areas in which technological communications have excelled in recent years can be categorised as: radio, television, the world wide web and literature. The Christian 'world' has also seen advances in the professionalism of major events (such as Spring Harvest), conferences, and Bible study resources (the Alpha Course). Christianity in Britain is revamping its image and although evidence of the hoped-for revival may be hazy, charismatic Christians seem to be less bound to denominational traditions and are themselves experiencing a new kind of freedom.

It is in this milieu that the seeds of change find fertile soil. A Christian populace leveled by the uniformity of shared resources and experience becomes less tolerant with the dogma of denominationalism, and a general dilution occurs within the different churches in relation to the traditions and standards of the past. While there may be numerous variables to explain the rapidity and degree of change within any given fellowship, it would seem appropriate to reintroduce the concept of *circulating saints* at this particular juncture. The involvement - the influence - of the individual plays a significant part in the transformation process.

In attempting to conceptualise the end product - the effect of the general shift from heterogeneity upon individual churches - we are presented with a multi-faceted form. No two churches are the same and yet it is possible to give expression to particular traits. Certain similarities are indicative of a new expression within evangelical conservative churches; it is becoming increasingly problematic to differentiate between Pentecostalism and the wider Charismatic movement, a distinction that has been commonly drawn.

The use and exercising of charismata<sup>5</sup> (the gifts of the Holy Spirit) have been traditionally the distinguishing feature of Pentecostal groups (the main denominations being the Assemblies of God, Elim and the Apostolic Church). The early 1960s, however, saw the emergence of a charismatic expression within the mainline church institutions. The label 'Pentecostal' may well have been indirectly applied to those Church of England and Methodist charismatics and yet the two movements did not sit together comfortably.

In his book *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (1989), Bebbington observes this historic divide between British Pentecostals and the Charismatic movement. He writes, 'For all its legacy from Pentecostalism, the Charismatic movement had different cultural affinities' (Bebbington 1989:232). He briefly considers the dissonance between the two groups and his observations are most pertinent to our discussion of the transformation of Pentecostal expression. Some of the themes we will touch upon here recur throughout this study and inform our

understanding of the dynamics present within the City Christian Centre. The fusion of these once distanced groups has, effectively, deconstructed the City Christian Centre's former incarnation and reconstituted it into what we see today.

Doctrinally, the Charismatic movement, according to Bebbington, could not accept that speaking in tongues was the sole confirmation of a person's baptism in the Spirit (see also McGuire, 1982; Neitz, 1987; Poloma, 1982). Had it been only for that one source of disagreement, Pentecostals and Charismatics could probably still have enjoyed a degree of fellowship together. The Elim Church did not subscribe to that particular teaching; it is the Assemblies of God who have traditionally firmly upheld it (see Petts, 1991, chapter 15). There were, however, more far-reaching and intangible difficulties between the two movements.

Firstly, it would be reasonable to assume that social background may have been a hindrance to a closer unity. In addition to the possible class status divisions of those who formed the congregations of Church of England establishments and those of Pentecostal chapels<sup>6</sup>, the non-conformist or Free Church mentality was an obvious barrier. Expressions of worship and the emphasis on more informal modes of church structure and organisation were indicative - amongst established Pentecostals - of a belief system that propagated the notion of a 'personal relationship' with God. This was opposed to the 'religion' espoused by the more conventional Church of England. Although the Charismatics represented a move away from orthodoxy and experienced a renewed sense of God along more

conservative lines, history and tradition are compelling ambassadors; neither movement's past sat well in the other's camp.

Traditional ties also connected Charismatics with those elements, within the large institutionalised churches, that were particularly unsettling to Pentecostals.

Bebbington talks of the 'suspicion' that Pentecostals generally held, 'that the new movement...compromised with the doctrinal errors of liberals and Roman Catholics' (Bebbington 1989:231. See also Poloma, 1982, chapter 2). Liberal theology, to the conservative Christian, represents the polar opposite of his or her religious convictions and beliefs. It is quite usual for there to be no discernible points of agreement. At the very heart of the divide is the question over whether or not the Bible is the inspired word of God. While there are always degrees of liberalism, an archetypal 'liberal' (as far as a Pentecostal is concerned) is someone who 'adds' to or 'subtracts' from the Scriptures. As the basis for all doctrine, the Bible, for the conservative Christian, is all sufficient and infallible.

In her study of an African-Caribbean Pentecostal church in Birmingham (New Testament Church of God), Nicole Rodriguez Toulis observes a similar interpretation of the Bible amongst believers there.

In the COG, the Bible is taken literally as the inspired word of God, and the New Testament represents the only legitimate rule of government and discipline for the Church. If a form of organisation or practice is not

found in the Bible or if the Bible expressly forbids certain practices, these will not be condoned by the church. Belief and practice are supported with reference to relevant scriptural passages and Biblical citation (Toulis 1997: 139).

In practice however, Pentecostals have a tendency to regard this understanding of the Bible in an often-contradictory manner. When asked about the Bible, the Pentecostal will, more often than not, respond by saying that the ‘Word’ should be taken literally. But even the term ‘literally’ needs to be understood in a particular way. There are, in fact, instances in which particular interpretations of the words seem to contradict the literal meaning. An example of this can be found in the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. Speaking about the cost of being a disciple Jesus says,

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters - yes, even his own life - he cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:26..)<sup>7</sup>

Clearly, this seems like a strange thing to say if God is Love, so the Pentecostal will interpret it in a certain way to accommodate, and keep consistent, other portions of Scripture. What is of particular sociological significance with this pattern, is that the onus is on the believer to accommodate and interpret the Bible in a way that does not detract from, or question, its fallibility. In the mind of the

conservative believer, a major problem within liberal theological thinking is the failure to acknowledge the Bible in the same way. Although a degree of interpretation does take place for the conservative, those major teachings in the Bible that would challenge the faith of the liberal to believe, are accepted without question. Creation, the virgin birth of Christ, the miracles of Jesus, His death and resurrection, the doctrine of salvation, Heaven and Hell, all are accepted and unquestioned.

Liberal theology has tended to re-evaluate Scripture and accommodate it to fit around the rationale of science. The story of Creation, for example, would be considered to be symbolic and not literal, so too would the virgin birth and the miracles. A more radical departure from the fundamental interpretation would be the downplaying of the doctrine of sin and the necessity for salvation. A story was relayed to me recently by a conservative Christian who was training to be a Methodist minister. During a college seminar, a 'liberal' instructor asked the class if any student believed in the concept of 'original sin'. The conservative believer raised his hand and a ripple of sardonic laughter was the response from both the instructor and his fellow students. Liberals cannot tolerate the inflexibility of conservatives and conservatives cannot tolerate the flexibility of liberals.

Although the seemingly astringent beliefs of conservative Christians are difficult for many to negotiate, the doctrine of the infallible truth of the Bible is

philosophically logical. Like a house of cards, to remove one compromises the entire structure, so too with the Bible, to dismiss one verse, questions the validity of the others. Nevertheless, the impasse stands and the close proximity of the Charismatics to liberal believers and institutions has created much suspicion and a barrier to greater acceptance.

A slightly different emphasis has traditionally been placed upon Roman Catholics by Pentecostals. Catholicism, by and large, has been deemed as an heretical religion. Meredith McGuire has written that, ‘...a strong anti-Catholic strain in classical Pentecostalism still exists and hinders efforts for “ecumenical” Pentecostal activities’ (McGuire, 1982: 4). Whereas Protestant liberals could be regarded as being ‘misled’ or ‘confused’, Catholics were thought to embody and actively propagate erroneous doctrine in a much more institutionalised fashion. The emphasis placed upon Mary the Mother of God, the prayers to the saints and the ‘idolatry of the Pope’ and the practice of the Confessional, all conflict greatly with Pentecostal evangelical teaching.

A further point of division juxtaposes with the ‘questionable’ tradition of Charismatics and the ties with liberal theology. Concerning the baptism in the Spirit, Bebbington writes:

Traditionally, Pentecostals had tarried for the experience with careful self-examination for moral shortcomings. It was a sign of their rootedness in

the holiness tradition. Charismatics, by contrast, looked for a sudden sense of release rather than for any moral transformation. That was symptomatic of an ethos that stressed immediacy, the human capacity for instant heightened awareness (Bebbington 1989:232).

What irked the Pentecostals so much was the seeking and exercising of the 'gifts' without the accompanying piety of lifestyle - a life informed through the instruction of the 'Word'. Pentecostals, as we know, do not shy away from emotive experience or expression in worship<sup>8</sup>. Nor have they traditionally placed a greater emphasis on experience than they have on the Bible. For the Pentecostal, the Bible is God's word and so all thought, action and experience is tested and filtered through it. With the possible exception of being 'slain in the Spirit',<sup>9</sup> all the various manifestations displayed, at various times, by Pentecostals, whether in the styles of worship they adopt or the demonstrations of the gifts of the Spirit, are firmly supported by Scripture. The Charismatics, on the other hand, had not shared in such a puritanical tradition and coming, predominantly, from higher church structures and modes of worship, the emphasis seemed to focus more on their new found freedom. Intense Bible study was a secondary consideration. 'Experience was likewise elevated above theology in the charismatic scale of values' (Bebbington 1989:242).

The above discussion concerning the divisions between Pentecostals and the Charismatic movement of the 1960s to the present, needs to be understood

retrospectively. This is not to say that the factors presented above no longer exist: clearly they do. Yet, the transformation that is taking place within contemporary Pentecostalism can be seen as a move towards an alignment with the Charismatic experience and the adopting of the Charismatic mindset. This we can attribute partly to the commonality of experience shared by both Pentecostals and Charismatics. To consider briefly the Catholic Charismatic movement we can see how affiliation between these potentially antagonistic groups might be facilitated.

According to Neitz (1987), Catholic Charismatic Renewal first emerged in 1967 after two Duquesne University faculty members were baptised in the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues. She writes, 'In the Catholic church the Charismatic movement began on college campuses and spread to the religious orders...' (Neitz, 1987: 214). Although disparate in innumerable ways, major interpretations of Scripture share a common ground within the experience of Catholic Charismatics and Pentecostals. Neitz talks about the centrality of conversion and the inclusion of the 'altar call' within Catholic Charismatic meetings.

People were invited to come to the altar for prayer by members of the community if they had needs that did not get expressed in the meeting itself. Those who had not yet made the decision to accept Jesus as their personal saviour received a special invitation to do so (Neitz, 1987: 217).

The conduct of the meetings also coincided with those of the Pentecostals with, ‘...prophetic voices, shouts, sometimes people falling on the floor – “slain in the spirit”’ Neitz (1987: 217). This kind of expression is exhibited by Protestant Charismatics also: Margaret Poloma, in her book *The Charismatic Movement: Is there a new Pentecost?* (1982) gives this description of praise and worship in a Charismatic meeting.

In addition to prophecy and glossolalia, other more or less common practices include “singing in the Spirit,” the “holy jerk,” and “dancing in the Spirit.” Such practices, believed to be initiated by the power of the Holy Spirit, would be bizarre at a non-charismatic service. A person ‘slain in the Spirit’ lies seemingly unconscious on the floor as the rest of the service continues. “Singing in the Spirit’ involves a chorus of glossolalia, often with musical instruments performing extemporaneously. Those doing the ‘holy jerk’ walk up and down the aisles with spasmodic bodily movement. “Dancing in the Spirit’ includes dancing in place or sometimes in the aisles during congregational singing (Poloma, 1982: 164).

The belief in the baptism and the gifts of the Holy Spirit is of course a major doctrine common to classical Pentecostals and Charismatics both Protestant and Catholic. McGuire comments that the significance of speaking in tongues for the Catholic Charismatic has been undermined in some Renewal literature (Mcguire,

1982, chapter 4. See also O'Connor, 1971). She goes on to suggest however, that, 'Tongue-speaking is very important as a recognizable sign of baptism in the Holy Spirit' (McGuire, 1982: 79). This view is corroborated to some extent by Neitz who acknowledges that on a grass roots level the gifts of tongues '...is often the first received' (Neitz, 1987: 39) amongst Charismatics. A more official response from Catholic Charismatic leaders however, has traditionally been that speaking in tongues is not the sole confirmation sign of a person's baptism in the Holy Spirit (see Neitz; 1987, chapter 7).

Clearly significant similarities exist between classical Pentecostals and Charismatics. As switching occurs, shared beliefs conjoin with interpersonal *contact* and this can create a potent bond of relationship. An example of this can be drawn from the attendance of an Episcopal nun at the City Christian Centre in the mid 1980s. Sister Arnold's family were regular attendees at the City Christian Centre. Her sister, Helen, had been the first in the family to be saved (in the Pentecostal sense) and her witness had brought her parents 'to the Lord'. Mary Arnold had been a nun long before the rest of her family had come into contact with the church. At Helen's invitation, she accompanied her family to the occasional 'special' meeting and gradually became a regular attendee at the Sunday evening services and the midweek Bible studies whenever her other commitments allowed her to take the time. Although very obviously not a Pentecostal in the institutionalised sense of the term – Mary would always wear her habit to church – her acceptance was unhindered. She was not only well liked

by all who met her, but she was also venerated for her service to the wider Christian community and for her *spirituality*. Whereas one may have anticipated a level of conflict based upon divergent religious traditions, quite the opposite was displayed. Although the terminology was never applied at the time, Mary was a neo-Pentecostal and had been particularly attracted to the style and expression of the meetings at the City Christian Centre. The combination of shared beliefs in the significance of the Holy Spirit *and* the potent dynamic of interpersonal contact forged a mutual respect between the two parties that became particularly conducive to forming a deep level of fellowship.

Although we begin to see a merging of Christian expression, Pentecostals do not simply become Charismatics, nor do Charismatics become Pentecostals. There is, however, a new expression that is particular to each individual church, and more specifically, to each Assembly of God fellowship. Evidence of similar transformation, in varying degrees, can be found in all Pentecostal churches regardless of denomination. It is reasonable to assume however that the churches that are in fellowship with the Assemblies of God are more susceptible to change due to the structure of the organisation at large.

The Elim Church (formerly the Elim Foursquare Gospel Alliance), due in part to its financial arrangements, has operated a much more centralised government over its churches. The Apostolic Church also, because of its teaching on the office of the apostle, has secured authority over its congregations (see

Hollenweger, 1972; Nichol, 1966; Wilson, 1961). William Kay, writing of D.P. Williams, a founding father of the Apostolic Church, states:

Williams, however, came to teach that the prophetic office in the church should be expected to “give governmental words of prophecy” and, indeed, “the prophet reveals doctrinal truths to the church” (Kay 1990:45).

The centralised legacies of these denominations, it is reasonable to assume, could have had an insulating effect upon individual fellowships thereby making them more resistant to change. The Assemblies of God, however, do not have a strong tradition of centralised government. Each Assembly is considered to be ‘in fellowship’ with the General Council of the Assemblies of God and to be in agreement with the constitution; nevertheless the affiliation allows for great freedom and flexibility within the individual churches. The Assemblies of God came into being in 1924. Earlier attempts *had* been made to unify free Pentecostal churches that were not part of the Elim or Apostolic groups - both were already formed at that time – but to no avail. A conference in Sheffield in 1922 tried to establish this unity with the formation of the The General Council of the Assemblies of God and the Constitution, but the movement, at that time, failed to get off the ground. Of this Kay writes:

The reasons for reluctance to identify with the General Council's Constitution are unclear: it may be that suggestion that the General Council "be empowered to exercise any needed discipline as required by Scripture over the recognised workers of the assemblies" smacked too much of an authoritarian central government. (Kay 1990: 71).

Clearly, there seemed to be much emphasis, on the part of the individual churches, for retaining autonomy. When finally, a more positive step was taken towards the formation of the Assemblies of God, the question of authority and central control was addressed. Nelson Parr, a leading figure in the Pentecostal scene in Manchester, circulated a letter in November 1923 to a number of Pentecostal leaders urging their support for a union. Parr laid down the leading areas in which the affiliation would operate. They were:

- 1) To preserve the testimony of the full Gospel including the Baptism of the Holy Spirit with signs following and to save the work from false teaching.
- 2) To strengthen the bonds of fellowship and to obtain a fuller degree of co-operation among Assemblies.
- 3) To present a united witness to those outside.
- 4) To exercise discipline over those who walk disorderly. To fail to recognise authority of those who have rule over us in the church throws the door open to lawlessness.

5) To save a number of Assemblies from falling into unscriptural organisations. (cited in Kay, 1990:72-73).

Parr goes on to address the issue of government specifically by adding,

...there can be union without Legislative Authority, without “Centralization” and without interference in local church government from any council or committee that the assemblies may see fit to appoint for advisory or executive purposes. (ibid:73).

With this tempered approach, in which the concerns of the local assemblies, regarding autonomy, were allayed, Parr’s efforts proved fruitful and a year later in 1924 the Assemblies of God were established. This patrimony of freedom and individuality has been maintained (and reinforced) throughout the history of the movement. Today it is quite possible to participate within a church that is in fellowship with the Assemblies of God and simply not be aware of it. The looseness of the association with the main body of the Assemblies of God can create a church environment receptive to new ideas, waves of fashionable theology and modes of worship. A major principle of membership with the Assemblies of God is to provide the churches with a ‘covering’ in order to protect them from false doctrine and establish a system of accountability. Should they wish to deviate, however, individual assemblies usually have more than enough rope to do so without significant interference from the larger organisation for a

long period of time. In chapter seven, I will provide an example of how deviation from the accepted doctrinal position of the Assemblies of God was negotiated at the City Christian Centre. Significantly, intervention came, not from the Assemblies of God, but from the Evangelical Alliance.

### **The Hybrid Church**

Having considered the historical background of, and the extent to which, a transforming process may be occurring within individual churches, I now want to consider the characteristics of such changes. Some points of qualification need to be considered first. My work is centred on one Assembly of God church although I have observed and collected data from several churches (some within the Assemblies of God, others not). My main focus has been concentrated, however, on the one case study. Consequently, it has been possible only to highlight those areas of change and those dynamics that have permeated the one fellowship. There are, of course, degrees of change and variations of interaction particular to individual groups.

Given the above, my research suggests the emergence of a super church or *hybrid church* within the Charismatic/Pentecostal domain. For reasons already considered, it is no longer appropriate to confine this notion to the Assemblies of God churches per se. Whereas it is possible to identify the hybrid church in the Assemblies of God denomination (City Christian Centre being my first and

obvious example), similar elements are to be found in churches of other denominations. The following characteristics are evident:

- 1) A new experience and expression in worship.
- 2) Changes in the traditionally perceived standards of 'lifestyle'.
- 3) Changes in the status and role of the leadership.

*A new experience and expression in worship.* Praise and worship are both public and private acts of devotion and adoration. Although it is in the nature of this study to attempt to highlight the subjective, the focus of my attention upon the area of worship will concentrate upon the public sphere. The transformation in expression of praise and worship recorded in this thesis (see chapter 4), reaches far beyond a superficial preference for a more contemporary 'style' (Sample, 1998; White, 1993). It is indicative of deep changes and shifts in emphasis within the theology of the believers at the City Christian Centre.

Pentecostals have always been associated with a more informal mode of public worship - the Ralph Vaughan Williams of the Church of England coming to be replaced by Fanny Crosby! Set liturgies were discarded and hand clapping and hand raising became the norm in traditional Pentecostal meetings. Although these expressions remain, there has been a revolution in music and song and a similar revolution in the spectacle of praise and worship - the traditional piano and organ

now replaced by the 'worship band', the clapping and waving now just precursors to the dancing, kneeling, jumping, shaking and running!

*Changes in the traditionally perceived standards of 'lifestyle'*. Although the issue of 'how a Christian should conduct him or herself in the world' can, again, be considered a subjective matter (to be born again is to have a *personal* relationship with God), Pentecostals have traditionally operated an effective system of accountability within individual fellowships. The system is two-fold: first, there is instruction and guidance for holy living taught from the 'pulpit' and a cadre of institutionalised standards and norms understood through the appropriation of a defined *theology*. Secondly, there is accountability on a grass roots level. A congregation consists of mentors, counsellors, prayer partners and home fellowship leaders who, by and large, support, encourage and tend to the 'flock' on a day to day informal basis. The City Christian Centre has, more often than not, developed a deep sense of community and involvement between 'brothers and sisters in Christ' which has reached high levels of intensity. Interpersonal relationships provide accountability; a system of checks and balances in one's Christian walk.

A marked decline in the monitoring of accepted standards of lifestyle has evolved over the last twenty years. Again, it is possible to tie these changes into a deeper theological groundswell; a perceived move away from the bonds of denominational traditionalism towards a new 'release', a new freedom of

experience. Two aspects of this change are particularly provocative for the sociologist and particularly relevant to the current work and the notion of the dissemination of influence and new ideas generated by ‘circulating saints’. Firstly, the rapidity and profundity of this change suggest the possibility of non-exclusivity within the City Christian Centre (and, indeed, other fellowships in which a similar transformation is taking place). A fellowship will not remain static. Secondly, although there is a breakdown in the former modes of conduct and accepted life practices, spiritual intensity and earnestness remain. Holiness in lifestyle is sought with much fervour. The changes taking place, although tied into a wider theological debate, are, for the most part, due to an altered perception of what it is to be *holy*.

*Changes in the status and role of the leadership.* Any talk of *change* must be understood as an evolutionary process. Changes are not instant and in the case of the City Christian Centre, my study charts, in detail, a twenty-year period shared between three very distinctive leadership figures. Within this period, Pastor Hedges (1976-1983) is representative of the traditional pastor. Chapter six covers in greater detail the issues connected with the leadership and organisation of the City Christian Centre and the traits and personalities of its leaders. We shall see that, although, from the ‘old school’ of Pentecostal ministers, Pastor Hedges displayed a propensity for innovation that cut across the ideal type of the Assembly of God pastor. His predecessor, Jeffrey Fuller, could be regarded as being traditional along standard denominational lines.

Pastor Dale (1983-88) was instrumental in radically changing the face of the City Christian Centre. Under his ministry the church entered a new phase of praise and worship and he paved the way for a supernatural *revolution*. Dale preferred the role of 'teacher' to that of 'pastor' (that fact alone being a departure from the traditional role of the 'shepherd' tending the flock) and instigated intensive teaching and training sessions. The emphasis on the experiential became all consuming and, if not altered, standard Assembly of God doctrine was certainly stretched somewhat under his ministry.

Pastor Young (1988-present) who also considers his main strength to lie in teaching and leadership as opposed to pastoring completes our account to the present day. Far less gregarious than the two who preceded him, George Young has slowly embarked upon a reworking of the past. He has had to do much to overcome the effects of the strong influence of the charisma found in the personalities of Pastor Hedges and Pastor Dale. Though all three leaders were/are vastly different in character they each displayed certain common traits. Out of the three, Pastor Hedges, on the whole, shared fewer characteristics with the other two, but all of their personalities, beliefs and actions contributed to the transformation of the City Christian Centre. Leadership transmogrified from *pastor to prophet*.

In the next three chapters I will consider more closely the transformation of the City Christian Centre in relation to the points discussed above. Chapter four presents observations and data from three worship services each representative of a different time period from the last twenty years. With these observations, it will be possible to chart the transformation of the worship expression comparatively. Issues pertaining to changes in lifestyle, I discuss in chapter five. As ‘lifestyle’ for the Pentecostal is determined by theological conviction, I will assess the changes apparent within the interpretation of doctrine also through comparative analysis of past and present. Chapter six will follow a similar line of analysis but in relation to the organisation of the church and the influence of its leaders.

#### ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Although Kelley lit the fuse, as it were, to the series of ongoing arguments over conservative church growth, his initial focus was not really the issue of growth. In his 1978 article he confesses that his publishers actually chose the title of his book *Why Conservative Churches are Growing* and, as a result, a shift in emphasis resulted. On this Kelley writes, ‘If the title were to sum up the book, it would be something more like “Why Strict Churches Are Strong” - whether “liberal” or “conservative” - whether growing in members at the time or not. (Kelly 1978:167). The inference in this book title directs the attention away from the question of church growth and points us towards a number of other issues pertaining to the enduring qualities of ‘strict’ churches.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Backslider’ – a person who had once made a commitment to Christ and who, at some point after their conversion, had reneged on that commitment.

<sup>3</sup> The arrival of a new pastor would, in many churches, trigger grievances. The change of leadership would, in some cases, provoke displays of allegiance to either the old pastor or the new one. This situation, of course, would be more pronounced if the former minister was not moving on to another church. This was the case at Fig Tree Gospel Hall in the mid 1970s when Pastor Hedges was inducted. A particularly bitter dispute developed between the supporters of the former pastor – Jeffrey Fuller – and those of Pastor Hedges. Chapter six provides a more detailed account of those events.

<sup>4</sup> Even the change of name from the Fig Tree Gospel Hall to the City Christian Centre is a prophetic pointer to the transmogrification of this particular church. An analogy can be drawn from the conversion of Paul and how, prior to his experience on the Damascus road, his name had been Saul. Just as his name change was a first indication of an internal change within, so too is the name change of this fellowship.

<sup>5</sup> Assembly of God doctrine understands this concept to have a two-fold meaning. From the Greek root *charis* we get the concept of ‘grace’ and the full word *charisma* refers to a *gift*. David Pettes describes the notion this way, ‘...the basic

idea behind the gifts of the Spirit is that they are gifts which God gives because of His grace' (Petts, 1991:105).

<sup>6</sup> Certainly the issue of class differences has been expounded by many in the field. Hunter, in his work on evangelicalism, for example, suggests that conservative evangelicals are from '...the lower echelons of educational achievement, income level and occupational status' (Hunter, 1983:59). The question of class is investigated further in chapter seven.

<sup>7</sup> New International Version.

<sup>8</sup> A joke and an attempt at self-parody amongst Pentecostals would be to describe a picture in which they envision themselves 'hanging from the chandeliers' during a particularly ebullient praise and worship time!

<sup>9</sup> There is some debate within the Pentecostal movement as to the Scriptural basis of this phenomenon. The experience of 'falling down' (usually within the context of a church meeting) is believed to be a demonstration of the power of God.

**4****Worship**

This chapter will highlight the different practices of praise and worship at the City Christian Centre over the last twenty years. Observations and accounts from three periods will show that, within a relatively short space of time, the style, pattern and emphasis of the worship experience have altered significantly. This is one characteristic of the hybrid church.

In order to provide a context for the different meetings here presented, I have devoted considerable space to 'description'. Predominantly this chapter comprises participant observation material. My intention is to immerse the reader into the unique culture of the City Christian Centre (formerly the Fig Tree Gospel Hall). I have, at times, pursued various observations and events that do not directly relate to the format of the worship services. These detours are intentional and my hope is that a greater understanding of Pentecostal fellowship and interaction will result.

The first of the three sections in this chapter will provide an account of a Sunday morning service typical of the meetings conveyed by Pastor John Hedges from the late 1970s to the early 1980s. Section two will describe a meeting from 1986 with the church under the leadership of John Hedges's replacement, Roy Dale. The third service we will consider brings us more or less up to date – a Sunday

morning Celebration service under the ministry of the current Pastor, George Young. Significantly, each description provides an account of the same meeting (Sunday morning 'Breaking of Bread' or 'Communion' service) but from a different era. The following observations provide a cogent illustration of the changing patterns of worship amongst Pentecostal believers.

### **Fig Tree Gospel Hall 1979-1983: The plan and design**

It is hard to imagine, given the generous dimensions of the new building, that the old building had ever looked big. Yet the main hall, which could accommodate over a hundred (at a pinch), provided more than twice enough room for the thirty or so people who formed the nucleus of Fig Tree's congregation in the latter half of the 1970s. I had acquired quite a familiarity with the geography of Kingston by the age of fourteen<sup>1</sup>. Northumberland Street, and the estate - both industrial and residential - which it led to, however, was new to me. The modern brick building stood out amidst the grimy factories and workshops that flanked it. It looked neat and compact with a well-maintained grass perimeter and concrete car park. A large notice board, giving the times for the weekly church meetings and activities, could be clearly seen by anyone approaching the church: underneath these notices was the name of the Pastor, 'Rev. John Hedges'. There was a small flower bed directly opposite the blue entrance doors and to the right of the entrance grew a fig tree which partially obscured some of the white, wooden lettering on the wall which ran - 'Fig Tree Gospel Hall'.

The building comprised a generous foyer with doors leading to the lavatories to the left and a small office to the right. Another door led to a corridor, the walls of which were lined with coat pegs. Along the corridor were two rooms. The first had been called many things and was used as a Sunday school classroom and a general small meeting room. During the era in which I was first introduced to Fig Tree, the room was affectionately referred to as the 'Craig-Alan' room in memory of the early founders of the fellowship, Miss Craig and Miss Alan. Over the next decade however, the room was also known as the 'blue room' (this name was adopted simply because of the blue paint it was decorated with). Later it would be referred to as the 'rec room', not to be confused with the 'rec hall' which was the name for the minor hall at the end of the corridor.

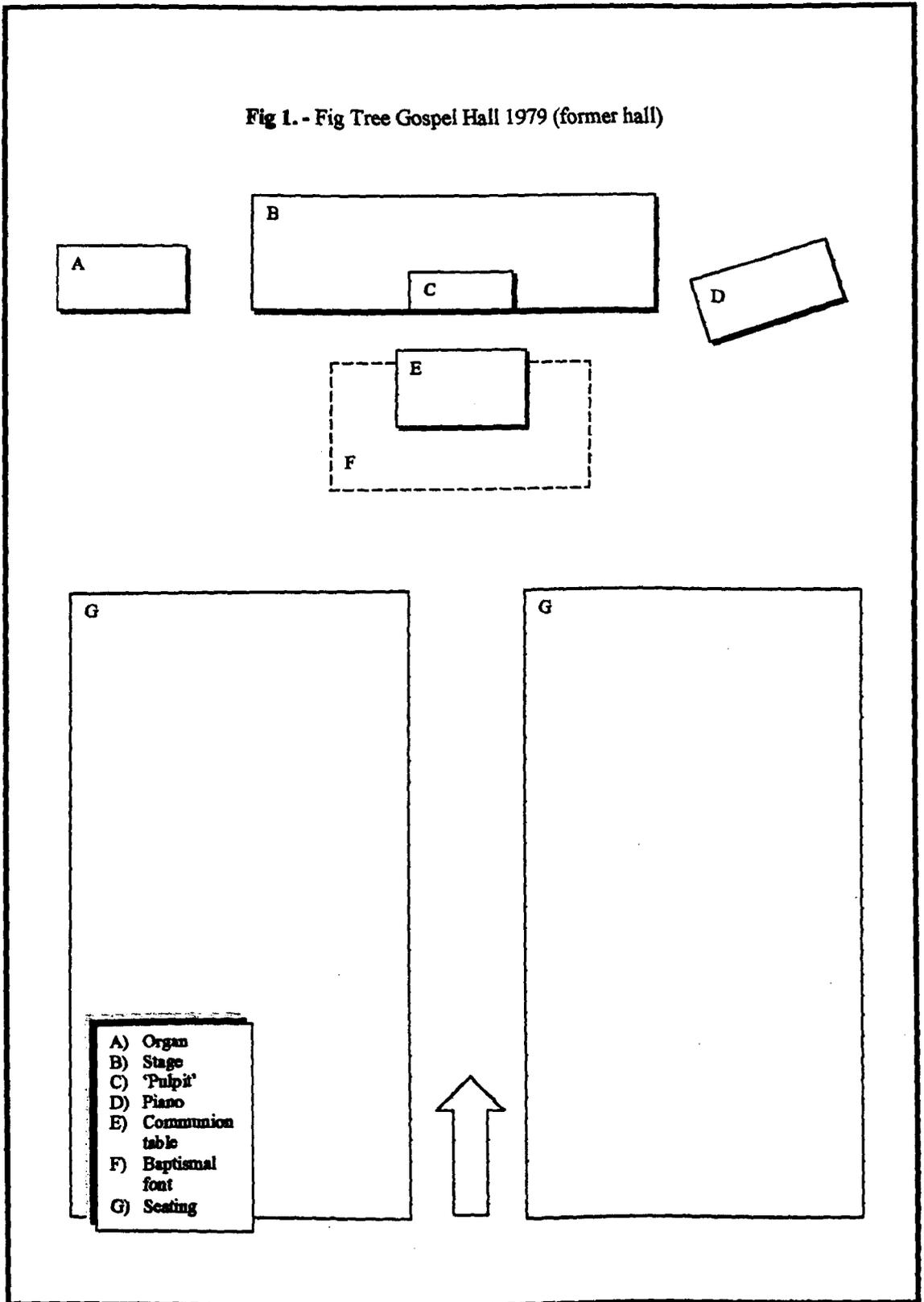
Next to the 'blue room' was the kitchen, well stocked out with china cups, saucers and plates. It was essential for a fellowship such as Fig Tree to be well equipped in order to cater for visitors and guests. As well as providing refreshments, after the Sunday morning Breaking of Bread service, for its own congregation, an Assembly of God church calendar would necessarily have many 'special' meetings and conventions during the year. These occasions attracted whole congregations from other churches, often from out of town. It was considered a day out and a church would hire a coach, if necessary, and enjoy the fellowship between themselves and their hosts for the day. Big name speakers would be invited, special music items would be included in the programme and in

between the afternoon service and the evening service (which both included two sermons) there would be a buffet lunch. A grand affair. The arrangement was, of course, reciprocal and Fig Tree's congregation enjoyed many powerful outings as guests. There was no need, however, to hire a coach for such events; the church owned its own forty-eight seater which they called the 'Life Liner'.

This coach was used extensively not only in supplying transport for numerous conventions, rallies and church outings, but for the regular church services too. Two hours before each service, the collection 'round' would commence, touring the city to pick up all those members who were unable to get to the church (conveniently) under their own steam. It was quite a commitment to make to a congregation and yet for over five years, spanning the late 1970s to the early 1980s, it was faithfully kept by just a few people who held the proper licence to drive such a vehicle. Pastor Hedges pledged himself the lion's share.

Reference has already been made to the minor hall at the end of the corridor. This was used for children's activities during the week and as a general fellowship area (a hatch from the kitchen opened out into the hall, making it convenient to serve cups of tea). The design of the building also made it possible for the 'rec hall' to become an overflow seating area for the main hall; the two were divided by a large screen. The main hall was a simple rectangle shape. It was sparsely decorated with a cream coloured emulsion applied directly over the interior breezeblocks. Having gained access through the foyer and double doors, two

Fig 1. - Fig Tree Gospel Hall 1979 (former hall)



blocks of seating, divided by an aisle, faced a simple raised platform upon which stood the 'pulpit'. Behind it, on the wall there was a large wooden cross and above that the words, 'Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever'.

Along the external wall there were seven vertical windows made with reinforced glass (the kind that looks frosted and obscures detail). To the right of the stage stood the piano and to the left, the organ; in front of the 'pulpit' stood a large ornate table upon which the Breaking of Bread service emblems were placed for the Sunday morning service.

A door was situated on either side of the stage area; they both led into a narrow corridor, it was possible to access this corridor from the 'rec hall' too. Three small rooms led off from it; two were used as Sunday school classrooms and the third as the Pastor's vestry.

The building was not elegant, nor could it have been considered stylish or 'posh'. It was functional and compact, a simple brick and breezeblock construction with no frills. How different in composition (and significance) the Fig Tree Gospel Hall was from many churches of other denominations, Methodist and Anglican in particular. To some the church is the building but to the believers who were part of the 'family' at Fig Tree the church, indeed, was the people, 'the body of Christ'. Other churches, with a more ceremonial religious expression would place a great deal of importance upon the architectural design of the buildings. Those within the Assemblies of God adopted a much more utilitarian approach to their

chapels, halls, missions and churches. It was a case of how best to use the space available to further the 'Kingdom of God'. Of course, there is plenty of room for debate here concerning how Christian denominations would define 'furthering the Kingdom'. Some would argue that the erecting of great cathedrals, the installing of magnificent organs and the use of worship appointments such as golden candlesticks and chalices are done so for that very purpose. They could see the upkeep of a historically significant parish church or the restoration of the Minster at York as an end in itself. Not so for the believers at Fig Tree, a church building was a vehicle, not *the church*. To further the Kingdom was to restore and maintain people not buildings.

This mindset of the Pentecostal believer is, generally, reflected in the building. This is not to imply that there was no sense or level of (acceptable) pride concerning the physical bricks and mortar of the Fig Tree Gospel Hall. Great care was taken to maintain the structure and look of the place. However, it was not the aesthetics of the hall that was considered a witness to the local council estate. It was the fact that this Fig Tree was bigger than the earlier Fig Tree - a tiny chapel positioned in the middle of a row of shops less than two hundred yards away. The significance was the size of the building, for a larger hall meant a larger congregation. It was both an encouragement to the members and a witness to the community. The former were 'planting seeds' and seeing the growth; the latter were beginning to wonder just what it was that went on in such a place and why it was attracting such a crowd.

**The Programme (Featuring a Sunday morning Breaking of Bread service in 1979)**

Although the church had started to see positive signs of growth from the early 1970s, it was a modest crowd that greeted me on a bright evening at the Tuesday Bible Study in the summer of 1979. Twenty or so of the regulars were seated to the right side of the main hall, facing the front. Their ages were predominantly between fifty and seventy. As a lad of fourteen, I must have looked and, certainly I felt, out of place. Yet, within a very short space of time I began to feel genuine warmth from those ‘strangers’.

The Tuesday night Bible Study was just one of many meetings held during the week. The complete official weekly schedule looked like this:

<b>Sunday:</b>	10:45am - Breaking of Bread Service
	2:30pm - Sunday School
	6:00pm - Gospel Service
<b>Tuesday:</b>	6:30am - Prayer Meeting
	7:30pm - Bible Study
<b>Wednesday:</b>	6:00pm - Warriors Club
	7:30pm - Youth Meeting
<b>Thursday:</b>	7:30pm - Prayer Meeting
<b>Saturday:</b>	7:30pm - Special fellowship Service

The Breaking of Bread Service was considered the most crucial meeting of the week to attend. To meet together as a body of believers and to remember, with thanksgiving, the sacrifice Jesus made on the Cross, was the most significant act of corporate worship at Fig Tree during that time. The act was an instruction given by Jesus Himself ('do this in remembrance of me')<sup>2</sup> and all members were encouraged to do their best to get along on a Sunday morning. Subsequently the meetings were always well attended.

The format of the service appeared simple, particularly when compared to some other Christian denominations that make extensive use of a liturgy. Holy Communion is practised by almost every Christian Church; it is often regarded as a tradition and it is the idea of religious expression becoming a tradition that Pentecostal believers are keen to guard against. Adherents to a set liturgy, it is believed, can only stifle the 'free movement of the Holy Spirit'. Great emphasis, therefore, would be placed upon spontaneity and openness to God. Within the Pentecostal mindset there exists the need always to be ready for God to 'take over' in any given situation - within congregational gatherings especially. The formal ordering of religious expression, praise, worship and prayer within a service is considered a hindrance and so liturgy is eschewed.

Given the exigency for Pentecostals to break with tradition, the Breaking of Bread services at Fig Tree in the late 70s and early 80s were, in no way, devoid

of structure. 'Order' was considered a Godly thing and the Scripture from Corinthians was often quoted, 'For God is not a God of disorder'<sup>3</sup>. The rejection of a liturgical framework within religious ceremony should not imply that the believers at Fig Tree (and then later the City Christian Centre) had not created for themselves their own tradition, albeit it in a latent manner. This would also apply to the Assemblies of God generally. One can identify the key elements within any given meeting that indicate the prioritizing of the pastor or leadership to promote sound Assembly of God doctrine. The intention is never to make something a 'set' procedure, there are very few meetings in which adherence to a set programme is the norm. There are, however, characteristics common to fellowships within the Assemblies of God.

Emphasis is placed upon the 'gifts of the Holy Spirit'. The Pentecostal movement was born out of the desire to restore to the church the gifts the apostle Paul spoke of in the first book of Corinthians and which were evident in the early church. For Pentecostal believers there is no significance in the time which has lapsed between the Acts of the Apostles and the present. The manifestations of the baptism in the Holy Spirit are not to be confined to history, but are just as real and vital for Christians today as they were nearly two thousand years ago.

Subsequently the baptism is regarded as one of the highest tenets within Assembly of God doctrine and a tradition ensues; manifestations of this experience become expected and anticipated within each meeting. A process of

pushing and pulling can be observed. The former correlates to the expectation of the participants in the meeting; the latter equates to the anticipation of what 'could be' within any given service or gathering. It would be an easy assumption to make that the pushing force is a feature of the pastor, worship leader, preacher or ministry team - the 'ministry' - in general, from the pulpit and, indeed, this is often so. Likewise, it would be easy to surmise that the anticipation, the pulling, is a sole characteristic of the congregation or the 'flock'. Again, this is sometimes the case. Yet in reality, both elements exist very prominently within each party. Expectancy and anticipation, when considered in this way stimulate each other. Although the differences between the terms are very subtle, a distinction can be made and the result is a seeming contradiction - a collective experience in which spontaneity and traditions co-exist.

The expectancy finds its source in the faith of the believer. For the Pentecostal, there is no reason - theologically - why certain manifestations should not happen today. With this established, the believer looks forward to God's 'outpouring of the Holy Spirit'. With instruction from the Bible, it is possible to list the various 'blessings' which may take place. Such manifestations are known as the 'gifts of the Holy Spirit'. Paul speaks of them in 1 Corinthians 12, they are: words of wisdom and knowledge, gifts of faith, healings and miracles, prophecy, discernment, speaking in tongues and the interpretation of tongues.

Within a congregational setting the gifts most often displayed were: speaking in tongues, prophecy, prophecy in tongues. The latter usually invoked the 'gift of interpretation'. At Fig Tree a pattern emerged whereby it was usual for the same people to bestow, upon the gathering, those gifts that were intended primarily for the edification of the whole body of believers. During the period we are considering (1979-1984), the gift of prophecy in tongues and its subsequent interpretation was exercised (almost exclusively) by Edna Roberts and Reg Croft. Edna would give the message in tongues and Reg would give the interpretation.

This procedure is an example of the kind of tradition that can develop in Pentecostal circles. It became increasingly rare for these gifts not to be exercised, by the same two people, in every meeting they attended. During a time of worship or prayer three messages in tongues were given, each followed by an interpretation. The number of messages given was significant for 1 Corinthians 14:27 states that, 'If anyone speaks in a tongue, two - or at the most three - should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret'.<sup>4</sup> This was taken to mean that the number of messages allowed in any one meeting was three; although open to other interpretations, Fig Tree adopted this understanding.

The two members most active in exercising these specific gifts - mature Christians who were very seasoned in Pentecostalism - came to each meeting with *expectancy* and *anticipation*. They would not participate, however, unless they firmly believed that the Holy Spirit was prompting them to do so within the

framework of the service. The other members of the congregation also expected and anticipated. The same optimistic disposition existed in all concerned, creating a receptive atmosphere to the 'move of the Spirit'. Yet, this template for each meeting, which looked often to be the partaking of a distinctive tradition, maintained a high level of spontaneous action. No one really knew *for sure* how a meeting would unfold.

Simplicity prevailed in the services at Fig Tree. Anyone accustomed to the Church of England liturgy would, on their first experience of a Breaking of Bread meeting, miss the set prayers, the Peace, the Confession, the Nicene Creed, the Thanksgiving, the Communion and Post-Communion. Pastor Hedges would commence the service with a welcome and then introduce the first hymn. The Redemption Hymnal was used. Today very few Assembly of God churches use this book, preferring instead the more contemporary Songs and Hymns of Fellowship, or the abandoning of song books all together in favour of the overhead projector and acetates. Preparation for the meeting would not be extensive. The pianist and organist would be given the hymn numbers either a day or two before the Sunday morning service: sometimes though, they would not be given them until just before the meeting. The Pastor could, and often did at the last minute, decide to alter his choice. Usually this was unproblematic for the musicians as few of the hymns were particularly challenging musically and could be played with little practise. David Martin (1967) has described the songs commonly used in such meetings as,

...a mutation of a tradition going back to the eighteenth century – back to the kind of rather ornamental dance tune or street song...tunes with dotted semi-dance rhythms reminiscent of the music hall, with words strongly characterised by fortitude in life's manifold misfortunes: 'Will your anchor hold in the storms of life?' and 'Hold the fort for I am coming' (Martin, 1967: 86).

Those acting as stewards (both male and female) would take their cue from the pastor and follow a set routine for the offertory and the administering of the bread and wine in the Communion part of the service. The greatest amount of preparation came in the writing of the pastor's sermon. The time it took to formulate a 'message' varied greatly however, particularly with Pastor Hedges. By 1979, he had been in active ministry for thirty years and so the ability to fill a forty-five minute sermon slot was no longer a challenge or difficulty. He had a vast reservoir of illustrations, anecdotes and memorised Bible verses to draw from. He had the ability to pull a sermon together in minutes and with the sparsest of notes should the situation necessitate.

To start, a rousing hymn would be sung, possibly a Wesley or Crosby. If the tempo lent itself to it (and the opening hymn invariably did), the congregation would clap their hands during the choruses. Dancing did not appear on the scene until the mid 1980s, although occasionally certain individuals would come quite

close to it. The raising of hands - an expression of adoration and praise - was welcomed and encouraged. The first hymn might be followed by a prayer, either from the pastor or a member of the congregation. Prayers spoken publicly were not rehearsed or prepared earlier and 'read out'. They were extemporaneously given and, as a new convert in those early days of my membership, I was amazed at the level of oration. They flowed, often poetically, into impassioned prayers of thanksgiving. Frequently a single prayer would articulate the entire Gospel message before concluding with sincere and heartfelt gratitude and praise.

For many of the newer members, or those less verbose, the thought of praying in a similar fashion, in front of the entire congregation, seemed extremely daunting. Everyone was encouraged to pray and to praise in that way. This 'problem' was picked up by some of the older members however, and extra words of encouragement would be shared quietly after a meeting. Edna (whom I have already made reference to) approached me at the end of one Sunday morning service and told me how blessed she had been to hear my prayer during the meeting. I had 'squeaked out', what I felt had been a few incoherent lines and was feeling quite embarrassed about it. I was reassured that, "God doesn't care what we sound like or if our prayers are long or short, it is what's in the heart that counts Malcolm." It was 'a word in season'.

A reading from the Bible could follow, often one of the Psalms; then another hymn. A third hymn would be followed by a time of quiet as the congregation

prepared to receive the emblems of the 'body and blood' of Jesus. The service took on a particular solemnity as an account of the Last Supper was given.

When the Hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."

After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."

And he took the bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given to you; do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you..."

Stewards would approach the table in front of the pulpit upon which the emblems were placed. Either the pastor or a member of the congregation gave a prayer of thanks. The stewards (often Elders of the church or individuals who were recognised as having reached a level of maturity in their faith) would be served first by the Pastor. The reverse would then happen, the Pastor received the bread and wine (Cream Crackers broken into small pieces and Ribena<sup>5</sup>) from the

stewards. The fellowship would then be served. The practicalities were well ordered. Moving down the centre aisle, the four stewards would take the emblems to the congregation who remained seated throughout. The bread first, served on small, rather ornate, silver plates. The wine followed; it had been poured (before the start of the meeting) into tiny glasses, the shape of which resembled thimbles. As the emblems were distributed, individuals were encouraged to give thanks. Often the Pastor would suggest simple short prayers, thanking Jesus for His sacrifice. There was an air of humility in the Sunday morning services and often weeping could be heard from certain individuals who had been particularly moved in some way.

Songs were 'struck up'. Short songs that were simply referred to as 'choruses'. The musicians would quickly try to find the key in which the song had been started. Occasionally the key was wholly inappropriate so, during the first time round, the song would hit a major problem - either the notes were too high or too low making it impossible for the congregation, as a whole, to sing. Usually the key would be changed for its second time round and the worship would continue.

The focus of the worship was firmly located in the person of Jesus, His sacrifice at Calvary, the shedding of His blood for our sins and the gift of salvation. The following illustrate the simplicity of the choruses and the focus of the lyrics.

*Jesus how Lovely You Are*

Jesus, How lovely You are.

You are so gentle so pure and kind.

You shine as the morning star.

Jesus, how lovely you are.<sup>6</sup>

*He is Lord*

He is Lord, He is Lord.

He is risen from the dead and He is Lord.

Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess

That Jesus Christ is Lord.<sup>7</sup>

*Thank You Jesus*

Thank you Jesus, Thank you Jesus.

Thank you Lord for loving me.

Thank you Jesus, thank you Jesus.

Thank you Lord for loving me.

You went to Calvary and there you died for me

Thank you Lord, for loving me.

You went to Calvary and there you died for me.

Thank you Lord, for loving me.

You rose up from the grave, to me your life you gave,

Thank you Lord for loving me.

You rose up from the grave, to me new life you gave,

Thank you Lord, for loving me.<sup>8</sup>

In years to come there would be a change of focus in the songs that were sung in the Sunday morning services at Fig Tree (City Christian Centre).

Between an hour to an hour and a quarter into the meeting, the worship time, centred as it was on the act of Communion, ended. There were always exceptions to this period however; not infrequently did the worship carry on and the Pastor forego his sermon. Usually though, the Communion would be followed by another hymn (during which the offering would be taken) and then the sermon.

The Breaking of Bread service was considered a meeting for believers, those who were already saved and who constituted the *body*. Sermons, therefore, were directed towards Christians and centred on issues surrounding the believer and his or her role in the service of the Lord and their Christian 'walk'. Subjects were varied although one grew used to the personalities and idiosyncrasies of the Pastor and, therefore, those points of theology that most excited them. Gideon, Daniel, David, the book of Revelation all got plenty of exposure. On a more controversial note, the issue of head coverings for women, while at church, was

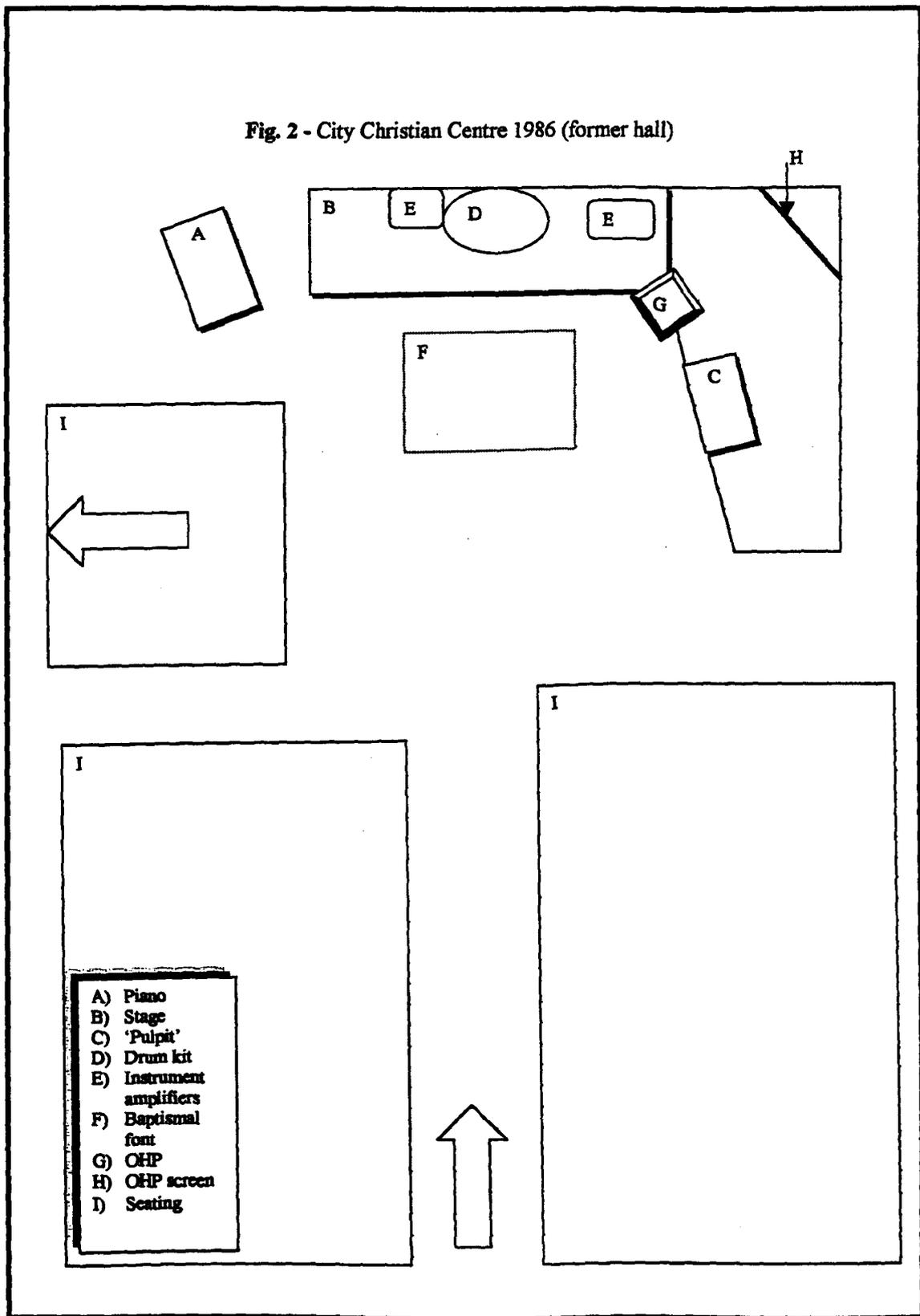
aired for a few consecutive weeks. Pastor Hedges was charismatic, energetic and always inspiring. His burly stature only matched by his considerable personality.

Depending on the length of time the pastor took in preaching his sermon, the meeting would conclude anywhere between thirty-five minutes to an hour later. It would be closed with a final hymn and prayer or just a prayer. It was important for the minister to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit (Wilson, 1959) and be ready to promote an atmosphere of either (quiet) contemplation upon the resolution of the message, or triumphant jubilation, or varying degrees in between these two extremes. Significantly, the conversations that developed after the meeting seemed always to revolve around spiritual things. Believers at Fig Tree were eager to talk about the Lord and the new things He was doing in their lives on a daily basis.

### **The City Christian Centre 1984-1988 (featuring a Sunday morning praise and worship service in 1986)**

The pulpit was now situated in the right hand corner of the stage area. An extension had been built to the central platform to accommodate its new location, thus ensuring that the pulpit was still elevated and at the same height as the existing platform. Centre stage was now home to the drum kit. It was surrounded by various back-line amplifiers for bass, lead (electric) and acoustic guitars, and electronic keyboard. The organ had been removed altogether but the piano - now to the left of the stage - remained. An overhead projector was perched

Fig. 2 - City Christian Centre 1986 (former hall)



precariously in between the drums and the pulpit. The screen had been secured above and behind the door leading from the rear of the stage to the back corridor.

The partition screen dividing the main hall from the 'rec' hall had been pulled back and seating had long since been a necessity in the overflow area. The church was full, or to use a familiar term from that era at the newly named City Christian Centre, 'packed'. Indeed the 'church' had outgrown the church.

Ten or fifteen minutes before the service commenced, a prayer meeting was already in progress in the vestry. More of a preparation time, this meeting was exclusively for those who would be leading that morning. The musicians, the preacher (if not the Pastor), any Elders who wished to attend (certainly if an Elder was participating in the service, he<sup>9</sup> would have been expected to attend) and the Pastor. It was an inspirational session. Those present stood in a circle, worshipping the Lord. Often the voices from the vestry prayer meeting could be overheard in the main hall above the conversations of the gathering congregation. The scene was reminiscent of a sports team 'psyching up' before a match. The Pastor determined the meeting programme and few pre-arrangements were made before the Sunday morning services. One was conscious of the existence of a particular agenda, however, but this was of Roy Dale's own formulation and execution. Innovations were generally introduced gradually and at a pace that ensured minimum adverse responses from those who may have objected to the shifting emphasis of praise and worship.

There was no set policy for prayers; sometimes each individual would 'pray round' the circle. At other times, just one or two would pray for the whole as the Spirit led them. Another variant would be for Roy to take the lead and pray a powerful invocation to the Lord to cause His Spirit to descend upon the meeting. To be 'open' before the Lord at such times creates a transparency between each individual. Faced with a mission that has its start and finish in things eternal, earthly pettiness is - for the time being - dissolved. Any grievances that may have existed between the band members and the Eldership were forgotten in that atmosphere of comradeship.

### **The service**

Exiting the vestry, the group made their way onto the platform via the doors on either side of the stage. The musicians quickly getting into place with their instruments and Roy (leading the worship) taking his place behind the pulpit. He would give a brief welcome before introducing the first worship song. The first song would be well known and invariably 'upbeat'. 'Come On And Celebrate'<sup>10</sup> perhaps or 'We Bring A Sacrifice Of Praise'.<sup>11</sup> The musicians would start to play; the sound heavy, loud and raucous. A 'young' sound was commensurate with the predominant age of the congregation. Having almost tripled in size since 1979, nearly two thirds were either youth or young adult.

The fellowship participated exuberantly in this 'time of praise and worship'. Clapping and the raising of hands were spontaneous acts. Dancing had become both acceptable and expected by the mid 1980s, although relatively few people threw themselves wholeheartedly into it. Those who did tended to sit together and so, looking out over the two halls, one could see small groups, predominantly near the front, closest to the platform, dancing 'before the Lord'. It took the form of the standard 'pogo'. Increasingly the praise songs had taken on a militaristic feel, the emphasis shifting from the person of Jesus to that of a rallying cry of 'victory' for Christians.

*Gird Up Your Armour*

Gird up your armour you sons of Zion,

Gird up your armour

Let's go to war.

We'll win the battle

With great rejoicing

And then we'll praise Him more and more.

With the high praises of God in our mouth

And a two-edged sword in our hand.

We'll march right on to the victory side

Right into Canaan's land.<sup>12</sup>

The first few songs would be fast and loud and introduced, or interspersed, with readings, words of encouragement, prayers and prophecies given from the leader. Although the congregation was active in their praise, the participation of individuals in public prayer or exhortation had been curtailed significantly since our Breaking of Bread service of 1979. The meeting being led from the front, the channel of its direction being Roy.

It was not unknown for certain members of the congregation to still feel directed to give a word of prophecy or some other message to the church. For such occasions, a procedure had been established; anyone feeling led to give a 'word' was now required to approach the leader of the meeting and share whatever it was he or she intended to say with him. The leader (invariably Roy) would then decide whether the 'word' was appropriate for the fellowship during that particular meeting. This process reinforced the position of authority in the persona of the pastor. Although still a young man himself (late thirties) his power to either allow or disallow the input of others created a formidable aura. The display was so public; while worship songs were being sung and in full view of the entire congregation, an individual would approach. For leaders, their 'image' could only be strengthened regardless of the decision made. For the member, being turned away could colour the opinions of others in the congregation towards them: their spiritual standing having sustained something of a 'dent'. On occasion certain individuals would transgress this rule and start to give a prophecy or 'word' without first seeking the approval of the Pastor. The

Minister's response would be to publicly rebuke these attempts by insisting that the individual discontinue their monologue and sit down.

The upbeat choruses would lead into a quieter time of worship. The music would play during the introduction of different songs; often just one chord would be played, or maybe a simple progression. The volume would pick up again when the congregation began to sing. Frequently some spiritual manifestation occurred. Certain individuals, whom a regular attendee would quickly identify as being a person with 'problems', would present themselves for prayer. They would step forward to the platform and the Pastor would possibly call for some assistance from the Elders. They would 'lay hands' on the person requesting prayer and this would often result in a display of hysteria on the part of the recipient. Such manifestations could take several forms: shaking, convulsions, crying, or shouting. More often than not the conclusion to the episode would be for the person to fall to the floor and remain still and calm for a number of minutes before being helped up and returned to their chair. Such occurrences were rife within the Assembly in the mid 1980s; although very unusual and very possibly frightening to a visitor, the congregation at the City Christian Centre became quite accustomed to manifestations of that kind. They had, after all, quite a specialist in their midst when it came to the ministry of 'deliverance' - Pastor Dale.

Prayers for healing also took place on a regular basis. Those with specific ailments would be anointed with oil and prayed over most forcefully. Most physical problems originated, according to Dale, from demonic attacks upon the individual. This theological innovation presented a notable shift away from traditional understandings of physical infirmity that accepted that ailments of a non-demonic nature were the norm and that problems initiated by evil spirits were only evidenced in exceptional isolated cases. Under Dale's ministry most, if not all, problems (physical, emotional, financial, and spiritual) were attributed to demonic activity. I will discuss the issue of 'theology' in detail in the next chapter.

The significance of the 'demonic' within the mindset of the church during the mid 1980s often conflicted with the practice of praying for the sick if no instant visible sign of healing was displayed. If the ailment was due to the influence of an evil spirit either 'oppressing' or 'possessing' an individual, the solution was to 'take authority' over the demon and 'rebuke it'. This act could be done by any one individual with an appropriate degree of 'spiritual authority' (maturity). In very public displays such as the Sunday morning services, Dale would be the sole 'deliverer'. It was often the case, however, that no immediate 'deliverance' would occur. Miriam Currie, for example, was deaf and unable to speak; she was prayed for on many occasions publicly and yet she was never healed or 'delivered' of her deafness. On such occasions, the responsibility for her non-deliverance was placed upon the entire congregation. The suggestion from Pastor Dale held

culpable those members of the church who did not possess the requisite amount of faith to believe for Miriam's healing. The deliverance model called for just one person to take authority but when the hoped for result was not forthcoming responsibility would shift to that of the collective body.

With the Redemption Hymnal having now been superseded by the more contemporary *Songs and Hymns of Fellowship* and the use of the OHP, the older hymns had been dispensed with and all the worship songs had a distinctively modern feel to them. It had been two years since 'O For A Thousand Tongues' or 'He Lives' had been sung. Although several of the older members struggled with the new rhythms and tunes and certainly with the volume of the music, they tended to adopt a consistently gracious attitude towards these changes.

Two elements contributed to this adaptation; there were other opportunities during the week to participate in collective worship. The homegroups on Thursday evenings were all very different; each one of them (there were four when first introduced into the weekly programme) developed its own unique character and format. Steve and Jayne's group consisted of, predominantly, young adults. Their meetings tended to be quite informal, a little rebellious and controversial, with no set structure save the watching of Top of The Pops from 7:30pm to 8pm (the official start time for homegroups was supposed to have been 7:30pm). Ian and Lesley's group had a mixed age range and was altogether much more subdued. Out of the four groups this one seemed to struggle slightly. In

both Steve and Jayne's and Ian and Lesley's group, there was no regular time of worship. This differed from the other two groups led by Bill and Lisa and Eric and Edna. Both groups adopted a more conventional structure to their meetings and that included a set time of open praise and worship. The attendees were generally older in these two groups and the style was less contemporary and more the 'old school'. What was sacrificed in the worship on Sundays was regained, for some, on a Thursday.

The second element instrumental in allaying the possible frustrations of the older generation in the fellowship, was the personal charisma of the Pastor. Like his predecessor before him, Roy was imbued with a winning charm. He (initially) also had the ability to anticipate potential concerns from certain individuals within the fellowship. A few choice words at the appropriate time would, more often than not, 'win over' any possible malcontent. Particularly in the early days of his ministry at the City Christian Centre, Roy relied greatly upon his past reputation and charismatic disposition.

For a short while at least, a majority of the fellowship were, in different ways, infatuated with him. Women found him attractive and dashing; men envied him for his entrepreneurial flair. All were impressed with his preaching and musical abilities. He could engage with folk of any age and always seemed to be able to bring a person round to 'his side'. Eventually Roy's charm was to wear thin, but at this juncture of our history, Roy could do no wrong.

That section of the meeting devoted specifically to Communion, although shortened slightly since our earlier account, was passionate and intense. As the stewards served the emblems, the worship would rise and fall in waves of sound. The musicians would be directed to play slower devotional songs the melody lines of which were particularly strong and in major keys. ‘Ascribe Greatness’ and ‘Jesus We Enthroned You’ being particularly popular worship songs of the day for this section of the meeting.

*Jesus we enthrone You*

Jesus we enthrone You

We proclaim You our King.

Standing here in the midst of us,

We raise you up with our praise.

And as we worship build a throne

And as we worship build a throne

And as we worship build a throne,

Come Lord Jesus and take Your place<sup>13</sup>.

This part of the service was a time for self-analysis. The congregation was encouraged to search their souls and to ‘put right’ any wrong thought or sin that might hinder them from being totally transparent in their relationship with God. The aim of the meeting, it seemed, was to reach new realms of intimacy with

God; to be released in praise and worship, to be completely focussed on the Lord and to push the boundaries of experience.

The offering and announcements would be 'got out of the way' after the Breaking of Bread section had concluded. As the new building project became top of the agenda, Roy's encouragement to give financially became longer and longer. Money became a big issue for the church at that time.

Finally, it would be time for the sermon. Roy was a masterful orator and could give an effective message on most acceptable topics within the Assembly of God tradition. Priorities were changing however and Roy wanted to move on from the everyday Pentecostal sermon. Within a very short time of his appointment as Pastor of the City Christian Centre, it became clear that the designation 'pastor' did not sit comfortably with his ministry. To be a pastor in the traditional sense was to be a 'shepherd of the flock'. The role was specified to ensure the spiritual well being of the congregation, to visit on a regular basis and to be on hand at various times of need. While it was considered essential for a pastor to be able to preach and teach, it was also just as important for a good pastor to be in touch with the people. A peculiar change of priorities was taking place in the church. The traditional role of the pastor was not the role Roy considered himself capable of fulfilling, nor did he wish to fulfil it. So, although his original mandate was that of pastor, he quickly began to distance himself from that particular office. He considered his gifting to be that of 'prophetic teacher' and leader of the oversight.

Subsequently, Roy's sermons were not considered the usual pastor's Sunday morning message: they were an 'event'. What Roy had to say in his messages seemed to go beyond the realm of simple Bible exposition. There was a promise of groundbreaking revelation which, if appropriated wholeheartedly by the fellowship, could influence not only the local estate or city, but also the entire world for God. The anticipation for this revelation was created in the hearts and minds of the members of the City Christian Centre, long before the day it was actually preached. The word, originating from Roy himself, would be put out to certain individuals indicating that a particular burden had been placed on him that week and that this burden or vision would be brought before the congregation on the Sunday. The message quickly spread in such a close knit community of believers and like Chinese whispers the potency of the rumour increased. Come the following Sunday morning service, the Church would turn out in force to be recipients of the new vision that had been given to Roy specifically for them.

An overriding theme of Roy's messages was the importance of worship and how God wanted to move the fellowship on into new heights of experience. Only when the heights were reached could the fellowship start to fulfil its true potential in God. Great emphasis was placed on stepping up to the 'Holy place' and entering 'within the veil'. Miracles would be witnessed, the blind would see, the deaf would hear and even the dead would be raised back to life. People would be 'released' into powerful ministries and thousands would be saved. The

prerequisite - it was implied - was to lose fleshly inhibitions and to be released into praise and worship. It would only be possible for the church to reach its full potential and to see growth when it was 'right' on the inside. Its house had to be put in order before it could reach out and touch the wider society. Putting its house in order eventually came to resemble a play by Arthur Miller (1953).

The Sunday morning service of 1987 would close with a fervent prayer, sometimes an appeal would be made. Individuals would come forward for ministry. Often a general prayer of recommitment would be given. Every one would usually stand to be included in the prayer, most members, it seemed, wanted to be right and serious in their convictions before the Lord.

**The City Christian Centre 1988 - present (featuring a Sunday morning Celebration service in 1998)**

There is a particular atmosphere before the commencement of a Pentecostal meeting. It is a mixture of excitement and anticipation. What will happen in the meeting is largely unknown; the congregation 'buckles up' to embark on a journey of adventure, like a child's first roller coaster ride. I take a deep breath and walk through the frosted perspex doors; all is activity! I am greeted instantly by a number of friends and acquaintances from my past. One or two of them have to look twice to make sure that I am, indeed, the person they think I am; for some it had been eight years since they had seen me. Again, I feel a jolt of emotion and recall a thousand memories. One cannot over estimate the intensity of

relationship between believers. There are degrees of intimacy of course but as I was greeted by my 'brothers and sisters in Christ'. I could feel the irresistibility of our kinship.

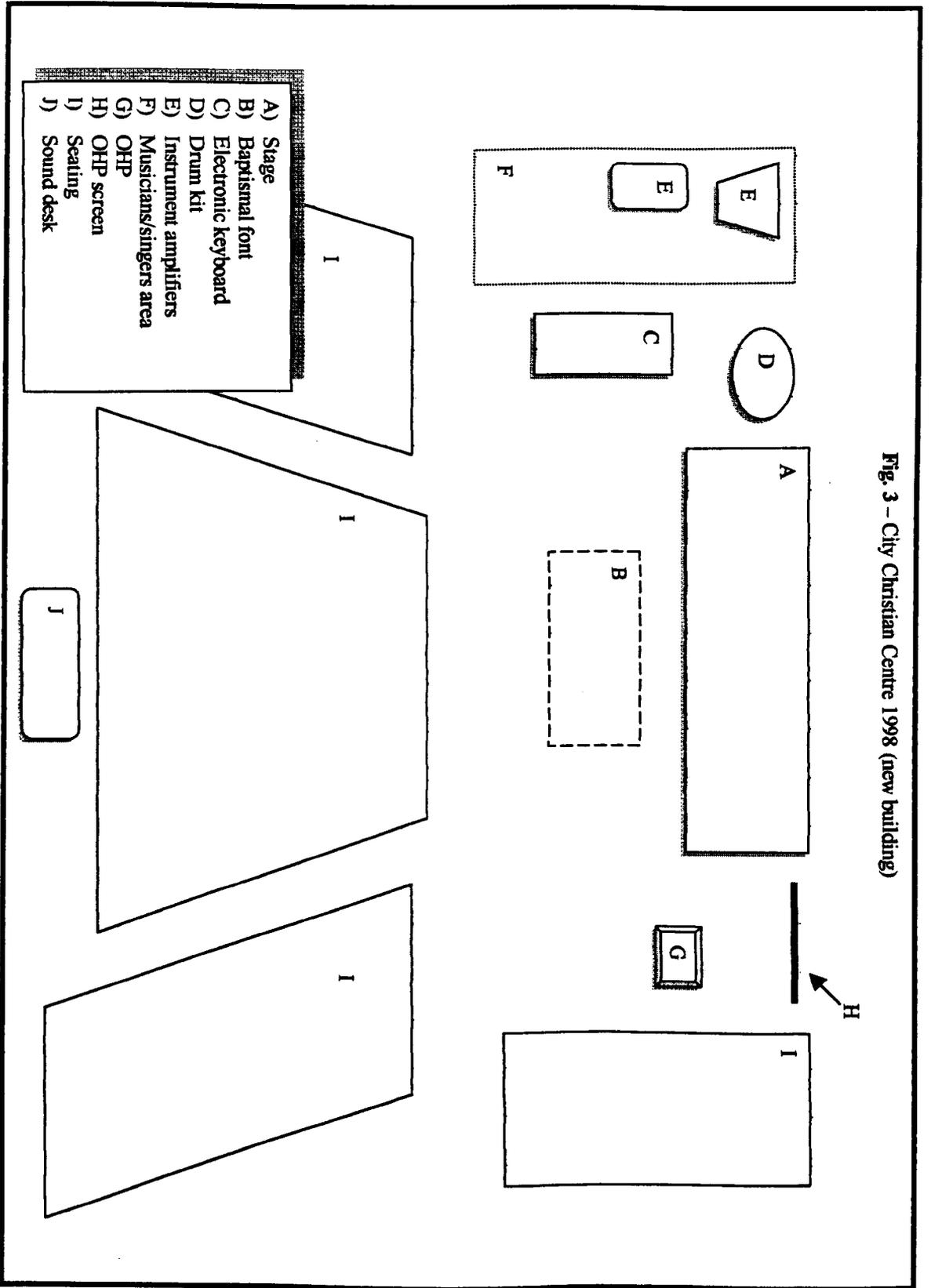
The main hall is large and square shaped with a low suspended ceiling and fluorescent strip lighting. Adjacent to the entrance is the platform and main stage area. It looked different; the familiar, modern looking (albeit bulky) lectern (which had always been referred to as the 'pulpit' even though it in no way resembled a church pulpit in the traditional sense) had been removed from the raised platform and nothing stood in its place. The large open space looked quite odd to me. I was, at that time, unaware of the reasons behind the disowning of the stage. To the left of the platform was the music group; it was rather sprawled out and it was hard to define where the line of singers ended and the regular congregation began. Besides the four vocalists, the band consisted of drums, bass guitar, acoustic guitar, two flutes, a trombone and a large electronic keyboard. Each musician had their own microphone and, for the guitarists, their own back line amplifiers. A number of monitor speakers supplied the fold back sound to the other musicians and singers. To the back of the hall the sound was mixed on a large mixing desk which was, and had always been, far too big for the needs of the church.

The music the band played was loud; conversations and greetings had to be almost shouted above the volume of sound created by the worship group.

Although most distracting to me, the members of City Christian Centre seemed quite oblivious to it and negotiated their exchanges with others well. Observing this familiarity with the volume of the music, it brought to mind a comment made by author Ken Kessey (1975) in *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*. So desensitized were the inmates of the State mental institution, to the continual playing of music over the speaker system, that when mentioned, by the newly incarcerated McMurphy, they were unable to hear it unless they concentrated specifically on the background noise of their environment.

By now some had moved to their seats and had begun to follow the words to the songs being played. The words were projected onto the wall to the right of the platform; a woman in her twenties was in charge of the overhead projector and the case of acetates. This was no easy duty to fulfill especially when the meeting would finally get into full 'swing'. The order of the songs would not be arranged before the service. It is probable that a few songs would certainly be intended to be sung and the OHP person would have been informed of them, but no item could be considered a certainty in such a meeting. To be open to the Spirit's leading meant having to be willing, and ready, to throw out any and all designs or programmes. I had experienced services in which the original programme for the meeting had been changed drastically. Some times the shift in direction comes right at the meeting's commencement; a change can occur at any time, however,

Fig. 3 - City Christian Centre 1998 (new building)



and the unpredictability of the Celebration service adds to the excitement before it.

After numerous greetings and snatched conversations, I take a seat to the far right of the platform and directly opposite the music group. I notice how the chairs are situated, three main blocks divided by aisles and another, much smaller, block to the right. The chairs in the main blocks are inclined inward and the overall look is that of disorder. I wondered under what circumstances the decision to position the seating, in such an irregular way, had been reached.

One of the vocalists steps up to her microphone and gives a casual greeting, the conversations continue with no immediate sign of quieting. She lifts her voice to talk over the volume and mentions that a dedication will be taking place during the service. She reads Psalm 95 introducing it as ‘an encouragement to praise’; gradually people start to take their seats and focus their attention on the meeting.

O Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord:

Let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation.

Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving;

Let us shout joyfully to Him with Psalms.

For He is a great God...

Come let us worship and bow down;

Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.

For He is our God,

And we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand<sup>14</sup>.

Further exhortations are given; the congregation is encouraged to 'go for it!' To 'give our best to God' and to 'enjoy God this morning'. With those words, the band starts to play. The song has a rousing, thunderous quality to it and I am put in mind of a rock concert momentarily. The anticipation builds and then suddenly the stage lights up and the sound 'hits' you. You know that the mix will be all wrong for the first song, but it is the sheer volume and excitement produced by your favourite band that carries you away. The congregation of the City Christian Centre rise spontaneously from their seats at the commencement of one of the newer worship songs on the circuit, 'These Are the Days of Elijah'. They are not prompted to rise by the worship leader. People clap to the beat, raise their hands, wave banners and many instantly spring into dancing. I noticed how 'dancing in the Spirit' had evolved over time at 'City Christian'<sup>15</sup>. During the 1980s, the concept of 'dance' in worship had come into its own. There had been initial concerns expressed by many influential Assembly of God ministers and, indeed, those same arguments for and against the Scriptural basis for dancing still are voiced, but quite infrequently.

The praise and worship revolution of the 80's (Smail, 1994) won, overall, a convincing victory that, it could be argued, brought a level of rejuvenation to an increasingly crusty church nationwide. It was not a unique experience for just the

Assemblies of God. It touched, to some degree, all churches that could be considered evangelical or Charismatic. For some, it created exclusivity and an inward looking mentality. This latter concept suggests that revival in the 80's - spurred on by the new developments in praise and worship - was an internal revival and not one in the accepted sense of the term which would be akin to the Welsh revival at the turn of this century.

Here to stay, it would seem, was dancing, and how sophisticated it had become. For many years, when first it was introduced, the motions were little more than a jumping up and down to the beat of the song. So repetitive were the movements, it was little wonder that it was tagged the 'Pentecostal pogo' and that the term quickly spread throughout the churches. As I observed the dancing at the City Christian Centre that morning I could still see one or two adopting the old-style but many more were utilizing their creative talents to experiment with new styles and patterns. There was a large area at the front of the church that resembled a dance floor at a club. The space was quickly filled with young children who were now dancing and waving colourful ribbons and streamers above their heads. For many of the adults in the congregation, the rows of chairs now seemed to be nothing but an encumbrance. Some moved out to the aisles to dance. I saw a young man lying prostrate ('before the Lord'). The worship group repeated the song a number of times.

*These are the Days of Elijah*

These are the days of Elijah,  
Declaring the word of the Lord;  
And these are the days of your servant, Moses,  
Righteousness being restored.

And though these are days of great trial,  
Of famine and darkness and sword,  
Still we are the voice in the desert crying  
'Prepare ye the way of the Lord.'

Chorus:

Behold he comes riding on the clouds,  
Shining like the sun, at the trumpet call;  
Lift your voice it's the year of jubilee,  
Out of Zion's hill salvation comes.

These are the days of Ezekiel,  
the dry bones becoming as flesh;  
and these are the days of your servant, David,  
Re-building the temple of praise.

These are the days of the harvest,  
the fields are as white in the world,  
and we are the labourers in your vineyard,  
Declaring the word of the Lord<sup>16</sup>.

For some in the fellowship, the exuberance displayed during the worship times was not welcome. Here Derek Smart talks of his concern regarding the new developments in praise and Worship at the City Christian Centre.

**Derek:** There's an awful lot of hype going on at the City Christian Centre and I'm beginning to realise that power doesn't equate with decibels, and whether you are swinging your arms around like a windmill or walking around non-stop, power has nothing to do with that. It's to do with what you say not how you say it.

*(Derek, a printer in his mid fifties. A member of the City Christian Centre for seventeen years, recently looking at other churches to attend)*

The music finally fades just a little and Sue continues to encourage the congregation to greater heights of worship and intimacy with God. It is not easy to hear her words over the band and the shouts and cries of worship from the congregation. She spends some time praising God in a prayer of thankfulness and the instant she concludes the volume of both worship group and congregation rises again. Chords are played, they do not follow the progression of the song, the band 'plays in the Spirit' and everyone 'sings in the Spirit'; many sing in 'tongues', others in their own language. The roof is raised.

After a lengthy time of praise, Sue says a prayer in which she states to the Lord that He is having 'as good a time as we are'. She then hands over the meeting to Pastor George Young who proceeds to introduce the 'dedication' of baby Abigail. He reads from Matthew's gospel the account of Jesus blessing the children and then explains to the congregation the principle behind the act of infant 'dedication' as opposed to infant baptism. There is no precedent in the Bible for infant baptism or Christening. The baptisms, which took place in the New Testament, were distinctive in two ways; firstly, they were by total immersion and secondly, the act was for those who had made a conscious choice to commit their lives to God. A child, therefore, who is not of an age to make rational choices, does not qualify to take part in a ceremony of baptism. Baptism itself is regarded as an outward sign of an internal transformation. Jesus commands that all believers are baptised but it is accepted within Pentecostal circles that should a person who is saved, for some reason, not be baptised, this would not preclude them from an active faith. The act of baptism does not 'save'; it simply represents the transition from 'death to life'. Given this interpretation, it is still considered extremely important for all believers to be baptised.

The dedication of infants finds no particular precedent in the Bible. To thank God for a newborn baby, however, and to pray that the child will grow up in the way of the Lord and will one day know true salvation, is safe ground doctrinally. The parents and other members of the family come forward and the Pastor holds the baby while he prays in the fashion we have just observed. Very often, the entire

congregation will be asked to stand as a sign of commitment to this new life, for all to play a part in his or her nurturing in the Lord. Such was the procedure adopted by George Young in the service we are presently considering. Baby Abigail is taken up in his arms and God's blessing requested in her life. The congregation stands and many raise their hands but not as they would in worship. Their palms are directed towards the family at the front of the church in a way that suggested some intangible 'blessing' was being imparted - as if a source of power was being projected from them into the little group.

The dedication now over, George briefly gives some announcements of future meetings: a 'friendship lunch' on the coming Friday and the Mothers and Toddlers group on Wednesday mornings. Though no fixed date is announced, Pastor Young makes mention of the up and coming Alpha course. The meeting is then, again, handed over to Sue, the worship leader, for another time of praise. The session lasts for some twenty minutes; there are long instrumentals interspersed with singing in tongues and in the Spirit. Again the music rises and falls in volume. Sue continues her encouragement.

**Sue:** We want the glory of the Lord to fall in this room. It's when the glory of the Lord falls in this room that there will really be a dramatic change here. We want the manifold presence of God here. We want a situation where we are seeing God's power moving and meeting needs in

the congregation. Getting excited each week because God is moving and we are seeing the tangible presence of God here.

*(Sue Everett, laboratory assistant in her late twenties. Member of the City Christian Centre for twelve years)*

The Breaking of Bread component was incorporated into this time of praise and worship. No account of the Last Supper was given and the proceedings were hastened along at a rapid pace. Little time was given for individual thanks. Occasionally during my observations of subsequent Celebration meetings, Communion was removed from the programme altogether. Whereas traditionally, it had been the main focus of the Sunday morning service, its significance now seemed to be undermined. Pastor Young's sermon followed, his emphasis drawing upon the expected revival that would sweep the city, the nation and the world. The congregation was encouraged to seek the infilling of the Holy Spirit in ever greater portions. The service ended undramatically with no closing worship song or appeal of any kind. Pastor Young, upon the conclusion of his sermon, said a general prayer of dismissal and brought the meeting to a close.

### **Summation**

Peter Mullen (1998) has suggested, rather forcefully, that *sentimentality* – an expression of symbolism over substance – has pervaded religious belief in this current era. He writes,

Imagine a room with the furniture removed so that nothing remains except the smell of escaping gas. This is a parable of sentimentality: for sentimentality is what is left when everything substantial has been taken away – form, content, order and reasonable purpose. It is the self inflicted fate of the Church in the last third of the twentieth century (Mullen, 1998: 103).

Mullen's observation does not apply exclusively to (as he puts it) the 'happy-clappy revivalism' (ibid) of the Pentecostals and Charismatics. Liberal theology too is criticised for its tendency to demythologise, reducing doctrine to nothing more than, '...an airy, insubstantial thing, a collection of indulgent sentiment in the presence of some old stories and some 'nice' feelings about one's fellow man...' (ibid: 105). Although quite scathing in his critique of both religious traditions (liberal and Charismatic), Mullen raises an interesting point – religious expression is shifting from being formerly grounded in substantive doctrine, towards the *experiential*. This chapter has highlighted the shifting practices of praise and worship within the City Christian Centre through a series of observations of Sunday morning meetings. Changes in emphasis can be identified by the different styles and formats adopted in the three services we have considered.

Main points of transition focus on a growing emphasis on music and instrumentation and the introduction of dance within the times of worship. In his

book *The Spectacle of Worship in a Wired World*, Tex Sample (1998) advocates congregational dance. He suggests that, 'Such fullness of the ear and eye, of feeling and sense, and yes, even taste, smell and touch, can only finally be expressed in the full kinesthetic action of the body, in dance' (Sample, 1998: 71). Clearly the growing emphasis in contemporary worship practice with regard to music and dance can be interpreted as a move towards the *sensual* at the cost of more substantive elements of doctrine that have traditionally been stressed.

'Tradition' itself, has been undermined within the Church by the removal of the altar table, organ and eventually the pulpit. The removal of the pulpit is particularly symbolic in that it can be interpreted as a diminution of the significance of the preaching of the Word. In the same way, the abandoning of the outside notice board could represent a move towards exclusivity and an inward looking mentality.

In a defense of neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic worship, Smail (1994) states that,

Those of us who have actually participated in Charismatic renewal worship, especially in its early days and our own early days within it, can bear witness that we have been carried, not into some vague mystic ecstasies without Christian content, but into the kind of worship of the Ancient of Days and the Lamb who is in the midst of His throne that the

book of Revelation describes. This has added to our corporate worship of God a dimension of immediacy, directness, depth, freedom, and joy to an extent that we did not know before (Smail, 1994: 96).

Given his strong views on this matter, Smail still acknowledges areas of concern regarding Charismatic worship practices. He suggests that Charismatics have failed to ‘...find a central and regular place in their worship for the confession of sins and deep repentance’ (ibid: 98). Within the framework of corporate worship within the City Christian Centre, we can observe changes in the Breaking of Bread service – traditionally the time and ‘place’ to meditate on questions of personal sinfulness. Whereas a large portion of the service in 1979 was devoted to the act of Communion, which focused too on Christ’s sacrifice, and therefore our response to that (repentance), a significant shift in the emphasis placed upon Communion has transpired. Today, that part of the Celebration service set aside for the Breaking of Bread has been marginalised and is often rushed or even left out of the service altogether. When one considers the worship practices of the hybrid church, a major shift lies in the importance now placed upon the experiential, a shift that draws classical Pentecostals and Charismatics closer to a point of assimilation.

This *assimilation*, as I have suggested in chapter three, can be attributed to a number of factors. Firstly, each church in fellowship with the Assemblies of God has the potential for a great deal of autonomy and subsequently the denomination

has little direct control over the policies and direction of any given fellowship. This arrangement effectively limits the level of accountability the Assemblies of God may demand from each congregation thereby increasing the potential for either outside influence upon doctrine or internal influence from the leader. Church switching provides a second factor behind assimilation. As people from other churches (many of them mainline Charismatic) switch their membership and attend traditional Pentecostal churches, the interaction and exchange of ideas between classical Pentecostals and Charismatics produces something of a melting pot effect. A third factor expands the melting pot effect to a wider Christian scene. Assimilation can occur within separate churches because of the factors we have considered. A more generalised assimilation is taking place, however, due to an evangelical and Charismatic Christian culture that is shared by a vast number of believers throughout the country. The proliferation of literature, worship tapes and cds, large-scale Christian events and resource material like the *Alpha* course all contribute to the milieu which helps to create a uniformity of practices and belief.

#### ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> The age at which I first saw the Fig Tree Gospel Hall

<sup>2</sup> Luke 22:19 (New International Version).

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<sup>3</sup>1 Corinthians 14:33 (New International Version).

<sup>4</sup>New International Version.

<sup>5</sup> Pentecostal churches do not use real wine in their Breaking of Bread services. The view has traditionally been held that Christians should be teetotallers and avoid the taking of alcohol at all costs. Even though the Bible makes no direct reference to the avoidance of alcohol, teetotalism has been the accepted condition because of its unambiguous nature. If one were to drink alcohol, the question would arise regarding how much would be an acceptable limit. In addition, Pentecostals place a great deal of emphasis on avoiding 'every kind of evil' (1 Thessalonians 5:22). As the extreme effects of alcohol can lead to serious physical and mental problems, avoidance generally, has been traditionally regarded as the best option.

<sup>6</sup> Excerpt from 'Jesus, How Lovely You Are' by Dave Bolton (1975, Thankyou Music), in *Songs and Hymns of Fellowship* (1987).

<sup>7</sup> 'He is Lord' by Martin V. Frey (1977), in *Songs and Hymns of Fellowship* (1987).

<sup>8</sup> 'Thank You Jesus' author unknown, arranged by Margaret Evans (1983, Thankyou Music), in *Songs and Hymns of Fellowship* (1987).

<sup>9</sup> All the Elders of the church, at that time, were male.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Come On and Celebrate’ by Patricia Morgan (1984, Thankyou Music), in *Songs and Hymns of Fellowship* (1987).

<sup>11</sup> ‘We Bring the Sacrifice of praise’ by Kirk Dearman (1981, Stamps-Baxter Music of the Zondervan Corporation), in *Songs and Hymns of Fellowship* (1987).

<sup>12</sup> Roy Dale – unpublished.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Jesus We Enthroned You’ by Paul Kyle (1980, Thankyou Music), in *Songs and Hymns of Fellowship* (1987).

<sup>14</sup>Text version used here is the The New American Standard Version. Sue used a different version that was probably *The Message* – a paraphrased version of the Bible by Eugene H. Peterson (1997). In this version the exhortation to ‘...shout joyfully to the Lord’, reads, ‘...let’s raise the roof!’

<sup>15</sup> ‘City Christian’ is how the church is commonly referred to by a majority of its members (and ex-members), as opposed to its full name ‘City Christian Centre’. In conversation, the designation ‘City Christian’ evokes a certain familiarity and

tacit understanding between individuals who have experienced the church beyond the most peripheral of levels.

<sup>16</sup>'These are the days of Elijah' by Robin Mark (1995, Daybreak Music, Eastbourne).

**5**

**Theology: "If you have your Bibles with you..."**

**A unified front**

The dominant theology of the City Christian Centre cannot be summed up in a concise manner. There is a clear distinction, however, between accepted Pentecostal doctrine (as taught on an 'official' basis within the Assemblies of God) and that doctrine which has been appropriated and nurtured within autonomous churches in fellowship with the Assemblies of God. Each Assembly practises its own unique teaching; this may be almost identical to the official line, but it may easily be quite a number of degrees off it. To the outsider, these differences in teaching, expressed, very often through no more than subtle nuances and emphases, can be impossible to detect. A familiarity with the language of the Pentecostal believer is required and this takes time to develop. Added to the problem of discernment, is the further subtlety of gesture, expression, and non-verbal inference. There are many actions and responses that are 'hit and miss' within any given church meeting, yet these instances are usually perpetrated innocently by newer members of the fellowship. As they are introduced, through teaching and Bible study, to an all embracing 'theology', actions, words, thoughts and motives begin to be understood in a particular light and changes to the individual's perceptions and lifestyle occur. To acquire grounding in the teaching espoused by a particular church doesn't mean that one acquires perfection. Christians struggle and often fall; what is significant,

however, is the fact that a life is rooted in a theology. For the conservative believer every constituent of existence is filtered through it.

The 'filter', in reality, is not one-dimensional. In order to gain a purchase on understanding any given phenomenon, the sociologist may be tempted (or forced) to represent that element in its most base form; its uniformity is emphasized at the expense of detail. In presenting a 'snapshot' of social life, the end result is in 'black and white' not 'colour'. Within the context of this study, however, I want to attempt to stress both the united front of Pentecostalism, as promulgated by the members of the City Christian Centre, and also the diversity intrinsic within the interaction of the fellowship. There are levels of relationship between individuals and degrees of adherence between congregations and concepts; while these interactions hold a strong propinquity, there is still much going on below the surface. The uniformity holds but there is more to study, for it is in the multi-dimensional and the 'polychromatic' that we begin to view the changes taking place within British Pentecostalism.

In this chapter, we will consider more closely, the theology of the City Christian Centre from its doctrinal stance of the 1970s through to the present day. A separate section evaluating theological interpretations of the role of women in Pentecostalism generally and specifically within the City Christian Centre is also included. In presenting this overview, it will be possible to identify the many influences that have shaped the fellowship's beliefs over the last twenty years and

a picture will emerge that supports the notion of diversity. (1) Some of the sources of influence have impacted directly from recent (often sensational) 'moves of the Holy Spirit' (the 'Toronto Blessing' for example). (2) Others have developed in a far more 'organic' way and permeated the hearts and minds of the congregation through contact with new members and different ministries. (3) A more direct instigator of doctrine is the teaching of the pastor and other senior figures. Each new theological permutation is appropriated via these sources: through 'global moves of God', the grassroots beliefs of the congregation and the influence of leadership teaching.

An appropriate starting point would be to review official Assembly of God doctrine. Below I have reproduced their Statement of Fundamental Truths which remains, in essence, unaltered to date.

### **The Assemblies of God in Great Britain & Ireland**

#### **Statement of Fundamental Truths**

The Scriptures, known as the Bible, are the inspired Word of God, the infallible and all-sufficient rule for faith and practice. This statement of Fundamental Truths is not intended as a creed for the Church, but as a basis of unity for a full Gospel Ministry (1 Cor. 1:10).

**WE BELIEVE** that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. 2 Tim. 3:15-16; 2 Peter 1:21.

WE BELIEVE in the unity of the One True and Living God who is the Eternal, Self-Existent "I AM", who has also revealed Himself as One Being in three Persons - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:29; Matt. 28:19.

WE BELIEVE in the Virgin Birth, Sinless Life, Miraculous Ministry, Substitutionary Atoning Death, Bodily Resurrection, Triumphant Ascension and Abiding Intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ and in His Premillennial Second Advent as the blessed hope set before all believers. Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23; Heb. 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22; Acts 2:22; 10:38; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 9:12; Luke 24:39; 1 Cor. 15:4; Acts 1:9; Eph. 4:8-10; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 1 Cor. 15:22-24, 51-57; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Rev. 20:1-6.

WE BELIEVE in the fall of man, who was created pure and upright, but fell by voluntary transgression. Gen. 1:26-31; 3:1-7; Rom. 5:12-21.

WE BELIEVE in salvation through faith in Christ, who died for our sins according to Scripture, was buried and was raised from among the dead on the third day according to Scriptures, and through His Blood we have Redemption. Titus 2:11; 3:5-7; Rom. 10:8-15; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; This experience also known as the New Birth, and is an instantaneous and

complete operation of the Holy Spirit upon initial faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. John 3:5-6; James 1:18; Peter 1:23; 1 John 5:1.

WE BELIEVE that baptism by immersion in water is enjoined upon all who have really rejected sin and have truly believed with all their hearts in Christ as Saviour and Lord. Matt. 28:19; Acts 10:47-48; Acts 2:38-39.

WE BELIEVE in the baptism in the Holy Spirit, the initial evidence of which is the speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance. Acts 2:4; 10:44-46; 11:14-16; 19:6; Isa. 8:18.

WE BELIEVE that the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and the Offices have been set by God in the church, as recorded in the New Testament. 1 Cor. 12:4-11; 28; Eph. 4:7-16.

WE BELIEVE in holiness of life and conduct in obedience to the command of God "Be ye holy for I am holy". 1 Pet. 1:14-16; Heb. 12:14; 1 Thess. 5:23; 1 John 2:6; also 1 Cor. 13.

WE BELIEVE that deliverance from sickness, by Divine healing, is provided for in the Atonement. Isa. 53:4-5; Matt. 8:16-17; James 5:13-16.

WE BELIEVE that Breaking of Bread is enjoined upon all believers until the Lord comes. Luke 2:14-20; 1 Cor. 11:20-34.

WE BELIEVE in the bodily resurrection of all men, in the everlasting conscious bliss of all who truly believe in our Lord Jesus Christ and that everlasting conscious punishment is the portion of all those whose names are not written in the Book of Life. John 5:29-29; 1 Cor. 15:22-24; Dan. 12:2-3; Matt.25:46; 2 Thess. 1:9; Rev. 20:10-15. (Assemblies of God, 1979).

The above Statement of Truth supplies us with the basic doctrine of the Assemblies of God. In some respects it may appear to be quite thorough: each point is backed up with the appropriate Scriptures and the wording is concise. Few, if any, Assembly of God fellowships would dispute or question any of these edicts. The Pentecostal movement generally would find the Elim Church in the United Kingdom objecting to the point on the baptism in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues as the 'initial evidence' of the experience (Wilson, 1961). If we were to include the wider Charismatic movement, there would quickly be revealed a number of potential conflicts, although many would remain undisclosed by just a cursory study of the Assembly of God Statement.

The teaching of baptism by 'immersion in water' (the Pentecostal way) would be hard to accept by some Church of England or Methodist Charismatics who were

loyal still to the institutional teachings of their churches and the tradition of Christening babies. Pentecostals do not accept the notion of infant baptism. The act is regarded as a symbol of the transition that takes place in a person's life upon conversion. Accounts of baptism in the Bible indicate that the ceremony is only for those who are old enough to choose repentance and to follow Christ, a decision tiny infants are unable to make. Wilson makes the observation, however that, 'Believer's baptism is not necessarily adult baptism...anyone who appears aware of the significance of redemption , even if only nine or so, is eligible' (Wilson, 1961: 19). A second objection centres on the actual practicalities of baptism. Pentecostals believe that 'total immersion' is the true Biblical method, as opposed to the sprinkling of water or the sign of the Cross on the forehead. As a symbol, the picture is given as a 'witness' to onlookers, the old life descends into the waters of baptism and a 'new creation' comes forth from them.

Usually referred to as the 'baptismal', the large bath-like constructions are, more often than not, built into the floor of each Pentecostal church at the foot of the stage. Each can accommodate at least three people with room to spare. There are steps to the left side and the right; the water is usually chest high and (if the heating rods have worked) comfortably warm. The candidate for baptism will, very often, share a brief testimony with the congregation of what the Lord has done in their life, how they were saved and changed and why they now want <sup>1</sup> to be baptised. Services in which baptisms take place are considered to be great opportunities to invite 'unsaved' friends and family: each testimony is regarded

as a powerful witness and a tool of evangelism. Fully clothed - minus footwear<sup>2</sup> - each candidate, after finishing their testimony, steps down into the water and is received by the waiting pastor and helper (usually an Elder of the church). The candidate will fold his or her arms across the chest and is supported on either side by the 'baptisers'. The pastor will then say "(candidates first name) upon confession of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, I now baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." The candidate is then lowered backwards into the water and is totally immersed for no more than a second before they are returned to an upright standing position.

As the newly baptised Christian ascends the steps and is greeted by helpers with towels, the fellowship claps and cheers and, often, a favourite worship song, chosen by the candidate, will be sung. There is a warm and excited atmosphere in the church. At the City Christian Centre (and numerous other baptism services I have attended) the proceedings are not formal. Members of the congregation will gather around the 'baptismal' or stand on their chairs to get a better view, with every baptism there will be a series of flashes as photographs are taken. Either prior to or immediately after a person's baptism, it is not unusual for the candidate to be hugged by various friends or colleagues. Such displays are common and are indicative of the emotional climate of the baptismal service (see Toulis, 1997: 146-150 for an account of water baptism in an African-Caribbean Pentecostal church in England).

Far removed as the Pentecostal water baptism is from the infant Christening of higher church institutions, the differences are not simply aesthetic. To the Pentecostal, the implicit meaning attached to infant baptism contradicts the basic understanding of salvation through conversion as an act of the will. Infant baptism bypasses the will of the baptisee. A common prayer within the Alternative Service Book reads,

And now we give thanks because through baptism we have been buried with Christ so that we may rise with him to the new life. (Alternative Service Book)

Understood in this way, salvation is no longer a conscious act of volition. Redemption is inherent within the Christening ceremony and specifically appropriated at the point of baptism. To the Pentecostal, however, this is not true salvation. The Assembly of God doctrine on baptism does beg an important question regarding the eternal destiny of those children who are deemed, because of their young age, to be unable to reasonably understand the doctrine of salvation and therefore unable to make a definitive commitment to Christ. David Petts, commenting on what he refers to as, 'the error of the doctrine of "baptismal regeneration",' (Petts, 1991:84) supplies an answer to this question and expresses the commonly held belief of most conservative Christians, that

It is utterly unthinkable that God would keep a baby out of heaven just because its parents didn't have it sprinkled! Jesus said concerning little children that "of such is the kingdom of heaven", and this is surely sufficient grounds for believing that babies (whether sprinkled or not) go straight to heaven when they die. (Petts, 1991: 84).

Of course, the Assembly of God teaching on water baptism serves to reinforce the vital significance placed upon a personal salvation experience. Notice in the above Statement of Truths how the section pertaining to this speaks of, 'an instantaneous and complete operation of the Holy Spirit upon initial faith in the Lord Jesus Christ'.

As we have mentioned earlier, the baptism in the Holy Spirit, according to Assembly of God doctrine, is manifested, as an 'initial evidence' by the 'speaking in tongues'. Other 'gifts' are bestowed upon the Christian but always they will speak in a new tongue first. The second largest Pentecostal denomination in England, next to the Assemblies of God - the Elim Church - does not share the 'initial evidence' belief, nor would the greater percentage of non-Pentecostal Charismatics.

A further difference between the Assemblies of God and more liberal modes of Christian belief involves the tenable status of their Statement of Truths; they *believe* in a literal sense an '...error-free Bible' (Thompson, 1992: 69). Of the

fundamentals, as laid down, the average Pentecostal would never dream of disputing even some of the more incredible elements within their doctrine, whereas, a liberal believer may well question, doubt or simply not believe some of the 'basics' of their institutionalised theology. The virgin birth of Jesus was just that; the healings which took place in the New Testament both during the three years of Jesus' ministry and throughout the accounts of the early church, all are believed to have taken place - literally. Not only that, but the Pentecostal believes that such miraculous signs and wonders are ongoing and did not stop at the book of Revelation. A person who did not believe these fundamentals could not be considered a Pentecostal. The divide would be too great and a theological exclusion would result. Significantly, however, a Christian within a mainline denomination who held liberal beliefs, would not be considered any less a Christian or member of the church they attended even if their views denied basic fundamental doctrine -the Bishop of York's denunciation of the Virgin Birth being a prime example. It is possible to 'believe', or not 'believe', as the case may be, and still be accepted.

It is the literal beliefs of the Pentecostal that so drastically sets them apart from the wider society, both church and social. Non Christian friends, neighbours and work colleagues will often be wary of their associations with them. Families, in particular, can quickly grow confused and frustrated when their mother, father, son, daughter or sibling is suddenly and dramatically saved. In their book *People, Power, Change: Movements of Social Transformation* (1970), Gerlach and Hine

suggest that commitment to a '...social, political, or religious movement...' (in our case, a religious movement) precedes a '...bridge burning act...' (Gerlach and Hine, 1970: 199). Even with the best intentions among all concerned, family tensions can increase rapidly when an individual's life is revolutionised. The 'world' alienates these 'new creations' and the Pentecostal church incorporates them; their experiences are explained and their questions are answered.

To the 'outside', the City Christian Centre, in complete agreement with the Statement Of Truths we have discussed, presents a unified front. It would be easy to devote research time and energy to the uniting aspects of faith and Christian experience, yet the shared beliefs we have considered so far, although significant, do not encompass the entire theology of those at the City Christian Centre. The above constitutes the very basics. A closer look between the lines reveals a far more complex picture.

### **Between and 'behind' the lines**

Pastor Hedges was a traditionalist when it came to Pentecostal doctrine, like Pastor Fuller before him. Within the framework of this study, it is possible to regard the theology of the City Christian Centre during the late 1970s and the early 1980s (known then as the Fig Tree Gospel Hall) as something of a 'base line'. Although it was possible to trace some slight variations of belief in the theological stance of Pastor Hedges, these were more indicative of his enormous charisma and accompanying eccentricity rather than deviant thought. His

sermons were passionately Pentecostal in the best Assemblies of God tradition and his Bible studies were extensions of his sermons.

Fig Tree in the late 70s was numerically very small: some thirty core members were the backbone of the fellowship. Fifty people may have attended each of the two Sunday services (the numbers swelling due to visitors or more peripheral members). The backbone constituted the congregations of the services during the week. A deep sense of family existed and although the format of each meeting was, in Pentecostal terms, quite formal, the formality was not due to a lack of relationship among the congregation. The group was close knit and there existed an openness and desire to talk about 'the things of God'.

The closeness of the interaction and the frequency of the services and times of fellowship limited exposure to a larger society or even to wider Christian circles and this may well account for the unity of beliefs which largely prevailed at that time. All conversation centred on Jesus and the Bible and it was in those conversations that the older ones passed on their interpretations of the 'Word' to the younger ones. Questions were asked - answers were given.

Although the topics discussed were varied, they tended not to fall outside of the doctrinal norm. Debates often centred on the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the baptism in the Spirit. Testimonies were shared often; they were part of the meetings and of the times of fellowship outside of the weekly church programme.

Strategies for evangelism were high up on the agenda and other subjects seemed to flow from that premise. Because it would be essential, when evangelising, to provide answers to people's questions regarding Christianity, issues such as the 'creation verses evolution' debate were talked about with much fervour, so too were the 'rapture' and the 'Second Coming of Christ'. Healing and 'deliverance' were important elements which engaged many in exposition; the question of healing, during the period we are now discussing (1976-83), was elevated more in conversation and interest than the issue of 'deliverance', but that began to change soon after Roy Dale became the pastor in 1983.

On top of everyone's agenda, however, was the Gospel. Fig Tree Gospel Hall had a real sense of 'mission'. There was an urgency, a desperation to preach the Gospel. Whether it was to indifferent shoppers in the middle of town on a Saturday afternoon, or to a stranger you happened to sit next to on a bus, the exigency to share the 'good news' was irresistible. Testimonies stressed the significance of entering into a personal relationship with Jesus; a straight Gospel message was preached in the Sunday night service and was always followed by an 'appeal'. This invocation was made by the preacher to the congregation at the end of the sermon. A sermon would normally conclude by 'winding down'. After the points had been made and the message given (in a typical Sunday evening service, the sermon would be approximately thirty minutes, but quite often longer) the preacher would ask everyone to bow their heads in prayer, "every head bowed, every eye closed". Once this request was granted, the monologue

would continue in this manner (the following is taken from one of Pastor Hedges' Sunday evening Gospel meeting sermons, March 1981).

It may be that you have been listening to the message tonight and that you haven't understood, quite, all that has been said. You may have come along here for the first time and heard the many testimonies and began to wonder 'how could it be that these people are saying the things they are saying?' You may be thinking for the first time that perhaps God is real and that He can make new that which is worn out; that He can rebuild that which has been broken or that He can replace that which has been lost. I'm here tonight to tell you that He can do those things, He can change you and you can know this very night what it is to have that burden of sin lifted. I'm going to give you the opportunity to ask Jesus to come into your life and to forgive you of all those things that have blocked your relationship with God. Jesus has already forgiven us and taken all our sin upon Himself when He died for us. All we have to do is receive that forgiveness, to turn away from our sin - the Bible calls it repentance - and to make Jesus Lord of our lives. When we do that we will be 'born - again', made new and Jesus will be closer than a brother to us; He has promised that He will never leave us nor forsake us. We can know God tonight and walk out of these doors different people. If you have never asked Jesus into your life and you want to, then I want you to raise your hand so that I can see it. No one else in the congregation will see it and

when I have acknowledged it you can put your hand down. We're not trying to embarrass anyone here tonight, but if you want to make a commitment and want to indicate to me that that is your intention so that we can pray in a few moments, a simple prayer of commitment to God, then please just briefly raise your hand and once I have seen it put it down again. Thank you, I see your hand. Thank you, there is someone else. And over there too, thank you I see your hand - you can put it down now. Is there another? Do you feel that God, by the Holy Spirit is talking to you tonight and saying 'yes, now is the time to make that commitment and to experience my love and grace'. If you are feeling that, please don't put it off.

For those who have indicated to me that you want to ask the Lord Jesus into your life, I am now going to say a simple prayer and I want you to repeat it after me in your hearts. There's no need to pray out loud, just silently in your hearts, just make it between you and God. ' Lord Jesus...I thank you for Your sacrifice...for dying for me...so that I may be made whole...I am sorry for the sins I have done...and I ask you now to forgive me...and to come into my life...as Saviour and Lord...help me to repent Lord...and to walk daily in Your light...thank you Lord...amen.

A final announcement at the very end of the meeting would invite those who had prayed the 'sinner's prayer' to see the pastor who would supply them with

various tracts and leaflets explaining, in greater detail, what had just occurred. A Gospel of John was also given to the newly saved.

The preaching of the Gospel and Christian apologetics were the predominant features of every conversation and, as such, formed the substance of any theological debate. Although there were, at times, conflicts of opinion, most, if not all, of the dissenting views fell within a quite acceptable doctrinal framework. Though occasionally thought to be a bit 'off course' in the eyes of some, these dissenters never veered too far.

Everything was about to change.

Between 1981 to 1984 Fig Tree tripled in size. The floodgates had opened and the influx of new members quite overwhelmed the older ones. That is not to say that the existing members did not welcome the newcomers, far from it, to them this was the next step for the church. It was simply regarded as what happens to a fellowship when its members 'get serious with God and preaching the Word'. It was a glorious time. Fig Tree was overwhelmed by this increase in the sense that the time and energy spent, prior to the numerical growth, on each newly saved person had had a grounding effect on the individual. The fellowship nurtured each new member and the delicate bonding of relationships had plenty of time to cement. When it came, the increase of membership happened so quickly that resources were stretched. Had this particular dilemma been articulated at that

time, the response would be one of joyful optimism, 'what a wonderful dilemma to be in'. With new people, however, came new ideas, new forms of expression and a new pastor.

Each new expression must be understood as being an addition to the existing Statement of Fundamental Truths. It is not that the basics changed, it is more a case of a complex emergence of new theological concepts which were situated 'between the lines' of the established 'truths'. Between 1983 to 1987, with the induction of Roy Dale as Pastor, the City Christian Centre entered its most tumultuous phase to date - spiritually, politically and interpersonally.

### **Pigs in the Parlour**

The 'church politic' aspect of the City Christian Centre is integrally linked to the mindset of the fellowship; issues relating to policy, structure and organisation will be discussed in the next chapter. For now I want to concentrate on presenting an overview of the theological teaching during the mid 1980s. It was the start of the 'experiential' in spiritual living for the City Christian Centre and a precursor to what would follow in the 1990s and the completion of our account. Although this period in the history of the fellowship is vastly different from how it is today, important elements remain – the move to a more experience orientated expression being the most significant.

Prior to his induction, Pastor Dale's former ministry roles had seen a great deal of 'spiritual warfare'. The theology of this particular issue was not new, as such, to the fellowship he now led. There had been a number of isolated instances in which certain individuals had received ministry for 'deliverance'. Those involved, however, were always careful to conduct the 'sessions' either outside of the regular church schedule or, should the need arise during a meeting, in an office or the vestry away from the congregation. The whole realm of 'deliverance' and 'possession', even to long standing Pentecostals, was and is quite an uncomfortable area of doctrine to negotiate. There are many different understandings and interpretations of this phenomenon and this has created a confused perception of what 'deliverance' may entail. For most Assemblies, 'demon possession' is an area best left alone if at all possible.

Another problematic, besides the potential for theological error in the teaching on 'deliverance', was how the 'world' perceived the notion of 'possession'. It is reasonable to assume that William Peter Blatty's best selling novel *The Exorcist* (1971) and the subsequent film, less than a decade earlier, had created a specific image of this nightmare experience in the minds of a large audience. Any mention of 'exorcism' or 'demon possession' brought to mind the sensational depictions in that film. This was not only true of non-churchgoers but of Christians too.

Although no member of, the then, Fig Tree Gospel Hall would have even considered going to the cinema to see such a film<sup>3</sup>, the great publicity triggered by its controversial subject matter created an awareness within the evangelical community and many Christians acquainted themselves with its portrayal in order to mount an attack against it. Outraged over some of the film's more graphic (sacrilegious) content, demonstrations were staged outside the cinemas screening *The Exorcist*. Tracts and leaflets would be handed out to those going to see it and long discussions would take place outside the cinema doors. For a city the modest size of Kingston these demonstrations were quite news worthy, particularly within the churches.

Within the Fig Tree Gospel Hall then, it was the case that both leaders and many of the congregation (especially those who were active in ministry) were cognisant of the perceived image of 'possession'. Even so, it was not an image that most Assembly of God fellowships wanted to dwell on. It conjured up darkness and evil and sinister notions of gothic church traditions. It was eerie and foreboding, quirky and all together 'weird'. Most Assemblies wanted to project the exact opposite: they wanted to depict Christianity in positive terms, as 'light' and 'salt' to the world, as joyous and fulfilling; they didn't want to get caught up in the mire of satanic activity. Walker observes that,

**Pentecostalism has not been overcome by demonic infestations**

**...denominations such as Elim and the Assemblies of God have believed**

in demons but have kept them firmly under the bed and firmly under control. There has been little interest or fascination in the habits, habitat or *haute couture* of evil spirits (Walker, 1994: 57).

True to the integrity of Pentecostals, however, the issue could not be totally pushed aside. The fact remained that there were numerous accounts of 'possession' in the Bible<sup>4</sup> and as the Scriptures were considered to be the infallible word of God, a space had to be maintained for it within the experience and beliefs of any given fellowship. It was within the context of a changing congregation that Pastor Dale introduced his own brand of theology concerning 'deliverance' into the City Christian Centre. The fellowship was no longer confined to just thirty or so members who could slowly nurture new members as they arrived in their dribs and drabs. The building was quickly filled to capacity and plans for a new building project were already on the agenda. New ministry programmes were being established and the past experiences of many of the 'switchers' who joined City Christian at that time, presented the 'oversight' (leadership team) with a plethora of new ideas to assimilate.

With hindsight, it is hard to imagine how a church could, over a period of a year, become so deeply obsessed with 'deliverance', 'unclean spirits' and all the manifestations that accompany such phenomena. The 'deliverance' aspect, however, was not thrust on to the people in isolation from other concepts. In the first few months of his appointment, Pastor Dale initiated a series of in-depth

Bible studies which covered both the basics of the Christian faith and a number of more specialised subjects. There was a great emphasis placed on these studies and the weekly turn out was very high. Dale would often voice his disappointment to the congregation during the Sunday services should the numbers attending the weekday meetings begin to fall. The illustration was sometimes given of a meal that is lovingly and painstakingly prepared; having been invited to dinner, the guests do not turn up for it.

The Tuesday night Bible studies were now much changed from the past format under Pastor Hedges. Instead of just the one congregation sharing in a time of praise and then listening to quite an inspirational sermon given by the Pastor, the fellowship was divided into three large groups (each one numerically equal in size to that of the former meeting). Each group would be given a different study; one would be taken by Pastor Dale and the other two by members of the oversight. Out of the three groups, one would cover basic doctrine, the second would cover a specific text (this one was more like a typical Bible study); the third would be a more specialised study, given by Pastor Dale, on a particularly topical subject. Out of the three options, Pastor Dale's study was always the best attended; topics covered included marriage and divorce, finances, leadership, praise and worship and 'deliverance'. The teaching given on the 'supernatural realm' was integral to an overall shift in emphasis. 'Life in the Spirit' had always been a major theme in the Pentecostal experience; under the teaching of Pastor Dale this theme was elevated to new heights.

Juxtaposed with the teaching on 'deliverance' was a new expression in praise and worship. Dale was particularly adept at leading worship. In his book *God's People*, Calley suggests that,

A successful leader is one who can stimulate his congregation to respond as a group, who can make members lose their own individuality in an impassioned, sometimes hysterical identification with the church (Calley, 1965: 74).

This was certainly evidenced during the praise sessions led by Dale. As the worship in the church became more extreme in emotion, losing a former simplicity and stress on adoration based upon the redeeming work of Christ, the fellowship entered into a new era of the experiential over the previous tenets of the 'Word'. The shift was subtle and the congregation largely shared in the excitement of the moment. Exhortations to enter 'within the veil' were given and prophetic messages assumed a more aggressive and direct tone. Times of worship became times of 'proclamation' and 'prophecy'. The 'strongholds of Satan' were torn down and rebuked. For the first time in the history of the fellowship emphasis was placed upon the reaching out to the city and not just to the local housing estate in which the church was situated. Before such outreach could commence, however, it was an imperative that the church was ready for the task and this instigated an intense period of introspection.

Through teaching, prophecy and an increasingly dominating leadership structure, the notion became firmly established that when the church - the body - was where it should be before God, only then would truly effective outreach follow. There had to be a time of cleansing before 'refreshing'; the 'pigs in the parlour'<sup>5</sup> had to be purged.

The scene was set for the introduction of 'deliverance' ministry, an area Pastor Dale was already very experienced in. The teaching on this subject was steadily increased, so too was the emphasis on worship and 'doing battle with the enemy' within the services and in a corporate sense. Each time of praise and worship was highly charged with emotion. Dancing was instituted, marches around the building, and around the building site of the soon to be completed new church building, were frequent, to the bewilderment of the onlookers from the council estate. Wild displays of spiritual perturbation were exhibited during the meetings: individuals would swoon or shake, cry out strange utterances during the sermon and be escorted out by the ushers for counseling and quite possibly 'deliverance'.

As the various outbursts and displays within the meetings became more frequent, Pastor Dale simply put such manifestations forward as confirmation of his teaching. The devil was 'hitting out' in fear because of the power generated within the body of believers at the City Christian Centre which was 'breaking down strongholds around the church and in the city'.

In that milieu of highly charged emotionalism and 'supernatural' life, some of the former understandings of holiness and self-discipline fell away. The Assemblies of God official 'statement' reads, 'We believe in holiness of life and conduct in obedience to the command of God "Be ye holy for I am holy". 1 Pet. 1:14-16; Heb. 12:14; 1 Thess. 5:23; 1 John 2:6; also 1 Cor. 13.' Holiness, as we have already mentioned, was considered an essential goal to strive towards. Unlike adherents of the holiness movement (Bebbington, 1989; Blumhoffer, 1993; Synan, 1997), Pentecostals believed that complete holiness could never be achieved in this life, but that Christians were required to continually work towards it, eliminating those actions that were thought to be sinful and offensive to God. This was in no way a belief in sanctification through works; Pentecostals firmly profess their reliance on the 'saving grace' of God in all aspects of life. Although 'saved by grace' - and that entailed the forgiveness of sins past, present and future (for those who continued to walk with the Lord) - Christians were still human and still erred. The sins were dealt with as far as eternity was concerned, but until then, life was still fraught with temptations and pitfalls.

A great emphasis was traditionally placed upon self-discipline at the City Christian Centre. It was believed that problems could be overcome, within an individual's personal life, with prayer, trust in God and a very physical commitment to do something about it. Certain places, through the exercise of the will, would be avoided: cinemas, public houses, nightclubs, as we have

mentioned, were all considered far too 'worldly' for a Christian to frequent. Drinking alcohol and smoking were considered to be very wrong, so too, of course, was the taking of illicit drugs. Bad language and the use of profanity and blasphemy were also heavily proscribed although it is necessary to make some qualifications to this notion of proscription.

A common misconception of the 'outsider' may be the perceived 'legalism' of the evangelical Christian experience. To someone whose friend or family member's lifestyle, upon joining a conservative Christian fellowship, starts to alter in quite a dramatic way, a need exists for explanation and understanding. To the onlooker, a newly saved individual has been traditionally seen as having been made to give a great many things up, things which may have been shared in a social setting with others. This abstinence is often thought to have been imposed by an austere church system and presented to the new members as a set of do's and don'ts, an inflexible set of rules. Whereas instruction, counsel and example provide the new convert with a 'crash course' of lifestyle norms and interpretations of what it is to be 'holy', a young Christian<sup>6</sup> will genuinely strive to please God because of the relationship he or she now has with Jesus. A distinction has to be made between that of Christianity as a 'religion' and Christianity as a 'relationship' with Jesus. Pentecostals scoff at the idea of religion and quite vehemently reject the notion that they are religious. They claim not a set of laws and commandments intended to appease God if they are kept, but a true relationship with Him, specifically in the person of Jesus Christ. It is a

love relationship in which God gave unconditionally because of His great love for humanity - for each individual<sup>7</sup> - and love is returned on the part of the believer. To relinquish certain activities, therefore, that may be deemed to hurt Jesus in some way, though not always easy to surrender, is a basic desire of the Christian; the journey to holiness commences.

Pastor Dale offered a short cut. The concept or state of holiness had always been integrally linked with self-discipline or self-control. To be holy was to exhibit the 'fruit of the Spirit' as read in Galatians, 'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control' (Galatians 5:22,23). With the emphasis now firmly on 'spiritual warfare' the ministry offered through 'deliverance' was applied to those murky areas of life that had formerly been the focus of much self-discipline.

While the Sunday and midweek services still radiated with a fervent exuberance which attracted a great many new members from neighbouring churches and towns, the activities which were scheduled between the meetings throughout the week, resonated with a tenebrous vibe. Innumerable appointments were made between the middle of 1984 to 1986 for people to receive 'deliverance' ministry. No longer was such ministry restricted to an isolated 'problem' case, quickly 'hushed up' and dealt with in as private a manner as possible; it became conceivable that every member of the congregation could be in need of that particular kind of help. Nor were the 'demons' restricted to the former (usual)

manifestations. A person would most commonly have a 'demon of epilepsy' or 'a demon of depression' and the 'demon' would reveal itself in some obvious physical way, '...causing recognizable symptoms of illness' (Jules-Rosette, 1975: 194). Under the ministry of Pastor Dale, however, 'demonic activity' was thought to be responsible for a whole host of problems. There were now 'demons' of anger, lust, masturbation, nicotine, unforgiveness, bitterness, unbelief, alcohol, pornography, defeat, the common cold (and any number of illness related 'demons'), and many more.

'Deliverance' sessions varied in time and could be as short as thirty minutes or as long as two hours with subsequent sessions scheduled over a number of weeks. Some instruction would be given prior to the actual 'ministry': Pastor Dale would explain his theological understanding of how to perceive the problem under counsel. Although saved, 'demons' could inhabit the believer and be the cause of some particular vice, wrong attitude or mental irregularity; it was possible to 'rebuke' the 'demon' in Jesus' name, to take authority, and to dispel the 'evil spirit'. The problem would then be gone and the individual would be free of it. Dale would look into the spiritual realm and claim to actually see the demon located within the subject: in the stomach or attached to an arm possibly. He would then explain, specifically, what could take place during 'deliverance' and how the 'demon' would try to fight against the command to go. The 'demon' could well manifest itself in a violent way but would not be able to resist the rebuke; the 'spirit' would, usually, leave the body through the mouth<sup>8</sup>.

The Pastor would then proceed, placing his hand on that part of the body in which the 'demon' had been seen (usually the stomach)<sup>9</sup>. A series of loud rebukes would follow, "In the name of Jesus I rebuke you spirit of ...". The subject receiving ministry would often react, as aforementioned, in an agitated and sometimes quite frenzied way. Arms would flail, faces would contort and screams would be emitted. Such manifestations would only fuel the rebuke and eventually, after a series of chokes, the 'demon' would depart. A prayer of thanks would be said by the Pastor and when the subject had collected him or herself, they would leave, believing in all sincerity that their problem was now gone and that subsequently their relationship with the Lord would be closer.

Having bypassed the processes of self-discipline and perseverance, they were a little further on in their journey to holiness. In this mid 80s period, the basic understanding of what it was to be holy continued in its traditional sense: display the fruit of the Spirit and surrender those things regarded as offensive to God. It was the understanding of how to achieve those ends that had changed: from 'striving towards the goal' to instantaneous 'deliverance'. A different kind of change in the perception of holy living would occur within the City Christian Centre's next and present incarnation. This time, however, the incongruence would lie, not in the problem of 'how' to achieve a level of holiness, but in deciding 'what' holiness actually was.

The City Christian Centre began to make a name for itself. Although many people were leaving the church on theological grounds, many people were joining the church for the same reason. The church gained quite a reputation: to some, within the evangelical community in the city of Kingston, it was regarded as extreme and fanatical and singularly unappealing, to others it was just what they had been waiting for. With all of its excesses and radical teaching, the City Christian Centre attracted a particular kind of 'seeker-switcher', those who were seeking a Christian experience on the front line of spiritual warfare.

Put in context, the revolution in praise and worship, and the emphasis on the 'supernatural', that characterised The City Christian Centre's theological outlook in the mid 1980s, must be seen as a transitional phase. It created a back drop and formed a unique receptivity to the new ideas and theological shifts that were to come.

By 1987 Pastor Dale had, it seemed, exhausted his potential to add anything further to the church. After two years of 'preparing the church' for outreach in what some described as "a campaign similar to McCarthyism", although numerically speaking the attendance figures were higher than they had ever been previously, a kind of stasis set in. Membership was high but the church had stopped growing. So emotionally charged were the times of praise and worship, that one wondered what could possibly come next. What new exuberance or experience could possibly 'top' the service last week?

The 'purging of the Body', also, was eventually criticised. Pastor Dale's interpretation and implementation of 'deliverance' ministry seemed not to work in all cases: many people who had been 'delivered' of the 'spirit of nicotine', for example, found themselves slipping back into the habit of smoking. Even after Pastor Dale wrote and distributed a leaflet entitled *How To Maintain Your Deliverance*<sup>10</sup>, in a rather hasty defense of his ministry, his efforts, though persuasive still to some, simply placed a bigger question mark over his abilities in the minds of others. Pastor Dale left the City Christian Centre to take up a high profile post with the Assemblies of God National Youth Council in 1987. Behind him he left a fellowship totally transfigured from its previous state. A large new building now adjoined the old, a new name had been introduced in an attempt to stem the pervasive culture of the past and a reputation had been forged - City Christian Centre was *the* place to be for an indomitable spiritual time!

### **Personality change**

The late 1980s were a turbulent period in the history of the City Christian Centre although the attendance figures, during the period between Pastor Dale leaving and Pastor Young replacing him, did increase slightly and peaked at approximately two hundred and twenty to two hundred and fifty people. Pastor Young, who was inducted in 1988, was even less of a 'team player' than his predecessor, a realisation which caused great divisions among the interim leadership team and subsequently amongst the congregation. By 1990, after the

many defections, jostling and resignations that so often accompany the installing of a new leader, the church, again, began to take on a different theological 'shape'.

The influx of 'switchers' played a great part in the theological character of the fellowship in two distinctive ways. Firstly, many had joined the church in anticipation of spiritual dynamism. Although Pastor Dale was no longer on the scene, one of his legacies was the reputation for charismatic worship. Even though Pastor Young's personality and personal charisma was far below that of his predecessor, the infrastructure of the meetings remained, more or less, in tact. Musical talent had always been a particular strength of the church and the band had long been established: the contemporary style of praise and worship at the City Christian Centre far surpassed the efforts of other churches in the area. The venue was ideal for energetic praise and worship - lots of people, lots of dance space, lots of music - this, in itself, was particularly appealing to 'seekers' looking for a fresh expression. Although Pastor Young could not match Pastor Dale in the leading of the worship times, his son, Steve, certainly could, and he even began to find new ways of surpassing the excesses of earlier days.

On the whole, the 'switchers' who had joined the City Christian Centre seeking a new experience were quite open to new ideas and so, in some ways, were quite impressionable. Those who were joining the church from other fellowships and committing themselves to Christ for the first time and those who had had no prior

church affiliation and who were getting saved were exposed to a situation in which traditional Pentecostals would have guarded against. The situation in question was to do with the balance between the experiential and the 'Word'. Although Pastor Young considered his main strength to be one of teaching, his sermons would be in sympathy with the various 'moves' of God which were beginning to create a stir of controversy throughout the evangelical movement, and of which placed, it seemed, experience over everything.

The second area in which the 'seekers' influenced the theology of the City Christian Centre, was in their understanding of, and receptivity to, these new 'moves' of God. For many, the ultimate in heightened spiritual awareness would be to experience 'the blessing' and to be part of the 'new wave of the Spirit' which was emanating from Toronto. The closest thing to that expression in Kingston was at the City Christian Centre. The net result of these two influences upon the Church was that a great many of those attending were seeking a spiritual experience that was not backed up necessarily by the traditional reliance upon Scripture.

Before we consider more closely the theology of the City Christian Centre under the leadership of Pastor Young, it would be appropriate, at this point, to consider the contemporary situation within evangelicalism and identify the various trends permeating and influencing the movement. For although the City Christian Centre would remain, in many ways, unique because of the delicate balance of

interaction between its composite parts, its history, the influence of its pastors, the influence of the congregation and the plethora of atomised beliefs and expressions negotiated therein, the fellowship now found itself in the jet stream of Restorationist theology (see Blumhoffer, 1993 chapter 9; Nienkirchen, 1994; Quebedeaux, 1976; Smail, Walker & Wright, 1994).

### **Heaven on Earth**

There is some confusion over what the Restoration movement actually entails. Bebbington identifies the present restoration as an emergence originating predominantly through the 'house church' movement which came into prominence in the early 1980s. Although its origins can be dated back to 1958 when a number of independent evangelicals arranged a series of conferences to discuss the restoring of the present day church back to its original New Testament state (Bebbington 1989). While Charismatic renewal was largely experienced within already established denominations, the restoration mindset was anti-denominational and became the theological substance of many 'break away' churches. Like the house churches, however, coordinated by Bryn Jones, a number of these denominational dissenters become relatively institutionalised themselves, as numbers swelled and the objectives of the Restoration movement became more popularised.

Integral to the growing number of Restorationist fellowships were the 'ministries' which promoted their particular brand of Christianity. The house church offered

various resource materials to the wider Christian community under the label of Harvestime. They organised the Dales Week conferences in Yorkshire and these rousing events attracted many members of the City Christian Centre in the mid 1980s. Harvestime also published a series of Bible studies written by Bryn Jones called *The Sword of the Spirit* and home group leaders at the City Christian Centre were encouraged to use them in their meetings. Other Restorationist groups were formed offering extensive resource material to other churches. Gerald Coats headed his Pioneer ministry and churches; Roger and Faith Forster built up the Icthus Fellowship. More recent operations include The Joshua Generation and Steve Young's (Pastor Young's son and member of the City Christian Centre's leadership) Days of Wonder Trust. The latter two are solely ministry projects whereas Icthus and Pioneer are comprised of both outreach and church.

Springing from the Charismatic experience, the Restoration strand emphasised the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and a new awakening amongst Christians, a renewal within the churches and a spiritual refreshing. In addition, Restoration came to mean the establishing of God's Kingdom on earth as the world's systems are challenged and brought down by a victorious Church. Much of the teaching in the Restoration movement is hard to tie down. It is closely related to the Charismatic movement and a number of Restorationist strands exist, all with some different point of belief emphasised or underplayed. Both Charismatic renewal and Restorationist ideology present problems of clear definition. Michael Harper, a

leading proponent of the Charismatic movement states that renewal, 'has no great theologians. Its teaching is varied and unsystematic' (Harper, 1971: 142, cited in Bebbington 1989: 243).

So too, with the Restorationists, much significance is placed upon openness to the Holy Spirit and His spontaneous leading. Bebbington suggests that a leading figure of the movement was Arthur Wallis who wrote *The Radical Christian* (Wallis 1981). Walker, Bebbington suggests, links the various strands together in his book *Restoring The Kingdom* (Walker, 1985), but even this is not clear cut. Bebbington writes,

Walker has popularised the use of the term 'Restorationism' for all the connexions together, but it should be noted that others wish to confine the term to Bryn Jones's movement (Bebbington 1989: 342).

It would seem that there is much room within the movement for different beliefs and ideas. Because of the anticipation of revelation from the Holy Spirit and the spontaneous nature of the worship experience, one is often encouraged by a leader to just 'go with the flow' and not to try and work out in the mind what God is doing in the spirit. The traditional Pentecostals established spontaneity and a reliance upon the Holy Spirit within meetings, the extent to which the Restorationists take this edict, however, has far surpassed the extemporaneous experiences of a generation ago.

The goal of such overwhelming spiritual ecstasy is the refining of the 'Body of Christ' so that when Jesus returns He will find a perfect church here on Earth. The linkages between the Restorationist and other Charismatic and, even simply, evangelical groups become more binding and complex when we speak of a vision of a 'perfected Church'.

Whereas most non Charismatic/Restorationist groups would believe that the future of the Church, prior to the return of Christ, will be fraught with persecution, hardships, false prophets and other evils associated with 'Godless end times'<sup>11</sup>, the new Charismatic mindset is firmly set on the notion of 'revival' and of the transforming of nations, world systems and politics. The evangelical world today is permeated with 'revival' theology; it is preached in churches, sung about in songs, echoed on Christian television, prolific on the printed page. Words like 'renewal', 'restoration', 'refreshing', 'anointing', 'the blessing', and 'revival' have been adopted into the vocabulary of the evangelical. A belief in a new 'move of God' that is awakening the churches and swelling congregations in various locations is generally held, even if the deeper meanings and implications of revival theology are not always realised. There is anticipation also, that revival, one day, will be experienced globally. Consider the following taken from Colin Urquhart's Kingdom Faith Church website.

God is imperialistic – He plans to take over EVERYTHING! And of course one day every knee WILL bow and every tongue WILL confess that Jesus Christ is Lord – some willingly, others will be forced to (Urquhart, 2000).

This evolution of thought from the former understanding of the future church prior to Christ's return presents us with, not only theological stimulus, but also with sociological significance, for the shift in emphasis and the development of Restoration ideology touches many areas of traditional evangelical and Pentecostal belief. Subsequently the 'society' of believers - action, interaction - changes.

### **The 'restoration' of the City Christian Centre**

During the emergence of the Charismatic movement and Restorationist thought in both the United Kingdom and America, George and Margaret Young were pastoring a church in Gibraltar in relative isolation from the mainstream. The principles of Restoration theology, however, were an integral element of Pastor Young's own understanding and interpretation of what God was doing in His Church. Long before they had even heard of 'Restoration' -the movement, George and Margaret and their congregation were actively living it. He describes his own interpretation this way:

**Malcolm:** What is your understanding of Restoration?

**George:** It's based on the original teachings of the restoration of the tabernacle of David. I think it's in Amos where it says that the tabernacle of David which was thrown down will be raised again... Basically the idea was that the church which flourished in the first three centuries but then went down in the dark ages to - virtually dead. Then it is restored again just before Jesus comes. So Jesus comes back for a beautiful bride, a restored church.

*(George Young, current pastor of the City Christian Centre in his early fifties. With the City Christian Centre for twelve years)*

By the time George and Margaret left Gibraltar and took up residence as the new leaders of the City Christian Centre, their theology was that of the Restoration movement, albeit their own brand. This can be seen in the statement of belief that was displayed on their web site pages in the late 1990s.

**What do we believe in?**

We believe in the Lord Jesus Christ

He is central to everything we are, everything we believe and everything we do. He is almighty God, who became a human being. He also died and rose again to make possible the gift of life and reconciliation with God that we enjoy.

### **We believe in the Kingdom of God**

Submitting to the rule and authority of Jesus established the will of God and the Kingdom of God here on earth. We are committed to sorting out our lives, our relationships and all our dealings with all men according to His standards of justice, righteousness, love, gentleness and integrity.

### **We believe in The Church**

The Universal Church is the current agent, or earthly representative, or 'body' of Jesus on earth now. There is nothing on earth greater than the Church. Local churches are meant to be living expressions of Heaven on earth. Our desire is that City Christian Centre and every other church that belongs to Jesus should be so full of the Holy Spirit that this should be the case.

### **We believe in Relationships**

We relate first to God, our Father in Heaven, through faith in His Son Jesus. But we also recognise that unless we love one another, no one will know how much we love God.

### **We believe in Praise and Worship**

We are a people of praise. We are expressive, exuberant and often noisy, and we believe God likes it that way. After all, Biblical praise is never quiet.

**We believe in Scripture and Teaching**

Everything we believe and everything we do is judged by and grounded upon the Bible, the Word of God. We read the Bible, learn the Bible, teach the Bible and believe the Bible.

**We believe in Mission and Resourcing**

God has called us to a wide range of activities, some of which are in place and some are still in the future. The common denominator in the things we are committed to is serving. We serve the unsaved by witnessing and helping them. We serve other churches by encouraging and supporting them. We serve the city by influencing and prayer. In fact, we see prayer as the vital element that releases life into all that we believe in. Unless we relate to God personally, intimately and regularly, we die and all our doctrines and good deeds become the trimmings of another dead church (Young, 1998).

The above 'statement' was displayed on the internet for a number of years in the mid to late 1990s. The official Assembly of God statement of Fundamental Truths was not cited at all on any pages of the church's web site, nor was there any mention that the City Christian Centre was, in any way affiliated to the Assemblies of God. This was indicative of the anti-denominational mindset of Restoration adherents. Significantly, however, in June 1999, the City Christian

Centre's web site was redesigned. The above statement was removed and a new one put in its place. The new statement replicated that of the Assemblies of God official 'line' exactly with no additions or subtractions. Rather than implying that the new expression within the City Christian Centre was, in a sense, becoming retrospective, the inclusion of the official statement simply reinforces my earlier observation that the tenets affirmed are not elaborated sufficiently to present an obstacle to the new theological outlook. The Scriptural basis for Assembly of God doctrine fits into Restoration thinking; if anything, it does not go far enough in its detail to exclude the tenets of renewal. To the 'outsider' still, the believers of City Christian present a uniformity of belief particularly when situated in the context of an evolving evangelical world.

Along with the amended statement of beliefs, the City Christian's revamped web site indicates that the church is in fellowship with the Assemblies of God and also that it is a member of the Evangelical Alliance. The inclusion of these affiliations provides a strong premise and the respectability of tradition. The appropriation of the appearance of solvency notwithstanding, the City Christian Centre proceeded to exemplify the Restorationist church.

Under the stringent leadership of Pastor and Mrs Young, the Church's transformation to date was made complete. Table 1 compares the former understanding of some key concepts with the church's present comprehension.

In the area of praise and worship we see a move from 'devotional/interpersonal' to 'prophetic proclamation'. In addition, the current expression is far more exuberant and 'liberated'. This is not a case of the church 'going hip' but part of the restoring of the 'tabernacle'.

**George:** The tent that David put up was something that actually came between the tabernacle and the temple that Solomon built. And in that place, instead of having the old ritualistic mosaic things, they had worshipers, singers and instruments, so the modern worship was the tabernacle of David which was thrown down, a thousand years of darkness; it's being restored today, worship is being restored today in the Church. This is ten, fifteen, twenty years ago that this teaching came out and was the foundation for modern, more free worship. That's 'restoration'.

The very style of worship has deep theological roots. In exuberance of praise, the 'restoration' is not only proclaimed and anticipated, but *lived* in the *now*. There is a move away from the devotional songs of thanksgiving and a move towards 'proclaiming the Kingdom'. That is not to suggest that contemporary worship no longer incorporates simplicity and devotion, only that there has been a dramatic shift in emphasis.

Just as dramatic is the emphasis on the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals have always been open to the guiding of the Holy Spirit and this has often led to spontaneous actions, both within the context of a church service and also within the everyday experience of believers. The influence of the Holy Spirit may be seen to operate on a number of levels: baptism in the Spirit is, 'the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon a person to [endue] him with power for service' (Petts, 1991: 101).

**Table 1** Dimensions of theological change

	<b>Fig Tree Gospel Hall 1980</b>	<b>City Christian Centre 1998</b>
<b>Praise and worship</b>	Devotional/Interpersonal	Prophetic proclamation
<b>Holy Spirit</b>	Circumscribed 'gifts' of the Spirit	The 'Blessing'
<b>Leadership</b>	Pastoral	Prophetic/Teacher
<b>Proselytism</b>	Localised/Active	Global/Passive
<b>Holiness</b>	Prescribed	Subjective/Liberal

Traditionally, the evidence of a person's baptism has been to speak in tongues. In addition, the gifts of the Spirit are bestowed upon members within the body and are, 'an outward evidence of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working within...' (Petts, 1991:105). The former exercising of the gifts and of the power of the Spirit has been circumscribed. While it was acceptable to give the Holy Spirit a free hand in any given church service, Pentecostals have, until recently,

guarded against excess. With the phenomenon of the 'Toronto Blessing' and the various other 'moves of God' which have impacted the evangelicals on a global level, manifestations have become extreme (see Beverley, 1995; Orepeza, 1995; Porter & Richter, 1995; Richter, 1997). No longer are meetings subjected to clearly defined (Pentecostal) boundaries. In his book *Catch the Fire* (1994), Guy Chevreau, a teacher at the Airport Vineyard church in Toronto, includes a number of testimonies from different people who have visited the church and received the 'blessing'. The following testimony is from a woman called Sarah; her account graphically describes an experience not uncommon to many who have visited the church in Toronto.

At first I just felt a good deal of energy flowing through me, and my body was involuntarily jerking now and then...It was extremely encouraging when Carol (Arnott) said that she would stay with me while I was on the floor during the message...I don't remember too much of what Carol prayed, but I do recall that my body went into the most unusual motions in response to her prayers...My head started to twist almost violently from side to side. While I worried this might throw my neck out, it actually loosened it up...As an expression of what I was sensing in my spirit, I remember motioning slowly with my hands in various ways I had never done before. Within seconds these motions became supernaturally empowered, full speed ahead! My hands and arms felt as if there was a power current running through them. Then there was the flailing, which I

can't really describe except that my whole body seemed to be twisting on the floor, and someone later affectionately commented that I resembled the character 'Big Bird'...At various times I did have to stop the intense bodily movements out of sheer exhaustion. Occasionally, the empowering just seemed to lift off momentarily, and I could rest...At other times I would begin to weep at the manifest love of God, over the fact that He was not going to pass me by after all; that I was included in this renewal and restoration of His Church. (Chevreau, 1994: 159-60).

Traditionalists within the City Christian Centre have a hard time reconciling these new expressions and displays of the working of the Holy Spirit with their own understanding and experience of the baptism in the Spirit. The rhetoric of the 'blessing' also creates problems. Betty Lloyd had this to say about it:

**Betty:** I don't like all this talk about a greater anointing of the Holy Ghost Malcolm. It doesn't seem to make sense and some of the things they do, with the laughing and all that doesn't seem appropriate.

*(Betty Lloyd, retired nurse in her early seventies. Member of the City*

*Christian Centre for twenty-four years)*

A similar comment was made by Betty's close friend - Kitty.

**Kitty:** If the Bible tells you that you are *filled* with the Holy Spirit when you are baptised in the Spirit, then how can you be any *fuller*? If we are filled then we have received the Spirit already in full measure.

*(Kitty Tattershall, retired midwife in her early seventies. Member of the City Christian Centre for twenty-four years)*

A distinctive feature of the 'blessing' is the way it is passed on. Links have been made between a select number of different churches throughout the world through which the current 'wave of blessing' is believed to have traversed. Holy Trinity Brompton, the Assembly of God fellowships in Sunderland under the leadership of Ken and Lois Gott, the Airport Vineyard church in Toronto and the most recent addition, the Assemblies of God church in Brownsville Pensacola, are all interconnected. The most common form of linkage is the visiting of one of these 'high profile' churches by pastors and other members of the congregations of other fellowships. Like the Olympic flame, the 'fire' is imparted and brought back. In the City Christian Centre, Pastor Young and a few of the Elders visited Sunderland and had their first taste of the 'blessing' there. Steve Young, some time after, visited the church in Brownsville Pensacola, again to share in the experience<sup>12</sup>. Steve Young also visited Sunderland before returning to the Bible College he was attending at the time, consider the events that followed his return, he first speaks of his time at Sunderland (taken from my interview with him):

**Steve:** And they said come forward if you need a refreshing and I needed a refreshing and they did nothing but glorify Jesus all evening and tell wonderful testimonies so I went forward, someone prayed for me, nothing happened, didn't fall over, nothing. Got back to the Bible College. The next day in our meeting, the Bible College just went crazy, the Holy Spirit came and for ten days most of us were drunk in the Spirit solidly for ten days. Obviously you're in an intense environment; people aren't going out to work you've just got meetings and we just laughed and, I don't know, just enjoyed the presence of God for ten days. I came out of that completely changed.

*(Steve Young, worship musician and assistant leader of the City Christian Centre in his mid twenties. With the City Christian Centre for twelve years)*

In 1994, when the 'blessing' was first introduced into the City Christian Centre, Kingston witnessed scenes akin to those in Toronto and the account of Sarah's experience in the Airport Vineyard. Certainly the most striking initial element is the appearance, the 'spectacle' of the manifestations which occur. Here, during my interviews with George and Margaret, the Youngs describe their experiences:

**Margaret:** I have gone down [on the floor] but more than that I would feel what I suppose it is like to feel drunk, very easily. I feel I want to be smiling all the time, slightly light headed and it's very easy to feel a sense

of God and feel a lightness, a sense of His presence... We would bring in speakers to bring it. We would say 'if this is in the nation we want it'. We didn't want to hold back and live with regret.

*(Margaret Young, assistant leader of the City Christian Centre in her early fifties. With the City Christian Centre for twelve years)*

**George:** Margaret was talking about feeling drunk when things get rather anointed. Well, whenever things get that way with me what I used to get very strongly, but it can happen anytime now in a meeting, is this sort of jerk of the diaphragm. I don't know if you have seen people jerking in meetings; it's just as if there is a sudden contraction of the diaphragm, you don't think it out, you suddenly... 'oh dear, there must be an anointing around'.

Because of the unpredictability of the 'blessing', Sunday services differ from week to week. One Sunday could be a 'time of refreshing' in which no sermon is preached but many gifts are exercised and manifestations occur, as described above. The next Sunday could be more teaching centred with less exuberance and fewer manifestations. Certainly, however, it is a great desire among a majority of the congregation, to experience more of the 'blessing'.

**Margaret:** It has given us a greater sense of expectancy. Now I don't think that we will be content until we know a level of revival in the

nation. You hear other ministers talking and no one is content with plodding any more because they want to see the nation touched.

The 'blessing' is believed to be integral to revival and so the theology of the 'blessing' informs other arms of the church and its activities. Among these, outreach has been affected significantly. Although vastly different to how the fellowship operated under the leadership of Pastor Dale, a distinctive theme has persisted. The theology of the City Christian Centre regarding important life issues for the Christian, attempts to by-pass human discipline and application. Under Pastor Dale, issues of lifestyle and personal holiness were subjected to scrutiny and the prerequisite for the church and its mission to proselytise was the purity and internal readiness of the fellowship. When people struggled with sin and inappropriate habitual behaviour, 'deliverance' was offered as a quick and instant remedy. Self-discipline was 'out of the loop' so to speak.

A similar 'instant' can be seen in the latest expression of the City Christian Centre, and other hybrid churches, in the area of revival. In the past, much energy was spent on active proselytizing: programmes of 'door to door' work were established and crusades and rallies were integral to the Church calendar. Youth outreach events, marches, town centre meetings, coffee bars, and Sunday school promotions comprised the evangelistic efforts of the church. The Gospel was preached every Sunday night; members were encouraged to invite their unsaved friends specifically to this meeting. Whereas the Sunday morning

Breaking of Bread service was intended for Christians, the Sunday evening meeting carried with it the surety that the Gospel would be preached and an appeal to accept Christ would be given.

Besides the collective forms of evangelism, one to one witnessing was considered to be even more effective for the spreading of the Gospel. It was widely accepted that by far the greater number of converts became so through the personal testimony and invitation of a Christian friend, neighbour, family member or work colleague. Traditionally, the whole ethos and mission of the City Christian Centre was to evangelise. Training in apologetics was given; opportunities to witness were sought. The Scriptural understanding was that Christians, as holders of the truth and who had accepted the gift of salvation, were in a position of responsibility for only through them would others come to believe, as the truth was preached. Evangelism was an active process.

A regular theme was that of 'missions'. Very often a rally or meeting would find the preacher making an appeal to Christians to consider a possible call of God on their lives in the area of missionary work. While this often yielded results and saw individuals pursuing that particular path of service, a pressing need for evangelism already existed just outside the doors of the City Christian Centre - the local housing estate.

In its present expression the fellowship's understanding of evangelism has changed considerably. Although the usual tools of proselytising were employed at the start of Young's leadership of the church, they have gradually been discarded. The emphasis in outreach is now placed upon a belief that a 'mighty move of God' will bring whole cities to repentance. The role of the Christian seems more to 'claim' than to 'proclaim'. Evangelism has become a passive process.

**George:** We want to see the city touched and that is the thinking behind the 'prayer walking' of every street, every church, every school, across the houses. It's all arising out of this desire... 'Lord we don't want the status quo, we want breakthrough'. And so we're, as it were, going out where the enemy is on the streets of the city and going in the name of Jesus, you know 'beware where the soul of your foot treads'. We're taking possession of the city symbolically by walking and blessing the city and binding the enemy, but it's arising out of the 'refreshing'. All of what we do, there is a connection working through.

The final category in table 1 indicates that interpretations of what it is to be 'holy' have changed. Over the course of just twenty years many of the characteristics that were traditionally held as spiritually wholesome in the area of lifestyle have been relinquished in favour of more liberal/subjective practices. Although still regarded as proscribed behaviour by the traditionalists within the fellowship,

many activities are now considered non-problematic or less problematic for the Christian.

During my time at the City Christian Centre I observed that many members would frequent cinemas, pubs and on occasion, nightclubs. Alcohol would be consumed both in public places and at home free of guilt, although drinking to excess was considered wrong. Many watched programmes and films on the television that would have been considered most inappropriate or even 'sinful' ten years earlier. During a conversation with Sue Everett (one of the City Christian Centre's worship leaders, see chapter four) she talked about how a few nights earlier she had watched, along with some of the young people, the film 'Ghost' and how all had really enjoyed it. One of the main characters in this particular film was a spiritual medium played by Whoopi Goldberg. The subject matter of the film, especially the depiction of a spiritual medium, would have traditionally been condemned outright by the fellowship and considered totally unsuitable and even dangerous to view.

For many, attitudes towards sexuality have been re-evaluated. Although sex before marriage was and is still considered to be wrong, a greater acceptance of masturbation for single people has developed. During one of the meetings I attended at a member's house (predominantly intended for young people, although many older members were also present) a question and answer session was incorporated into the programme along the same lines as the BBC's

'Question Time' with a panel and an audience. The panel consisted of four older adults who were considered 'mature in the faith'. One question put forward asked whether it was right or wrong for a person to masturbate. The traditional thinking on this subject had been that this practice was definitely wrong and that either self-discipline (according to Pastor Hedges) or 'deliverance' (according to Pastor Dale) were required to overcome the temptation to masturbate. The panel, on that particular evening was quite divided in the answers they supplied. One 'traditionalist' espoused the former view that the practice was wrong and unsuitable for a Christian. Other panel members were not so forthright in their answers and expressed the view that although not the most wholesome of practices, it was at least a way for young people especially, to alleviate sexual tension.

A church member in the audience who had attended the Moorlands Bible College (evangelical/interdenominational) reiterated this view. Kate Wilson, an unemployed ministry graduate in her late twenties (member of the City Christian Centre for four years), announced, quite calmly, that she masturbated regularly and that one of her female mentors from Moorlands had encouraged her to do so in order to relieve tension.

Other changes to lifestyle observed during my time at the City Christian Centre included the appropriation of popular culture and fashion. Many would listen to secular music alongside religious or worship music. Clothing would follow the

latest fashions and there was a greater acceptance of ear and body piercing. Extreme though the attitudes of the past may have appeared to the 'outsider' regarding such activities, the foregoing of them helped to establish the identity of the believer. The goal was to be in the 'world' but not a part of it. To participate in 'worldly' pursuits twenty years ago would have been an indication to the Church that an individual was in need of prayer and counsel. Lifestyle practices of the vast majority of the congregation at the City Christian Centre today resemble those of the 'backslider' back then.

The changes in the theological position of the City Christian Centre from its former expression, undistinguished from traditional Assemblies of God Pentecostal fellowships, to its current incarnation, is not merely a representation of highly individualised leadership traits and characteristics. The leadership, and more specifically the leadership personality of the different eras we are considering has clearly been instrumental in the transformation. However, the changes that have occurred seem to be indicative of a much more foundational shift in conservative evangelical Christianity today. A form of hybridisation is occurring; the characteristics of which are evident in a number of Pentecostal/Charismatic churches within the United Kingdom. Many of the changes I have witnessed at the City Christian Centre are evident in a number of the other churches I have visited during my field research.

In one independent evangelical church, visited intermittently over the course of two years, a numerical growth (consisting predominantly of 'circulating saints') appeared to have been instrumental in altering the theological expression of the fellowship. Although ideas and new forms of worship/theology were introduced into the church through individual participation, the absorption of new styles gradually affected the overall expression of the congregation. New ideas circulating within the Christian milieu are appropriated and become established at a grass root level. Innovations are then developed by those in positions of leadership. This transformation was present (to varying degrees) in a number of fellowships visited including a Methodist church and a United Reformed church (for a summary of churches observed as part of my fieldwork see Appendix II).

Within the current leadership of the City Christian Centre a perception of foundational change, as opposed to change instigated from the top down, exists. During my interview with Margaret Young, I asked for her thoughts on the role of the 'pastor' within the fellowship. Her response acknowledges a shift in the traditional emphasis placed upon the office of pastor with regard to the visiting of church members.

**Margaret:** I think the day when the pastor, the leader, went and had tea and cake with all the old ladies every week is long passed and you couldn't build a church today doing that. I don't think. I think there wouldn't be the time, you would just have to have, I'm not saying you

shouldn't have someone who is socially concerned like that, but I don't think he would be the leader of the church. I think that would be an impossible task today.

Notice here how Margaret implies that this shift in emphasis is not a result of a subjective leadership trait or preference. It is somehow connected to a more general transformation that structures or frames a new understanding of what once was a traditional conception of the leader being the 'shepherd'.

The area of analysis needs to be focused upon the dynamics within each hybrid fellowship that defines them as such. Not all Charismatic churches fall into this category, nor do all Assembly of God Pentecostal churches. The process of hybridisation lies in the juxtaposing of the legacies of both movements.

### **Pentecostal theology and women**

The status of women within the City Christian Centre has experienced various shifts since its inception. The changes have not flowed in a linear fashion and the present situation is one of confusion and contradiction. Significantly, however, although the contemporary phase is infused with contrariety, tensions created by excessive teaching in the area of male and female positions within a frame of power, are minimal. The issues that for years had been a source of conflict and non-egalitarianism within the church in Kingston have currently been subsumed by questions of authority that do not hinge on the sex of the one who holds it.

Before considering the case of the City Christian Centre in more detail (in order to place the contemporary scene in proper perspective), it is necessary to chart briefly the history of women's standing within the Pentecostal tradition.

The Pentecostalism of the early twentieth century in America provided, for some women, a radical platform in Christian ministry. Synan states that a '...Pentecostal practice that varied from the norm of other churches was that of allowing women to preach' (Synan, 1997: 190). Neitz states that, 'Women as well as men got the call to preach or evangelize, and the call was what mattered' (Neitz, 1993). Not only did women share in the work of the Gospel alongside their male counterparts (see Blumhofer, 1993, chapter 2; Nesbitt, 1997, chapter 1), but Nichol (1966) includes the work of Mrs Mary B. Woodworth-Etter and Amie Semple Mcpherson as contributing substantially to the 'initial success' of the Pentecostal movement in the United States (Nichol, 1966, see chapter 5). The stifling interpretation of Paul's letter to the Corinthians did not gain its *full* potency within Pentecostal circles until later in the century. It must be noted, however, that for most Pentecostal women, subjugation to male dominance was still the norm even in the early days of the movement - credit *and space* being given predominantly to outstanding women evangelists and church pioneers.

Langley (1989), suggests that the '...impetus for women's emancipation from within the Churches arose among the dissenting, the revivalist and the socially active, while then as now the conservative, the established, the catholic and the

orthodox vehemently argued for the maintenance of the status quo' (Langley, 1989: 298). Langley goes so far as to suggest that one of the motivating factors behind the emergence of feminism in the nineteenth century was evangelical expressions of religion. Two further 'motivators' she accredits to Enlightenment reasoning, and '...the socialist tradition of the English and French co-operative and communitarian movements and Marxism' (ibid).

Pentecostalism in the British Isles did not experience such an egalitarian ideal. No early women leaders of the movement are alluded to in the historical literature that documents the formation of the three main Pentecostal churches in Britain (the Apostolic Church, Elim, and the Assemblies of God) with the possible exception of Jesse Penn-Lewis. The emergence of the Charismatic movement in the second half of the twentieth century also gave little room for women in public ministry. Even though, according to Quebedeaux, women are 'prominent participants', he states that, '...they generally have not risen to prominent leadership in the movement' (Quebedeaux, 1976: 110). A possible exception, in England, has been Jean Darnall (ibid). To focus on the Assemblies of God, doctrinally women have never been officially sanctioned against entering into ministerial positions and yet male dominated society and culture channelled women into strict familial roles. Theoretically, the *mechanism* for greater emancipation (see Langley's model above) was in place within the Pentecostal movement in Britain but instead of providing a positive example to the wider society, the churches lagged behind and even added to the patriarchal tendencies.

The basis for discrimination regarding women in ministry centres around two passages of Scripture found in the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12. Although Bible scholars, pastors, teachers and preachers who adhere to the *view* use many more verses to back up their argument, these are predominantly the main ones.

Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law" (1 Corinthians 14:34).

"Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence (1 Timothy 2:11-12).<sup>13</sup>

Within a marriage relationship, key verses are used to designate specific functions which pertain to either the husband or the wife: Ephesians 5:22-28 and Colossians 3:18,19. From these passages, traditional Pentecostal teaching has come to regard the man as the 'head' or authority in the household. The husband is expected to take the lead in spiritual matters and to be the one upon whom the decision-making and responsibility of family life ultimately lies. The wife is expected to submit to her husband's authority.

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself (Ephesians 5:22-28).

Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them (Colossians 3:18,19).

When one considers the literal view that most Pentecostals take regarding the Bible, it is not difficult to begin to see, from the above verses, how and why male dominance has prevailed within the movement. Added to these passages are many more generalised notions that have excluded women taking up various offices of ministry within churches and placed them firmly in the domestic role of 'housewife'. These notions serve to reinforce the stereotypical gender roles of men and women within the City Christian Centre and many other fellowships too. Pentecostals point to the fact that Jesus called twelve *male* disciples and maintain that this a general model and example for the church today in the area of the

ministerial office of apostle, pastor or church leader. Another argument that undermines egalitarian principles lies in the belief that in Genesis Adam was created first and that Eve was created *for* him, to be his 'helpmeet'. This concept forms the bedrock of thought that a woman's function is to be man's helper, support, comfort and little else. David Pawson, a prominent Charismatic and itinerant minister, discusses this point in his book *Leadership Is Male* (1988).

And God created woman...from a different material, for a different purpose and at a different time...Woman was made *from* man, not dust. This might be thought to indicate incompleteness of the man...but Paul uses this to support the *headship* of the man (1 Cor. 11:8), possibly recalling that she was from his side...Woman was made *for* man; the reverse is not true (1 Cor. 11:9). Her primary function is in relation to him; his was already established without reference to her (Pawson, 1988: 16).<sup>14</sup>

The prevailing practice has been to regard women as basically irrational, overly emotional and – except for those areas in which women 'typically' excel, child rearing, care and support for example - less able than men.<sup>15</sup> One result of this thinking has been to exclude women from the arena of church service in which a level of authority or responsibility is required (Wallace, 1997). The force of this ideological framework is, in many respects, more difficult to engage critically for the Christian than it is in the secular world. Feminist discourse within sociology

has effectively challenged the early assumptions of biological determinism in roles relating to gender and established the significance of culture and socialisation (Friedl, 1975; Oakley, 1974). For the Christian, conceptions of the male and female quintessence have found their origin, not in biological explanations first and foremost, but in a specific theological understanding of the Bible.

Within the City Christian Centre an unbroken line of contradiction has existed since its origin with regard to the traditional teaching on the role, function and limitations of women. The fellowship was established by two women and throughout its history there have been strong women who have actively participated in the ministry of the church. During Pastor Fuller's leadership, his wife, Irene, was the Sunday school Superintendent, this post was eventually taken over by Louise Roberts, the daughter of Eric and Edna. For a long period in the late 1970s and 1980s, Edna would give up to three messages in tongues in almost every meeting she attended (which was most of them on the weekly programme). Carla Harris and Glenda Roe were both active in the Sunday school in the early 1980s. They also led worship and were the leaders of the youth group. Outside the office of the pastor (who, after the days of Sister Craig and Sister Alan was occupied by a man) women participated in as much, if not more, of the 'body ministry' of the church, as men did. The noticeable exception to their 'authority' was in the election of men only to the positions of Elders and oversight members. During Roy Dale's pastorship, efforts were made to more clearly define gender

boundaries within the Assembly of God tradition. Dale let his mind be known in no uncertain terms in the mid 1980s during a packed Sunday morning meeting. He related certain events that had taken place just the day before. Sandra (his wife) had spent some time shopping alone and had purchased an outfit that had caught her eye. Later that evening she had shown her husband what she had bought and Roy had rebuked her for buying it without his permission. The story was now used as a sermon illustration and Dale clearly believed that it would instil the necessary mettle in husbands to 'take the lead' and fulfil their God given duty to be the 'head of the household'.

Some men tried to emulate the Pastor, but the overall effect tended to be one of marital strains and conflicts. In many marriages, the women were simply more spiritual and capable than their husbands and this left many men who believed it was their job to lead, feeling inadequate, disillusioned and confused.

The current situation is no less contradictory than at any time before. Margaret Young is a co-pastor of the church along with her husband George. Sue Everett leads the congregation in worship and women, as well as men are involved with Steve Young's *Young Leaders Association*. Inasmuch as any member of the congregation is free or is granted the opportunity to minister in some capacity during the meetings, women are afforded that same entitlement.

Like other emerging hybrid churches which are a mixture of both Charismatic and Pentecostal traditions, links between themselves and the Assemblies of God are such that gaps between the teaching within the autonomous fellowships and the denomination creates ambiguities. For example, the Executive Council of the Assemblies of God is comprised totally of men (twelve of them!). Regional Directors are all men except for five women who form a separate *Women's Ministries* team. This branch of the Assemblies of God was established over ten years ago with a mandate to, 'encourage and promote the ministry of women in such areas as: missions, prayer, family life, social concern, evangelism, preaching and public ministry' (Assemblies of God website, 1999). Within the City Christian Centre, the small ministry team or leadership consists of two women out of four members, Margaret Young and Carla Harris.

Certainly attention is deflected from the issues of women's ministry in the church and in the home. At the City Christian Centre what is spoken as rhetoric is by and large not lived in practice. If challenged most men *and women* would accept the words of the Apostle Paul and yet dismiss it by their actions. This view is echoed in research on the negotiation of gender relations in an independent evangelical church conducted by Rose (1987). She states that, 'There is still a tension between the values of the "biblical," patriarchal families they are trying to achieve and the more egalitarian norms that they live out' (Rose, 1987). Resolution has not been worked out and one is left with the impression that the issues are simply not allowed to distract the believers at the City Christian Centre from their current

spiritual pursuits. Under the surface though, the contradictions still exist.

Blumhofer recognises this potential for confusion particularly within

Charismatic/Restoration movement. She writes,

...restorationists noticed the apparently overwhelming preponderance of texts that narrowed women's sphere. The liberationist and the patriarchal exegesis, then, were rooted in ambiguities in the restorationist reading of Scripture, for taking everything in the New Testament literally gives us both daughters speaking their visions and women keeping silence (Blumhofer, 1993: 176).

In the next chapter I will consider the organisation of the City Christian Centre providing first a brief history of the fellowship and positioning it within a wider context. In so doing, my aim is to chart the differences of structure that have transpired throughout the Church's history and to provide a description of how the hybrid church operates politically.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> The imperative for baptism is given in Matthew's Gospel. Part of the Great Commission to His disciples, Jesus commands, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..." (Matthew 28:19, New International Version).

<sup>2</sup> It has been the tradition at the City Christian Centre for women candidates to wear white baptismal gowns and the men simply to wear a casual shirt and trousers.

<sup>3</sup> Traditional Pentecostals of the era we are now discussing (the 70's and early 80's) would not only feel that it was very wrong to see a film of this kind but would consider it sinful to even attend a cinema. As with nightclubs, pubs and dance halls, cinemas were thought to be 'worldly' and were subsequently spurned.

<sup>4</sup> 'Deliverance' ministry, although not mentioned in the Statement of Fundamental Truths, does prevail in Pentecostal circles. Its Scriptural point of reference is found, in a general sense, in Paul's letter to the Ephesians 6:12, 'For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms' (New International Version). More specifically, accounts of 'possession' by evil spirits or 'demons' are documented in the Gospels. The following is taken from Luke, the same story is also told in Matthew 17:14-23 and Mark 9:14-32. 'The Next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met Him. A man in the crowd called out "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. A spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams, it throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth.

It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him. I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not." "O unbelieving and perverse generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you and put up with you? Bring your son here." Even while the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the evil spirit (Greek *unclean*), healed the boy and gave him back to his father. And they were all amazed at the greatness of God (Luke 9:37-43, New International Version).

<sup>5</sup> This phrase is used as a somewhat veiled reference to a book *Pigs in the Parlour* (F. Hammond and I. Hammond, 1973) which Pastor Dale loaned me (and a few 'select' others who were particularly active in ministry during the time period we are now discussing). The book is one American pastor's account of his involvement in the 'deliverance' ministry. As an aside, upon reading the book, I was singularly unimpressed with the author's theological interpretation of 'demonic possession'.

<sup>6</sup> My use of the word 'young' here is not meant to denote age in the natural, physical sense but in the 'spiritual' sense. Regardless of age, when a person comes to Christ and experiences salvation they are considered 'babes in Christ'.

<sup>7</sup> While it is true that Pentecostals believe that the ultimate sacrifice of Christ was made for *all* of humanity, it is often preached, given as testimony or simply commented as a general encouragement to others, that "even if there was only

one person in the whole world, Jesus would have still died for that one sinner.”

There is a great sense of intimacy established between the believer and the Lord.

<sup>8</sup> This description of a typical ‘deliverance’ session is based upon direct observation. Often there would be another person (or more than one other person) present in the session besides Pastor Dale: during my time at the City Christian Centre I sat in on numerous ‘deliverance’ sessions.

<sup>9</sup> If the location of the demon was in a more delicate part of the anatomy, hands would be placed upon the head.

<sup>10</sup> This leaflet attempted to place the onus for maintaining one’s deliverance firmly upon the subject in question. The leaflet appeared to retract the earlier claims made by the author which had suggested an instant and complete cleansing of the ‘problem’, whatever that may be. The modified notion of deliverance now required a particular application of discipline on the part of the person now delivered. A possible consequence of not maintaining one’s own deliverance could be the return of the once evicted demon and the potential for several more demons to re-enter all at once. The Scriptural basis given to support this addendum to Pastor Dale’s initial teaching on deliverance can be found in the Gospel of Luke, “When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. Then it goes

and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first" (Luke 11:24-26, New International Version).

<sup>11</sup> In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus gives us a description of the 'end of the age' just prior to His return. The traditional Pentecostal understanding has always been seen in this light. Although bleak in outlook, the Christian would be moved to give witness to Christ all the more fervently and to not simply resign him or herself to the coming gloom. As we have mentioned before, the members of the City Christian Centre have not displayed strong Calvinist leanings and so the necessity to 'do what can be done in the time left' has always remained constant. Although times of revival have been prayed for and anticipated, the former understanding of the *extent* of revival has not come close to the current Charismatic/Restorationist belief. The following passage helps us to understand why this is so, 'As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" Jesus answered: "Watch that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come, nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth-pains. Then you will be handed over to be prosecuted and put to death, and you

will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm will be saved. And this gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." (Matthew 24:3-14, New International Version).

<sup>12</sup> There exists an expansive network of communication between the churches experiencing the 'blessing' and the larger evangelical community. Contact is not confined to actual visits of these 'centres' from members of other congregations. As well as the availability of books, videos, compact discs and teaching resources produced by a number of the larger fellowships there is now a revival webbing on the internet. One can go (for example) to the Sunderland Assembly of God homepage and follow the links to literally hundreds of different churches around the globe which are experiencing a similar 'move'.

<sup>13</sup> Myrtle Langley (1989) gives a most useful summation of the arguments for and against the ordination of women within the Church of England.

<sup>14</sup> For scholarly work offering a counter argument to the patriarchal tradition of Pentecostalism see *The Role of Women* (Lees ed. 1984) and also work by Elaine Storkey, *What's Right With Feminism* (Storkey, 1985) and Betty Miller, *Neither Male Nor Female* (1980).

<sup>15</sup> Within the family home and operating within an allotted sphere of domesticity, Christian wives are, according to Ammerman, '...both powerful and powerless. Within their households they have enormous powers of persuasion that are based in part on their intimate involvement with the everyday details of the family's life' (Ammerman, 1987:139).

6

**History, Leadership and Organisation**

The Assemblies of God have various strongholds throughout the United Kingdom. The national headquarters are based in Nottingham; the West Midlands has a great many Assembly of God fellowships, so too do Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Lancashire and Tyneside; the southern part of Wales also has a large concentration of assemblies. The denomination's Bible College is located in Mattersey, close to Doncaster. Fellowships within the Assemblies of God, as we have already noted, enjoy a great deal of autonomy. Although ultimately accountable to the higher authorities within the organisation, each assembly has considerable leeway in the practices it adopts. In the area of church leadership, organisation and the election of pastors and other church workers - the central theme of this chapter – there is considerable variation between fellowships.

Churches take on a colloquialism of expression and yet particular characteristics are often adopted from the mainstream of Assembly of God teaching and national leadership, various traits will be universal within the fellowships. Certain styles of dress, speech and vocabulary will be instantly recognised and accepted from one congregation to another. Much of these shared attributes are passed along by visiting preachers, revival and church anniversary rallies (during which many congregations meet), and the annual Assembly of God Conference. There has also been the official publication of the movement, *Redemption Tidings* (RT),

that was first issued on a monthly basis starting in 1924 and which contributed to the overall unity of the organisation. The magazine style RT featured noticeable items of news from within the organisation: the establishing of new fellowships, new pastoral appointments, reports of evangelical outreaches; attention was also given to missionaries abroad. In every issue Biblical teaching would feature prominently along with editorial comments on relevant contemporary issues in the church; a section for reader's comments and letters was also included. From 1934 to 1956 it was published once every fortnight and then once a week from 1956 to 1985 (Kay, 1990: 7). From 1985 to the present, *Redemption Tidings* has undergone a number of revisions and changes. It is now *Joy Magazine* and published monthly. The format, however, has altered little from the earlier *RT* days; the one noticeable difference being the presentation. It is now much more professionally produced and incorporates full colour images. The overall effect of both the *Redemption Tidings* and *Joy Magazine* has been to provide a level of 'official' doctrine to the many fellowships in association with the Assemblies of God. A comparison can be made with Wilson's work on the Christadelphians (Wilson, 1961) regarding the publication of *The Christadelphian*. Although the editors were not officially sanctioned to produce the magazine, their work was in 'full sympathy and harmony' (Christadelphian, 1911, XLVIII: 471, cited in Wilson, 1961: 276) with the movement's Constitution. Wilson suggests that,

Over time, the magazine became the organ through which some type of control was exercised over the whole fellowship, and although it was

defective in this function, and failed to prevent many divisions, it did in fact provide some essential stability for the movement (Wilson, 1961: 276).

This same observation can be applied to the influence of the Assemblies of God magazines. Although the congregation of the City Christian Centre has, until relatively recently, subscribed heavily to such publications, church 'get togethers' and activities, something of a distance, however, has always been maintained between the congregation in Kingston and the main stream Assembly of God expression. A peculiar individualism has been recognised by a number of members and former members of the City Christian Centre. Throughout the various twists in its history, a juxtaposition of strong leadership, Assembly of God doctrine and often disparate congregational mixes has aided and abetted this distance. That is not to suggest that adherence to the 'party line' has never been particularly strong for certain periods in the history of the City Christian Centre have been steeped in denominational tradition, yet this distinctive mentality of the fellowship is worth noting.

The first part of this chapter will attempt to provide an historical context from which we will chart the origins of the City Christian Centre. A history of the Assemblies of God in Britain already exists in the book *Inside Story* by William Kay, therefore it would be futile to attempt a summary of his very detailed account beyond those elements which pertain specifically to this thesis. In this

chapter, attention will focus on the church in Kingston but a greater appreciation of the background to the fellowship will be gained with some inclusion of the national and international context of Pentecostalism generally.

The main body of this chapter will concentrate on the history of the City Christian Centre and the many organisational and structural changes that have taken place throughout its near century in existence. Inevitably there will be a degree of overlap between this account of the organisational processes of the church and the theological characteristics that are interwoven and integral to them. In covering the theological issues in the last chapter, my hope is that both chapters will complement each other and that any significant gaps can be filled with the reading of both accounts.

Apart from the most elementary of details, the descriptions of the origin and development of the Assembly are provided by oral histories collected from members and former members. Some of the later details regarding organisation and structure may, at times, be contradictory but I have included the following chronological account from a number of versions which, without significant contentious implications, present an initial overview.

### **The Wider Context**

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century witnessed periods of intense evangelical and then later Pentecostal activity throughout the British Isles. What

has been referred to as the Second Evangelical Awakening in Britain – a sustained revival that was particularly strong in Scotland (Bebbington, 1989:116; Orr, 1949; Whittaker, 1983:19) flourished between 1859 – 1860. A significant concentration of religious fervour was demonstrated in the Welsh revival of 1904-5 during which time over 100,000 people were converted to Christianity (Bebbington, 1989: 106; Evans, 1969: 146; Whittaker, 1983: 47). What would soon develop into the restoration of the Pentecost experience, as recorded in Acts chapter 2 with its emphasis on the gifts of the Spirit and especially the gift of tongues, was slowly emerging from this atmosphere of spiritual revival. Indeed, by 1907, under the invited ministry of T.B. Barratt, a Norwegian Methodist, an increasing number of Christians at All Saints (Monkwearmouth in Sunderland) were baptised in the Spirit and spoke in tongues.

The vicar at Sunderland – the Reverend Alexander Boddy – had been greatly affected by the events in Wales and the testimony of T.B.Barratt (Bebbington, 1989; Kay, 1990; Whittaker, 1983). Barratt himself had been equally affected by news of intense spiritual activity in the United States spurred on by reports of the Welsh revival (Bebbington, 1989). Upon visiting Los Angeles and witnessing, first hand, all that was taking place at Azusa Street and the revival there, Barratt was baptised in the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. Coming from a holiness background William Seymour was instrumental in the work of the Azusa Street revival which, ‘...taught repentance, restitution, sanctification, healing, Spirit baptism as “a gift of power upon the sanctified life,” and the imminent

premillennial return of Christ' (Blumhoffer, 1989: 105). The Azusa Street revival of 1906 is commonly thought to have witnessed the first instance of a congregant 'speaking in tongues'. According to Harrell, 'Many date the beginnings of American Pentecostalism from a meeting held in the Azusa Street mission in Los Angeles in 1906' (Harrell, 1975: 11). This view has been contested, however, and acceptance of the doctrine of glossalalia has been traced back to the Holiness movement and Charles Fox Parham in Topeka Kansas at the turn of the century. Possible manifestations of the baptism of the Spirit originated even earlier in North Carolina (see Wacker, 1999; Cerillo, 1999).

Reports of the Barratt's subsequent ministry soon spread and were received with much interest by Rev. Boddy. 'At Boddy's request, T.B. Barratt, the Methodist minister who had brought the dramatic manifestations to Norway, now carried them to Sunderland' (Bebbington, 1989: 197). During the first two weeks of his seven weeks stay with Alexander Boddy, Barratt would later write that seventeen people had received the baptism with the evidence of speaking in tongues (see Barratt 1927 in Kay, 1990: 22).

It must be noted that Pentecostal sects had emerged in Britain prior to the Sunderland experience. Conflicting with the Calvinism of the Church of Scotland both McLeod Campbell and Edward Irving advocated the manifestations of the Holy Spirit as pertinent for the church at that time. Campbell's ministry in Row, Scotland and Irving's church in London both witnessed the outpouring of the

Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues in the early 1830s (Vidler, 1971). It was at the instigation of a Church of England vicar, however, that Pentecost *resurfaced* again in Britain in the early twentieth century. It would be nearly twenty years, however, before the Assemblies of God would be officially instituted. That is not to suggest a curtailing of Pentecostal activity between those early days at Monkwearmouth and the formation of the Assemblies of God. Both the Elim and Apostolic churches predated the AOG (Hollenweger, 1972; Wilson, 1961) and those who would go on to be influential figures in the Pentecostal movement, generally, were ‘learning their trade’.

Those key figures included Howard Carter, Harold Horton, Teddy Hodgson, the Jeffrey brothers - George and Stephen, Donald Gee and Smith Wigglesworth (Whittaker, 1983). A Pentecostal lineage can be traced from the Welsh revival. The leading figures of the Pentecostal movement were influenced by the initial outpouring of the Spirit amongst the mining communities of Wales. Boddy was actively involved in the revival and ministered with Evan Roberts, the fervent young preacher who was so instrumental during that period (Hollenweger, 1972). Boddy, as we have already said, went on to arrange the visit of T.B. Barratt to his church in Sunderland. George and Stephen Jeffreys were ‘children of the revival’ (Hollenweger, 1972: 184; Kay, 1990). Both would be involved in the establishing of the Elim Pentecostal church, although Stephen would later be more affiliated with the Assemblies of God (Whittaker, 1983: 64). Donald Gee was saved under the ministry of another prominent figure of the Welsh revival, Seth Joshua, and

would later become a key personality within the Assemblies of God (Hollenweger, 1972; Kay, 1990; Whittaker, 1983, see also Gee, 1967).

Smith Wigglesworth was an early 'pioneer', who, although never committing himself to any specific denomination, was committed to a belief in the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the initial evidence doctrine of speaking in tongues<sup>1</sup>. In his book *Seven Pentecostal Pioneers* Colin Whittaker (former editor of *Redemption Tidings*) writes,

Wigglesworth was absolutely dogmatic about the Pentecostal experience. He frequently said; 'I believe in the Baptism of the Holy Ghost with the speaking in tongues, and I believe that every man who is baptised in the Holy Ghost will speak in tongues as the Spirit gives him utterance (Whittaker, 1983: 37).

Wigglesworth first spoke in tongues at All Saints Church in Sunderland even before Reverend Boddy had been baptised in the Holy Spirit (Frodsham, 1949: 27).

### **Phase I: From 'curse to blessing' - the 'Fig Tree'<sup>2</sup>**

Our history - the history of the church in Kingston – commences shortly after the events we have just reviewed. Sister Jane Craig and Sister<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Alan established their mission to the city of Kingston in 1908. They had no church

building as such, simply a house in which they both lived known as Fig Tee House on account of the fig tree that grew in the front garden. Although long since demolished Fig Tree house was located less than a quarter of a mile away from where the City Christian Centre now stands.

In earnest Sister Craig and Sister Alan initially established a Sunday school outreach, drawing in children from around the neighbourhood. Sunday school meetings would comprise of singing, prayer and Bible instruction. A weekly task would be the learning of a verse from the Bible; this part of the programme became known as the 'memory verse' and ingenious and novel ways of learning would take place. The format of the Sunday school at the church in Kingston would remain in place for many years to come. In the mid 1980s moves were taken to discontinue this particular ministry which was scheduled between 2:30pm and 4pm. No further children's work was established to replace it, although efforts were made to build up 'children's church' that catered solely to the children of church members and would run concurrently with the Sunday morning and evening services. Children under the age of fourteen were required to join in with the worship times of the Sunday meetings but then would leave the hall and have their own programme of activities while the 'grown ups' would listen to the sermon. The eventual disbanding of the Sunday school was indicative of a more exclusive expression within the church during the mid 1980s and 1990s – a church for believers that emphasised less the need to evangelise in favour of a need to minister to the body.

As the years at Fig Tree House passed more and more parents would 'sit in' with their children and listen to the message that was presented. Because of the limited space a separate meeting was arranged on the Sunday evenings for any one who wanted to attend. These services became known as 'Gospel meetings' in which, after the singing of a hymn or two followed by prayer, the salvation message was given. Steadily the numbers increased and it was eventually necessary to find new premises. Once Sisters Craig and Alan relocated to a larger hall down Eric Street, the number of services increased and Fig Tree Mission became an independent Pentecostal church. The Sunday school, as we have said, continued to grow, but the children's ministry was then just one of the many functions the church fulfilled in the local community. The ministry programme developed into the following:

Sunday	Morning Breaking of Bread Service
	Afternoon Sunday school
	Evening Gospel Service
Tuesday	Evening Prayer Meeting
Wednesday	Youth Service
Thursday	Evening Bible Study
Saturday	Evening 'Testimony Time'

Shortly after the Assemblies of God were established in 1924 (Hollenweger, 1972; Kay, 1990), Fig Tree Mission affiliated with them. No discernible change to the structure or leadership took place as a result of the association, although the question of who would carry on the work after Sister Craig and Sister Alan retired or passed on was an ever-increasing concern. The answer to that particular prayer was right on the doorstep in the person of a young local - Jeffrey Fuller.

Jeffrey Fuller had attended the Sunday school at Fig Tree house from an early age and a special bond had developed between himself and his two spiritual mentors. Upon leaving school he became an apprentice in the shoe trade as a future retail buyer. When the Mission relocated to the building down Eric Street, Jeffrey lodged with Sister Craig and Sister Alan. On completion of his apprenticeship he worked for a short while in the job he had been trained to do but soon felt the calling of the Lord on his life to enter into full time ministry. To prepare, Jeffrey gave up his job in the shoe business and attended the Assemblies of God Bible College that was, at that time located in Hampstead in London (Kay, 1990; Whittaker, 1983). The Bible College at Mathersey was not bought until 1973 (Kay, 1990: 335).

Upon graduation, Jeffrey pastored an Assembly of God church in Darlington for two years before returning to Kingston to become co-pastor with Sister Craig and Sister Alan, now both ailing somewhat in their later years. During World War II the Fig Tree Mission was bombed during a raid and temporary accommodation

was sought elsewhere. Throughout the remaining years of the war up until 1952, the fellowship would meet in two buildings on a Sunday. A local church hall for the morning service and a Quaker Friends' Meeting House for the evening service. Shortly after Jeffrey's appointment, Elizabeth Alan died in 1949. The Mission continued, however, and plans were developed for the congregation to acquire a building of their own.

The financial resources for the new building were attained through the diligent administration of Pastor Fuller. Although a building loan would be secured from the Assemblies of God Property Trust - there was an increase in the availability of funds after 1947 which provided mortgages to many new congregations wishing to secure their own church premises (Kay, 1990: 206) - it was still required of each congregation to put forward a substantial amount towards the purchase. Fully aware of the meagre incomes of most of the members at Fig Tree Mission, Pastor Fuller distributed building fund boxes to all those in the congregation who were willing to give of their incomes. Over time and with much patience, the building fund increased and in 1952 a modest retail outlet down Monarch Street (a couple of hundred yards away from the original Fig Tree House location) was acquired. This small shop building became the Fig Tree Gospel Hall and would remain so for the next twenty-five years.

The newly acquired hall could comfortably sit fewer than forty people. Entrance to the building was through double doors at the front that opened into the hall

straight from the pavement. A small stage was positioned directly opposite the front doors and in the middle of the wooden floor stood an old fire hearth.

The format for the meetings was a 'hymn-prayer sandwich', quite typical of Pentecostal meetings of the day. The Redemption Hymnal was used, this being the most popular choice of hymnal adopted by churches affiliated with the Assemblies of God. The opening prayer would be followed by a rousing hymn and the subsequent Bible reading, prayer testimony time, would be punctuated with further hymns. After the sermon there would be a closing hymn (more often than not)<sup>4</sup> and a final prayer. A time of fellowship would follow and the focus of the various conversations would be God centred and full of encouragement, requests for prayer and promises to meet those requests throughout the week. Very few members would ever be in a hurry to leave the building.

Sister Craig, who by that time was unable to walk very many steps unaided, would be one of the first to arrive for each meeting and one of the last to leave. In her last few years before she passed away in 1959, she arranged to be brought to the church before any of the congregation had arrived and to be seated in her chair on the platform. There she would still participate in the leading of each meeting while gradually relinquishing her involvement to Pastor Fuller. Always very much loved and respected by those in the fellowship both young and old, after the meetings had concluded she would have a group of people around her. She would use those times of fellowship to encourage and minister to the many

needs presented before her. When finally the hall was empty and every one but herself and Pastor Fuller were left, only then would she want to go home - a remarkable lady.

Over time, the identity of the Fig Tree Gospel Hall became integrally linked to the personality of Jeffrey Fuller. He displayed few frills or gimmicks, he was, after all, from the 'old school' of Assembly of God pastors. He was faithful in his calling, reliable in his work and consistent in his commitment to the community around the Mission. He was, by all accounts, a true pastor, who would spend his days visiting and caring for both members of the fellowship and non-members within his 'parish'. He was a local and could relate to people without having to try too hard. People liked and trusted him and he would spend hours during each day striking up conversations on the high street with any one he would come into contact with.

The Sunday school thrived and so did the fellowship generally. It was becoming obvious that the facilities of the small hall down Monarch Street were no longer adequate to cater for the numbers attending. Pastor Fuller had long since anticipated such a happy dilemma and had ensured that the building fund boxes had been kept in circulation. At various times of the year the contents of the boxes were collected and banked. It was a slow process, slow but thorough, and by the mid 1970s a large piece of land was acquired by the fellowship, just two

hundred yards from the Monarch Street location. Plans were afoot to erect a new building.

### **Phase II: From 'blessing to curse'**

By 1976 the new Fig Tree Gospel Hall was up and running. It occupied a plot of land on the corner of Monarch Street and Scarborough Avenue, a five-minute walk from the city centre. Its backdrop was a large machine manufacturer and a number of much smaller workshop factories. The new church building faced a council house estate, one of the newer housing developments on the periphery of the city centre. The building was well equipped with two halls (the main hall complete with a baptismal built into the floor), a kitchen, offices and classrooms for the Sunday school. Outside there was a car park that, although modest in size, had ample space for the needs of the fellowship. As we have already mentioned a fig tree was planted to the right of the main double doors in a small garden area.

Whereas the former building had become woefully too small for the size of the growing congregation, the new building was far too big for them and made the forty or so members feel a little lost in the luxury of space. This was not the case with the Sunday school, however, and the teachers and children both acclimated well to the new halls and classrooms. Pastor Fuller, now married, continued the work of the Fig Tree Gospel Hall methodically, establishing a sense of security and Pentecostal tradition in the hearts and minds of the congregation.

Like his own predecessors, who anticipated the need for their eventual replacement as the Mission's pastors and leaders, so too did Jeffrey Fuller in the mid 1970s. The change over of leadership this time, however, would not be smooth and a harsh political edge would be displayed within the fellowship, the legacy of which would be interwoven in the Church's fabric for many years to come. The conflict, although certainly a clash of personality, was not driven by the central characters. Nor was it a conflict that divided the church in equal parts. The initial reaction against the proposed new pastor – John Hedges – did, however, affect the entire assembly and had a detrimental effect on its growth and vitality for a number of years. Wilson (1959) has noted that,

A stable church is not easily established among social groups which are themselves unstable and consequently particularly susceptible to revivalist blandishments and the emotionalism of Pentecostal services. Petty jealousies and spites appear to be common...aggravated by the smallness of the groups and the frequency and intensity of their interaction (Wilson, 1959: 500).

Such grievances were perhaps due, in part, to the institutionalised appointment of Pastor Hedges. Pastor Fuller, although a graduate from the Assembly of God Bible College had strong local ties with the Fig Tree Mission since the early days of its operation. His position was more that of an 'honorary pastor' (Wilson, 1959: 496), a status affirmed by the local congregation and one more in keeping

with the sectarian principles of Pentecostalism. According to Wilson, the transition from sect to denomination and the subsequent necessity for trained, paid ministers, was a great cause of conflict for many who were more inclined to look for spontaneity in leadership. 'The honorary pastor had been a "Spirit-led" brother, but the minister was an appointee' (Wilson: 1959: 496).

John and Jean Hedges had been missionaries in Malaysia; they had four young children and a zeal and enthusiasm for ministry. Although suited in many ways to the style of the Fig Tree Mission, Hedges's character, although quite irresistible, was loud and brash. For some of the more reserved members, his manner was simply too over bearing and yet he possessed a vibrancy and charisma that was particularly magnetic.

The various problems that emerged only came to the fore after Pastor Hedges had been inducted. Although his appointment was administered through the proper channels - a referral from the Assemblies of God and then an affirmative decision from the church itself - a small minority came to regret the decision that had been made. With any change over of leadership there are it would seem, inevitable conflicts of interest. As the new minister seeks to establish him or herself and certain changes are made or former practices or procedures are relinquished or altered, these changes conflict with tradition and become problematic for some. The problems were intensified at the Fig Tree Gospel Hall because those who were most affronted by the changes held important positions in the church.

One such woman, Doris Seal, the church treasurer and trustee of the building, attempted something of a coup d'état in a bid to oust Pastor Hedges from his position. With support from a few other members who maintained that Hedges's appointment could (and should) be reversed, Doris Seal stopped paying the Pastor's salary. After a great deal of internal squabbling and confusion the situation was brought before the Church Business Meeting in June 1978. Item 4 of the official minutes for the meeting indicate that a motion was put forward and seconded stating 'that Pastor Hedges should be dismissed'. Out of the thirty-five members present, twenty-seven voted against the motion, two were in favour of it, three abstained and three people didn't vote. The rest of the meeting was taken up with the election of an 'interim church council'; three men were declared elected, none of whom had been involved in the attempted coup.

The constitutional battle had been won in favour of Pastor Hedges and yet something of an unhealthy cynicism had entered the fellowship. Fig Tree Gospel Hall had lost its innocence, or so it seemed. The original vision of the Mission had been obscured for a season and the focus of its energy had been on the machinations of its members.

Given the bad start of Hedges' pastorate and the subsequent dry years of the late 1970s, a turning point was eventually reached. From 1979 to the mid 1980s the church would experience a dramatic growth in membership.

### **Phase III: Establishing a leadership trend**

Throughout the following sections I will be drawing on data taken from the official minutes of the Fig Tree Gospel Hall and City Christian Centre's church business meetings. While these documents are informative and pertinent to our understanding of the history and organisational structure of the church, they are, at times, fairly scant in content. Wherever possible I have elaborated on the detail and the sequence of events from my own involvement with the church and also from the accounts of members and former members.

Contacts outside of the Sunday school and children's work were quite rare. Most of the congregation in the late 1970s and early 1980s had some family member either actively involved in, or attending one of the junior church outreaches. This trend reflected the strong tradition of the youth work within the Fig Tree Gospel Hall and the original vision of Sister Craig and Sister Alan. Evangelism was a major concern, however, and the modest congregation was committed to spreading the 'Word' at every opportunity. This they did and new people started to attend.

A good many new members had switched from other churches in the city or had moved into the area and were looking for a church similar to the one they had left. A greater influx of new members, however, were, in those early days of growth at the Fig Tree Gospel Hall, new converts without any prior church

experience. They were people from the housing estate who had been invited to a meeting by the Pastor, wandering souls, such as myself, who had heard the Gospel for the first time from a preacher on a street corner; a woman who had committed her life to the Lord and then witnessed to her son who was heavily into the drug scene (he became a Christian and so too did his friends, most were addicts at the time). As Fig Tree grew, so too did its reputation for dramatic conversions.

Along with the growth in numbers, the organisation of the church became more formalised. The interim church council was soon made more permanent and a number of constitutional policies were established with the administrative help of Paul Summers. Paul and Victoria Summers had settled at Fig Tree Gospel Hall in 1976 from an Elim Pentecostal background. Both had been members of a local Gospel group which, during the sixties, had toured nationally. The Summers would become prominent figures in the leadership of the church.

From the General Business Meeting in November 1981, measures were taken to ensure that the Pastor was accountable to the council (or 'oversight') and that no major decisions could be made without a two-thirds majority. The meeting also clearly established the leadership structure of the Assembly. The following information is taken from a document from the meeting, it outlines the 'business' side of the Fig Tree Gospel Hall at that time.

## **I Church**

The Church is managed under the auspices of the Trust Deed enacted in the name Fig Tree Mission

## **II Beliefs**

The Church is in fellowship with the Assemblies of God in Great Britain and Ireland and adheres to that body's statement of fundamental doctrine

## **III Church Oversight**

1. The Church Oversight is composed of a minimum of two brethren with the resident Pastor.
2. When the Church is without a resident pastor, the activities, outreach and business of the Church, come under the jurisdiction of the Church Oversight.
3. The financial arrangements of the Church are the overall responsibility of the Church Oversight.
4. All matters of discipline are the responsibility of the Pastor and Church Oversight.

## **IV Church Diaconate**

Each Deacon serves for a period of two years. At the end of this period he is to resign but is free to offer himself for re-election together with any other nominations, at the Church's Annual General Meeting.

#### V Pastor

1. It is the policy of the Church to have a resident Senior Pastor.
2. The responsibility of the choice of pastors is vested in the Church Oversight and Diaconate, in consultation with the Church Membership.
3. In the event of the Pastor resigning or being asked to resign, three months notice is given.
4. The activities, outreach and programme of the Church come under the jurisdiction of the senior Pastor who consults regularly with the Church Oversight.
5. Associate or Assistant Pastors under the Authority of the Senior Pastor may be appointed as circumstances indicate.

#### VI Church Membership

1. All applications for membership are made to the Church Oversight and the Senior Pastor who decide on acceptance or otherwise.
2. A member must be at least eighteen years of age, have a clear testimony of the New Birth and be in sympathy with the doctrine and practice of the Church.
3. Junior membership is permissible at fifteen years. Junior members are free to attend Church Business Meetings but have no voting power and are not permitted to take part in discussions.

## VII Associate Fellowship

In seeking to promote fellowship with all sections of the true Body of Christ, where full membership is not possible, we encourage Associate Fellowship on the simple basis of the Lordship of Christ. Associate Members are free to attend Church Business Meetings but without any voting powers.

## VIII Church Business Meetings

The Church conducts its Annual General Meeting according to those conditions outlined in the Trust Deed.

## IX Church Trust Board

The Board of Trustees shall operate as set out in the Trust Deed registered with the Charity Commission

This policy document marks some significant changes from the earlier days of the Mission. Great pains were taken to ensure the accountability of the Pastor; this could be interpreted as a measure to counteract the ‘one man band’<sup>5</sup> approach to running a church. In the case of Pastor Fuller (who had passed away in 1981), the subsequent conflicts that resulted from a change over in leadership could have been averted had the Pastor not been so integral to every activity and area of the fellowship, or so it was thought. In practice, however, and as time would tell, the

leaders of the Church all operated with a 'one man band' mentality, even though a system of team leadership was in place. Many of the subsequent problems and disputes which dogged Fig Tree Gospel Hall were the direct results of inconsistent leadership which adhered to a rhetoric of shared responsibility while constantly at loggerheads with the system. In order to accommodate the very strong personalities involved in the leadership (sometimes known as the Elders, sometimes as the oversight), constitutional policies were altered and amended several times throughout the 1980s.

The policy statement of November 1981 presented the church with a clear structure, something that, given the earlier 'troubles', was required at the time. Although neat and relatively simple, in some respects it did not reflect the experience of the congregation at large. Yes, the oversight and deacons were established and recognised but the rules concerning Church membership were never rigidly enforced. In the early 1980s, when the numbers of the Church were being added to on a weekly basis, few, if any, made a formal request for membership. For most people entering the Church, formalities were not even considered. The atmosphere was one of youthful, innocent excitement; people were coming into a life changing relationship with God. Spiritual, emotional and physical problems were being dealt with 'at the foot of the Cross'. Sunday meetings became much more spontaneous and informal, people came not knowing what would happen from one service to the next, but they were excited at whatever it was that God was going to do. Would someone be healed of an

infirmity? Would the friend or neighbour you had invited make a decision for the Lord?

A conversation after the service would centre on what the Lord was doing and what the possibilities for the week ahead may be. Teenagers would get together in a corner of the building to strum on guitars and sing praise choruses. People would ask for prayer from friends and spiritual mentors. Formality was, for most believers, far down the list on the agenda. As a result, much of what was decided in business meetings and set into policy was lost on the majority of the congregation, and this was possibly one reason why the system was abused at various times in subsequent years.

The lack of participation in, and understanding of, the constitutional issues of the fellowship is reflected in the relatively poor attendance at church business meetings during a time of unprecedented growth in membership at the Fig Tree Gospel Hall (1978 – 1983). Table 2 shows the number of members present for the business meetings (the meetings from which accurate minutes have been kept). Although we see a numerical upward trend in the persons attending the business meetings from 1978 to 1983, there is a general decline in participation when viewed as a percentage of those who considered themselves to be full members of the church. Given that the formal acceptance of members (as laid down in the constitution) was not adhered to with any degree of rigidity, all of the people represented in the figures, here approximated, would have been allowed to

participate and vote in the business meetings. Clearly in the hearts and minds of the majority it was a time for miracles not 'minutes'.

As the 1980s unfolded, however, we shall see that the leadership of the church had a hand in ensuring this state of ignorant bliss regarding constitutional issues. Changes were afoot, and the church business meetings became nothing more than an exercise in rubber stamping decisions already made by a select few. Evidence of this can be gleaned from the fact that no further church wide business meeting minutes were recorded. The format of official meetings also changed accordingly. The emphasis shifted - from informed debate and deliberation amongst those members of the fellowship who still wished to be active in church policy and voting procedures, to a system whereby policy, already decided upon by a select few, was presented and 'sold' to the congregation. Many members fell in line and gave their approval, some did not and were regarded suspiciously by the oversight and tagged as something of a trouble maker, or worse still – a 'backslider'. The leadership style reflected the influence of 'heavy shepherding' techniques and an emphasis on submission to the Elders of the church.

Although official business meetings were, in effect, suspended throughout most of the 1980s, the oversight met very regularly and from those sessions numerous alterations and additions were grafted on to the existing official documents of the church. In the next section we will see how these impacted the fellowship. The

second major crisis was about to unfold but very few believers at the Fig Tree Gospel Hall would realise it until it was too late, three years too late.

**Table 2** Participation in the Fig Tree Mission’s business meetings as a % of actual membership

	Number present at business meetings	Approximate number of church members	% of congregation attending business meetings
1978	35	45	78%
1981	47	95	49%
1983 (June)	85	150	56%
1983 (October)	65	175	37%

**Phase IV: A new kind of shepherd**

Having been instrumental in building up, what was now, a numerically thriving church, and along with it (in his own heart and mind), exhausting his own potential as the Pastor of Fig Tree Gospel Hall, John Hedges decided sometime in 1982 that the Lord was leading him away from Kingston and onto some new ministerial project. His ‘release’ from the pastorate at Fig Tree was made possible by the arrival of Roy Dale and his evangelical music group – *Frontline*.

Roy was born in South Wales and came from a very strong Pentecostal background. Before he was twenty-five he became an assistant pastor, working alongside a prominent Assembly of God minister. Shortly after that, he worked with the Assembly of God Home Missions and pioneered a church in the West Midlands. In the late 1970s Roy and his wife, Sandra, spent some time with an international outreach ministry which organised large tent rallies, drawing large crowds. This work took them to the United States and many European countries as well as tours of the British Isles. One such location for a weeklong rally in 1979 was Kingston. After internal conflicts within the organisation had caused the team to finally split, Roy (who had always been active in a musical capacity), sought to increase the popularity of the band that had toured with the tent crusades. *Frontline*, seeking a base for their ministry, settled in Kingston and became active in the Fig Tree Gospel Hall while also trying to establish themselves in the Christian music scene. They recorded an album and played some large venues but it soon became quite obvious that *Frontline* were never going to be the next *Petra* (one of the leading Christian rock bands of the 1980s).

With Roy now firmly entrenched within the Fig Tree Gospel Hall, seeking a secure position in a church full of potential, having abandoned his 'sinking ship', and John Hedges seeking greener pastures, an obvious reciprocity emerged. Although in the business meeting of June 1983 there is recorded a unanimous vote in favour of Dale taking on the role of Pastor, the wheels of exchange had

been set in motion months before. There was no search arranged for a replacement pastor when Hedges had publicly indicated his desire to step down in April of that same year. At that time no meeting of church members had been arranged to decide on the appropriate steps to replace the existing pastor. By the time June came round the cast were already in place and, given the teaching that was prevalent at the church in the early 1980s, to question the authority of the leadership placed the questioner in a precarious position. Not only would it have indicated that the charismatic personality of Roy Dale had not won you over, so to speak (not, in itself a bad thing although you would from then onwards be considered something of a marginal member), but your very spirituality would be in doubt. How could it be possible to be ‘living in victory’ and experiencing the ‘blessing of God’ if you were not in a state of submission to this ‘man of God’. To understand the pressure to conform and agree, one needs to grasp the significance of what church life could be like on the periphery of ‘God’s best’.

Drawing on the work of Dorothy Emmet (1958), Gerlach and Hine (1970) suggest two types of charismatic leader: ‘a) the leader who possesses an almost hypnotic power of personal authority inspiring devoted obedience, and b) the “charismatic” who strengthens those he influences, inspiring them to work on their own initiative’ (Gerlach & Hine, 1970: 39). In their study of the Pentecostal movement, Gerlach and Hine suggest that out of the two types of charismatic leadership, the latter is the more common amongst Pentecostal leaders. Pastor

Dale, however, displayed both types during his time at the City Christian Centre. The 'charmatist' eventually giving way to the 'hypnotist'.

Although Dale's appointment bypassed the policy of the Fig Tree Gospel Hall, it was never questioned within the ranks of the Assemblies of God. This was due in part to the autonomy of each fellowship. Churches in association with the Assemblies are free to implement their own policies in relation to the search and election of new pastors. The possibility existed for intervention, but this would have only applied had someone from the congregation (who objected) contacted the Assemblies of God directly. To my knowledge, this did not happen. Dale's hegemony had been most effective.

The meeting of June 1983 was significant in a number of other ways. Not only was Roy Dale effectively ushered in through the back door to take over where John Hedges had left off, but a motion was passed to alter the name of the church from the Fig Tree Gospel Hall to the City Christian Centre. The name change was important in two ways; firstly, it was an attempt to break with the tradition of the past, to disassociate itself with the legacy of the Fig Tree Mission. For some, a bitter taste remained from the conflicts that had arisen just a few years earlier. With Mrs Fuller now attending another church in the town and some former members, who had been prominent during the 'troubles', also no longer attending, the new oversight felt that the time was right to sever the ties, little opposition was anticipated. In a rather unceremonious fashion, a plaque

honouring the efforts of Jeffrey Fuller was removed from a wall in the foyer. Along with the plaque, an old photograph of the original Fig Tree house that hung in the 'Craig – Alan' room was removed. The room became known from that day onwards as the 'blue room' simply on account of the colour of the paint used to cover the walls.

The second significant factor in the renaming of the Church lay in an attempt to present to the outside world a contemporary image of Christianity. The notion drew on the traditional Pentecostal tendency to view with some suspicion the aesthetics of institutionalised religion. Arches and steeples, it was thought, meant nothing to most young people in society today. Church organs and pews were not things that many could get excited about. The notion enveloped more than just the characteristics of high church architecture. The traditional 'look' of Pentecostal churches was considered by some to be somewhat 'out of touch'. Buildings had to be modern and user friendly incorporating a minimum of religious 'clutter'.

Those items that had formerly been regarded in a traditional sense within the church were now discarded or 'played down'. A large ornate table that stood at the front of the hall was removed for every meeting other than Communion (the 'emblems', bread and wine, were placed upon it during that particular service). The organ (albeit a freestanding one) became obsolete<sup>6</sup> and was eventually removed from the stage, never to be played again. The organ had been originally

paid for by funds donated by former members, so too had the table. Their removal from view also helped to eradicate the memory of the past from the minds of the present. The hymnals, as we have mentioned earlier, were no longer used – the overhead projector became dominant, the words of the short worship choruses being beamed onto the wall above the drum kit. In the effort to modernise the ‘Gospel Hall’ became a ‘Centre’.

A third motion was passed during the business meeting of June 1983; Paul Summers was confirmed in his position of Church Administrator. Summers had been busy behind the scenes for a number of years, and had been instrumental in the seamless transition of leadership. That is not to suggest that the decisions made by Hedges and Dale were fully condoned by Paul Summers, often he opposed, in no uncertain terms, the actions of the respective Pastors. He did, however, work to facilitate the changes for the good of the fellowship and because of his own desire to avoid a repeat of the conflicts that had emerged during the Fuller/Hedges transition.

Along with these sweeping changes came a ‘working structure’ document that was included in the official constitution and distributed among the congregation. The document is reproduced below.

### Who are we?

The City Christian Centre is based in the inner city of Kingston. Allied to its normal church services and programmes we are firmly committed to a caring involvement with the local community, working in complimentary areas of care and activity, emphasising voluntary involvement. With this in mind we provide a balanced programme to meet social, recreational and spiritual needs across a wide age spectrum and social strata of our community.

The Church/Centre throughout its many years history has had special concerns for children, youth, O.A.P's and the underprivileged sections of our community. We have a team leadership and ministry team, some full time, others sparetime, who have professional specialised skills.

### The Church

The City Christian Centre is in fellowship with the Assemblies of God in Great Britain and Ireland. The church trust deed was registered in 1952.

### Oversight

The activities, outreach, business, programme, discipline and financial arrangements of the Centre are the overall responsibility of the church oversight who operate via both collective and delegated responsibility principles, in a ministry team concept.

Membership

1. Members recognise the spiritual authority of the oversight according to 1 Peter 5:5<sup>7</sup>. Conduct detrimental to the church, unscriptural doctrine or position come under the discipline of the oversight.
2. Members must be at least eighteen years of age, although junior membership at the age of fifteen in an observing capacity is possible.
3. Members must have a clear testimony of the new birth and be in sympathy with the doctrinal practice of the church, in accordance with: Romans 6, John 3:3-7, Col. 1:13-14, 2 Tim. 3:14-17, 1 Cor. 1:9-10, 2 Peter 1:19-21, Acts 2:42.
4. Membership is subject to approval of the oversight, who at their discretion, accept, refuse, or require a probationary period. In the light of Acts 2:42, members are encouraged to attend regularly the services and activities of the Centre. Members not having attended for a period of six months can be considered as having resigned.
5. Members are encouraged to realise the privilege, responsibility and act of worship contained in supporting the church financially. Although not a rule of membership, tithing is recommended for consideration as a means of doing so.

### Community Relationship

The Centre is open to the community of all nations and race to fully participate in its programme and activities under the authority of the oversight or oversight delegated leadership and is not restricted to membership use only. Caring involvement with local community is encouraged.

This document indicates the changes besetting the role of the leadership and the influence of its latest senior addition – Roy Dale. It stresses the authority of the oversight over the fellowship in no uncertain terms and is reflective of a wider move within Charismatic circles. There was much agreement between Dale’s theological stance and that of the Harvestime, or house church movement which was originally formed in Bradford under the direction of Bryn Jones (Bebbington, 1989: 230). Like the City Christian Centre, Harvestime had a team ministry yet with an overall leader – Bryn Jones (see Thurman, 1982 also Walker, 1985). The team experience within the City Christian Centre applied the term ‘headship among equals’ to denote various individual areas of expertise. The understanding was for members of the oversight to excel and be the ‘head’ or authority of their own particular job or area of responsibility. It became apparent, however, that Roy grew to consider himself to be the actual ‘head’ of the rest of the oversight and therefore undermined the ‘headship among equals’ principle.

A hierarchy existed and this structure was justified by the use of the same teaching Bryn Jones had introduced to the fellowships in Bradford. Roy regarded himself as an 'apostle' – a 'messenger' or 'messenger of Christ to the world' (Berry, 1981:13)<sup>8</sup> - as did Jones, and with this office came an unquestioning authority which subjected both the oversight body and the congregation to his leadership (for further reading on the introduction of the office of the 'apostle' within many of the Charismatic and Restorationist churches in the late 1970s and 1980s see Bebbington, 1989 chapter 7; Truderinger, 1982, 1984; Walker, 1985 chapter 13).

Dale's leadership brought with it a number of significant contradictions. The image of the 'one man band' leader was rejected in favour of the team ministry of the oversight. This structure was not, in fact, how the Pastor operated: with his interpretation of the role and function of an apostle, Dale became something of a law unto himself within and without the fellowship. The questioning of any aspect of his ministry or input into the church was met with inflexibility and often the stigmatising of the critic as someone 'outside of God's blessing'. To one young woman who found herself in the midst of a confrontation with Roy, he retorted "I am to you as God, young lady!"

Another contradiction was the increasing dominance and control of the oversight upon the congregation, headed by Roy, coinciding with a call to liberty and 'release' in praise and worship. Collectively the fellowship was experiencing the

Holy Spirit, it seemed, like never before, and exuberant praise and worship was encouraged and sought by those leading in the meetings (usually Roy). Behind the scenes though, the oversight operated with an 'iron hand'. Regularly individuals were asked to see the Pastor, or visited by a delegation of the oversight, to discuss possible problems of deviance or 'sin' that had been made known or surfaced in some way or another. Exclusions and probations were insisted upon as forms of discipline. The 'heavy shepherding' of the Bradford churches was mirrored in Kingston; some members left the church, many stayed. City Christian Centre became inward looking for the first time in its long history.

The incidence of 'heavy shepherding' were not restricted to those in the fellowship who had in some way 'strayed' in their personal or spiritual lives. The practice of an authoritative control permeated the entire Church and for a period in the mid 1980s, the City Christian Centre became almost 'cult-like' in its emphasis on submission to the oversight. Although not a 'live in' community like those of the Children of God or the Jesus Army – both of which displayed a similar authoritarian style, members were frequently entreated to conform to certain practices either within the church or in their private homes. Issues relating to dress and appearance were touched upon; courting relationships were often encouraged or discouraged, and issues relating to personal finances were pursued (in relation to shepherding practices in the Children of God, see Van Zandt, 1991; for the Jesus Army see Cooper & Farrant, 1997).

The intensity of spiritual experience combined with an exclusivist view of other Christian groups and denominations, placed the church in a position of relative isolation within the City. Inside the church it became widely accepted that although salvation could be (and was) experienced by individuals within many different Christian denominations, ‘God’s best’ was only for an ever decreasing few, namely those at the City Christian Centre. Sermons and encouragement from the ‘pulpit’ made it quite clear that if one did not experience *and manifest* the Holy Spirit in a particular way – with exuberant worship, dancing, speaking and singing in tongues, and with a clear demonstration of ‘victorious living’ – then for some reason you were not entering into true ‘blessing’. It was always possible for individuals from both within the fellowship and from other churches to gain such a lifestyle by submitting to the teaching and example of the oversight at the City Christian Centre, or indeed the handful of other groups throughout the country that espoused a similar message. Until such a time as that, however, many throughout the city, nation and even the world would be considered ‘second class’ Christians who were sadly missing out on God’s best for their lives.

Perhaps born out of a need to subdue the dissonance of isolation, moves were made in 1986 to create stronger ties and enter into greater fellowship with another church in the city that was theologically congruent with the City Christian Centre. The North Kingston Fellowship, although considerably younger than the City Christian Centre, was, by the mid 1980s, slightly numerically larger with some

two hundred members in several locations compared to the one hundred and eighty at the City Christian Centre. In many respects both churches offered a similar understanding of the Christian experience. The North Kingston Fellowship grew from the Charismatic/Restorationist tradition; it had no church building but several separate congregations that met in different hired rooms on a Sunday – community centres and school halls. Within a short space of time it had grown in both size and reputation: located close to the city's university, many students attended and formed a large percentage of the overall congregation. City Christian Centre had usually attracted a great many students but gradually the number of students lessened as the North Kingston Fellowship became more prominent.

The move towards some kind of joint venture between the two churches was made more enticing when one considers the evangelistic outlook of the City Christian Centre. The old Fig Tree Gospel Hall vision for the local community had altered drastically since the 1970s. As a backdrop to the many changes taking place, both in structure and theology throughout the early 1980s, a further building project had been decided upon and the new City Christian Centre was operational in 1987. Adjoining the existing building, the new hall could seat up to four hundred people and, even though the new building was nothing more than a large factory unit in its shape and design, its construction sent out a clear message to the other churches in Kingston - that the City Christian Centre was expanding!

The City Christian Centre was no longer a small Pentecostal church somewhere near the city centre attracting a small handful of locals, it was a 'city-wide' church, a term that was increasingly used and resonated well with the rhetoric of 'blessing', 'victory' and 'warfare'. With the notion of the church now being influential throughout the city as opposed to just the local neighbourhood, thoughts of massive gatherings of believers were entertained; a unity between two large fellowships coming together frequently for collective praise and worship, seemed the way forward. The following is taken from a summary of a joint meeting between the oversight of the North Kingston Fellowship and the City Christian Centre held in June 1987.

Why are we meeting and where are we going?

A strategy and way forward towards creating a strong, balanced, growing and dynamic local church structure in the city of Kingston that is flexible and will allow for expansion and change without tension.

Translocal leadership team concept

Create translocal leadership team – mutually agreed jointly by the individual local leadership of the CCC and NKF and any other fellowship that linked in relationship with us in the future. Ministry, strategy, direction, pastoral, organisation, mission.

Why

1. Eliminate duplication of effort and temptation to competing structures.
2. Create reference for local leaderships in matters where help is needed outside individual fellowship resources.
3. Release individual leaders to wider function and fulfilment within their gift areas rather than having to be a jack of all trades, but still giving security to the fellowships by having a good mix of mature ministry gifting within each fellowship.
4. Financially and spiritually it will be good stewardship creating highest quality and effectiveness for least duplication cost/effort.
5. It will create a powerful witness (sizewise/unitywise).

### How

1. Keep unique style/character of local fellowships.
  - a) Both fellowships would continue to be self governing for the foreseeable future both legally and in operation, i.e. their own meetings/venues etc.
  - b) The translocal team will not be a formalised legal entity but a team based on relationship and which is created, maintained, and changed in full mutual agreement by each individual fellowship.

Legal, denominational, charity commission problems would therefore not occur, i.e. each congregation would be a legally charitable independent unit, choosing their own leader within their own constitution, owning their own property and continuing to be linked in fellowship to historic

denominational structure as applicable and particularly where default in membership of historic denomination links would create legal/property hassles.

1. Links would be increasingly formed on an everyday basis.
  - a) Translocal leadership would develop clear city and localised strategies that would increasingly improve the effectiveness/quality of our individual fellowships.
  - b) Local leadership at all levels would have joint meetings and fellowship.
  - c) New/trainee leaders would be better trained and put into needy areas of leadership function best suited to their gifting.
  - d) New congregation planting and outreach could be increasingly a joint effort thus increasing/strengthening/maximising success possibilities without undue weakening of original congregation/team.
  - e) Ministry/function teams, i.e. pastoral, children's work, youth work, admin/finance, teaching/preaching, home fellowships etc.; all these areas could have increasing cross training, involvement and fellowship.
  - f) The congregation – joint bimonthly celebrations/teaching for the total fellowships would continue. Specialised citywide youth, prayer and teaching events would continue and be a brilliant witness to the city.

### Summary

The translocal team will emerge in an unforced way as the two joint leaderships continue to meet and share strategies, ideas, prayer, fellowship. It is essential that the two leaderships mutually recognise, without a competitive edge, and come to clear understanding of the particular, specific giftings of each individual.

Running contrary to the expectations of rational choice theory, point 1 under the above heading 'Why' suggests an attempt to regularise the kind of Pentecostal expression espoused by both the City Christian Centre and the North Kingston Fellowship by eliminating 'duplication of effort and [the] temptation to competing structures'. Finke (1997) has said that, 'To the degree that a local religious market is competitive and pluralistic, the level of religious participation will tend to be high' (Finke, 1997: 56). Clearly one of the intentions of the proposed union between the two churches was to limit competition and reap the potential benefits of economies of scale. The Pentecostal thinking on this issue draws on notions of believers being 'in one accord' and in unity with other 'brothers and sisters in Christ'. This concept is evidenced in the many joint ventures of Christian Evangelical churches, such as some of the larger Evangelistic Crusades like Mission England in the late 1980s and March For Jesus. In reference to crusades, Steve Bruce states that, 'Cooperation between different denominations provides a reason for regulating an event' (Bruce, 1984: 101). Traditionally, therefore, under certain conditions that 'pull' churches

together in order to achieve a common goal, the 'minutiae of creed' (Finke, 1997: 58) that Finke suggests is so vital in maintaining religious pluralism, is frequently underplayed within the religious community. The issues that pertained to the failure of the merger between the City Christian Centre and the North Kingston Fellowship, stemmed not from a theoretical inclination to claims of rational choice theory but from a much more pragmatic origin.

In many respects the 'summary' reveals the overwhelming problem associated with such an undertaking: if 'headship among equals' was not achieved successfully in one fellowship it could never be achieved between two fellowships of similar theological persuasion. Very few joint meetings were ever arranged between the two churches, most of the ones that were organised utilised the facilities of the new City Christian Centre and were held on a Saturday. The day of the joint meetings was significant, for many church members who attended from both the City Christian Centre and the North Kingston Fellowship, it never really felt like two congregations joining together with a view to a merger. It was simply a group of Pentecostals and Charismatics attending a 'special' Saturday meeting with an invited (usually high profile) guest speaker.

It is possible that this venture could have been more successful than it was, however, had more of the congregation of the City Christian Centre supported it. The backing was not there and this reflected certain changes taking place, once again, within the fellowship. A number of factors had started working against

Roy Dale: many who had been ‘delivered’ of some addiction or vice had not been able to maintain a lifestyle free of whatever problem had first caused them to seek ministry. This not only discouraged the individuals involved but it also caused doubts to arise in some members of the congregation regarding the validity of Roy’s ministry. Even for those who had not been involved in the ‘deliverance’ ministry, the level of spirituality that was set as a standard for every member of the church became too high a goal to achieve. For many they compared their life to Roy’s and felt that because they could not match his prosperity, style and confidence they were somehow not right with God.

Roy also was beginning to change and become frustrated. The constitutional policies, that had looked so fine on paper and that talked of a ‘ministry team concept’, began to wear a little thin. The attempts of the members of the oversight, to contain Dale and make him accountable to the team within the fellowship, were a constant source of conflict. One ruling, made in November 1985, was possibly the straw that broke the camel’s back. Under the sub heading ‘Income’ in a policy document entitled, ‘Basic Church Policy: All Departments/Projects Operating Guide Lines – Finance’, it states,

No Department/Projects should collect monies separate to the normal offerings or designated giving envelopes. All income must be recorded through the Church Treasurer. NO individual should hold Church monies

in any account, not authorised or subject to audit of Church  
Treasurer/Administrator or the Church's accountants.

This presented a significant financial problem to Roy for he had grown accustomed to supplementing his church salary with monies from preaching and singing engagements out of town. Roy would be given a 'gift' for his ministry and this he would effectively 'pocket' without declaring it to the oversight at the City Christian Centre. Over time these 'gifts' would add up to quite a considerable amount. Although not common knowledge to most of the congregation, certain individuals who worked closely with him knew of Roy's ministry gifts and speculated at the possible outcome of their curtailment. The following is taken from my interview with Ian Scott.

**Ian:** Roy used to go out preaching and earn quite a lot of money and put it in his own pocket for a long while. Until, and I've talked with Paul [Summers] about this, until the day the church decided that everything that was earned by the ministry teams had to come back to the church. As soon as that happened Roy was leaving.

*(Ian Scott, a concert 'roadie' in his mid thirties. A former member of the City Christian Centre for sixteen years, currently with no church affiliation)*

The ruling implemented in 1985 theoretically put an end to Roy's supplemented income, although in reality he did continue to take bookings and did, in fact, retain some of the monies given to him from some, if not all, of his engagements. The fact remained, however, that the concept of 'accountability' was increasingly being developed between the members of the oversight and that it applied to *all* the leaders, including Pastor Dale.

It was becoming obvious that Dale's heart was no longer in the work in Kingston. At an oversight meeting in July 1987 Dale made known his intention to resign from his position by the end of that same year. He indicated that the Lord had told him that it was time for a move to a different area of ministry, not as a church leader or pastor. In a general letter to the Church (dated November 1987) prepared by the oversight, the following was stated,

We would like to inform you of a change to the leadership and ministry team at the City Christian Centre.

Roy Dale is to be released from all local leadership, ministry and pastoral responsibilities with effect from the end of 1987.

He is to work full time in national/international ministry, directing an international youth missions programme for AOG.

The rest of the letter was an attempt to maintain some level of stability and order within the fellowship in the knowledge that such news often leaves a church susceptible to a mild form of hysteria brought on by a general lack of direction. This last statement may seem a little extreme but when one considers the emphasis placed upon strong leadership and ‘heavy shepherding’ under Roy’s ministry, the sudden withdrawal of such influence became, for many, the removal of a crutch. Though harsh, when discipline was imposed, the congregation, generally (with exceptions of course), had grown accustomed to the regime and regarded Roy’s departure as a hard blow. Although numerically large, the City Christian Centre was certainly vulnerable.

#### **Phase V: The end of an era**

The damage control exercised by the remaining oversight (now numbering three)<sup>9</sup> was more successful than anyone could have thought possible. Controls and heavy handedness were relaxed and although this was a cause of great dissonance for some, most began to find the experience refreshing. There was something of an innocence re-introduced into the proceedings. Roy’s professionalism in the ‘pulpit’ was replaced by the efforts of a number of church members who were keen to develop a ministry in preaching or leading worship. By and large the congregation related to the existing oversight on a totally different level. These were people who had predated Roy Dale and with the exception of Bill Hartley, had actually predated John Hedges also. They were seen to be faithful to the fellowship and their loyalty began to contrast strongly

with Roy Dale's many promises of faithfulness and long term commitment to the church. He had gone; they had remained. For many in the fellowship, Dale had let them down, but the existing members of the leadership were still around to pick up the pieces.

Not only did the City Christian Centre manage to maintain a numerical equilibrium during those first months after Roy's departure but also the church actually grew in size! The majority of those new members were, in fact, former members who had left the fellowship because of some disagreement they had had with Roy. Some had been unable to accept his emphasis on Christian 'deliverance' some could not tolerate his 'showmanship', while others had been asked to leave the church because of some matter of discipline that had not been resolved. Whatever the reasons had been, with Roy now gone, many returned. According to Bibby and Brinkerhoff these returnees would fall into the category of the re-affiliate – Christians 'returning to the fold' after a period of absence. This re-affiliation, however, requires greater understanding. Whereas some of the returnees would fall into the 'switcher' category, having attended another church after leaving and then switching back to the City Christian Centre, others would be regarded by the fellowship as restored 'backsliders' upon their return. As I mentioned in chapter three, the 'backslider' who recommits his or her life to God, is regarded as a significant 'victory'. Although no official headcount was ever taken or figures recorded, the average church attendance reached between two

hundred and twenty and two hundred and fifty people for each Sunday service – the highest attendance the church had ever seen.

Although the idea of keeping the organisational structures as they were became a consideration or even a temptation for the leadership, it was only a matter of time before a search had to be made to find a replacement full time pastor. For Bill Hartley and Paul Summers especially, work commitments required the bulk of their time and energy. The Assemblies of God were contacted to help with the search: whoever became a candidate for the position would not be entering the church through the back door as Roy had. This time the procedure was followed much more carefully and in keeping with accepted Assembly of God convention.

George and Margaret Young had felt a call for some time to leave the church they had established in Gibraltar and return to England. They had informed the Assemblies of God that they were considering a move and the Head Office directed them to Kingston. In many ways they seemed very suited to the pastorate at the City Christian Centre. Their church in Gibraltar, by all accounts, had been quite similar in both size and style to the church in Kingston. An early concern that had surfaced within Roy's ministry to the church was his reluctance to fulfil the office of 'pastor'. The emphasis of Dale's mission to the City Christian Centre had shifted shortly after he had been publicly acknowledged as John Hedges' successor. He began to stress that his strengths were in the area of leadership and prophetic teaching: the traditional 'pastor' role - a shepherd

tending the flock - was therefore relinquished and others had established a 'visitation' ministry in the fellowship. It was hoped that George Young would meet the needs of the fellowship in that capacity.

After meeting with the oversight and the church over the course of several months, George and Margaret were eventually welcomed to the assembly. An entry in the document entitled 'Notes of significant decisions' reads,

In accordance with the constitution George and Margaret were invited to join our Team in Kingston. They had previously headed a church in Gibraltar. George and Margaret Young were appointed to the church by official service agreement and a welcoming service at which time a jointly agreed oversight and minister welcome letter and statement of intent was published. The Appointment was decided by the Oversight in full consultation of all tiers of leaders including housegroups and by individual consultation by the oversight with all known committed members. There were only two objections.

Although the appointment of George Young was initiated amicably enough, steps were being taken to ensure accountability and an avoidance of the excesses of the past with regard to the pastors of the City Christian Centre. A further policy document was issued later in the year stating the exact job description for each

member of the oversight team including the full time minister George Young. Included in the document was the following statement:

[The] full time minister is directly accountable and responsible to the oversight team which functions on a mutually accountable basis.

The desire of the oversight, prior to Young's appointment, was to find some one who could serve as a full time minister for the church but who would not necessarily want to run the church independent of the team. Leadership during the interim period between Dale and Young had been most effective and the overall experience of the fellowship had been a good one, given the former strain of Roy's excesses and over emphasis on 'heavy shepherding', 'deliverance' and 'spiritual warfare'. It didn't take long, however, for a bitter dispute to emerge between George Young and the other members of the oversight. Young, although initially quiet and somewhat reserved, surfaced as a man with his own agenda and specific ideas on how a church should be run.

A clash of wills quickly brought an end to any 'honeymoon' period the church was enjoying with its new pastor. Young, feeling stifled by the requirement to acquiesce continually to the oversight, consistently made church-wide decisions without consultation with the team, a practice that outraged the other leaders. Efforts to curtail George Young were thwarted upon the resignation of Bill Hartley as a member of the oversight. Bill had been invited to pastor a growing

independent Charismatic fellowship in a town just outside of Kingston. He accepted the offer and in so doing, left only two of the original oversight in the leadership team. Out of those two, Eric Roberts had no intention of causing further divisions or splits in the church. He had little interest in church politics unlike Paul Summers who continued to resist George Young at every opportunity.

The conflict between these two characters intensified throughout 1989 and the intolerance both had for each other became widely known amongst the congregation. Some sided with Paul Summers while others sided with George Young. Over a period of several months however, the battle of wills began to lean in George Young's favour and Paul Summers eventually resigned his position as church administrator and Elder. The fight had been a long one that had done untold damage to the fellowship. Many people had left during that time, some to join other churches, others to simply leave church altogether. Paul and Victoria Summers and their two children Marie and Anthony eventually became established in an evangelical Anglican church outside of Kingston.

The City Christian Centre was now in the hands of George Young. In what had been a dramatic couple of years, most ties to the history of the church had been severed as far as individuals in leadership were concerned. Although a leadership team would eventually emerge, no team concept rhetoric was entertained. George Young was the leader and very little confusion prevailed regarding that fact. The

'one man band' style of leadership was unashamedly reinstated and, after a significant number of individuals had left the church because of this (attendance between the latter half of 1989 to 1991 dropped by about one hundred members to approximately one hundred and fifty), some balance and order was achieved under Young's leadership. Those who had stayed were, in the main, content to give the new pastor a chance. Many were excited at the thought of 'starting over' free of the bureaucracy of the past.

Divisions would eventually surface, but the early to mid 1990s was, by and large, a period of calm for the fellowship. To a great extent that calm remains today. Certainly there have been no major challenges to George Young's authority, although dissenting voices can always be heard if one listens. The format of the Church programme was gradually altered to reflect a reliance on the free flowing of the Holy Spirit. Two significant meetings were dropped, the Sunday evening service and the home group meetings that had met on Thursday nights. The home fellowships were first introduced somewhat spontaneously in 1983<sup>10</sup> and were later adopted by the oversight as part of the official church programme. At various locations throughout the city, certain homes became the weekly venue for a time of fellowship, praise and Bible study. Leaders were appointed to organise the meetings, promote discussion and play a pastoral role within the group. George and Margaret's concern with the continuation of the groups lay in the number of potential home group leaders. Many who had played an active role in ministry prior to the conflict between George Young and Paul Summers had

since left the church and this had created a shortage of mature Christians who were willing and able to undertake the leadership of a home fellowship. The answer, for the time being, was to suspend them.

A replacement for the home groups was a midweek Bible study given by Pastor Young and held at the church. Two important factors emerged as a result of the discontinuation of the home groups. Firstly, the level of control exerted by the Pastor was increased and secondly, pastoral care was weakened even further (see Margaret Young's comments on the role of a pastor in chapter five). Janet Michaels expressed the above factors in this way:

**Janet:** If you ask Margaret she will tell you that the house groups were knocked on the head because she couldn't find enough people who they thought were responsible enough to be house group leaders. The other thing is, if your aim is to make sure that your congregation is being taught. If you have a joint, a total meeting, there is a certain amount of control within that. And you can control what is being taught and therefore if what you see the objective of a midweek meeting as in 'in-depth' teaching, then having it as a joint meeting altogether is fine. You haven't got to worry about having enough house group leaders or anything. If your objective for that meeting is to teach. If your objective is to 'pastor' then house groups are your answer. I think in an ideal world you can teach and 'pastor' in a house group. You cannot 'pastor' in a large

meeting.

*(Janet Michaels, co-manager of an internet service-provider in her mid thirties. Member of the City Christian Centre for five years)*

The dropping of the Sunday evening meeting coincided with an overall shift in emphasis regarding the necessity for what was originally a 'Gospel service'. Whereas in the past the Sunday night Gospel rally had been an evangelistic tool, a meeting to which you were encouraged to invite your unsaved relative, friend, neighbours or work colleague, the significance of meeting together, as a church, was now to enter into 'celebration', praise and worship. As the emphasis shifted away from outreach and centred more and more upon the experience of worship, one meeting on a Sunday was deemed to be sufficient.

### **Summary**

As this chapter has attempted to show, the history of the Fig Tree Mission and City Christian Centre has been peppered with conflict. Clashes of personality and reflections of the popular changes in Pentecostal and Charismatic practice have influenced many people's lives, some for the good, some for the bad. The early pioneers never foresaw the changes and disruptions that have moulded the City Christian Centre into what it is today. For Sister Craig and Sister Alan, their vision had been originally for the children in the community. That vision had

grown and eventually became a concern, not only for the salvation of the young, but for all ages.

These two women extended their 'vision' and ensured that after they themselves had left this world and 'gone to Glory', the work of Fig Tree Mission would continue. This they entrusted to the Lord and Jeffrey Fuller, who in turn, was faithful in carrying the work forward with his pastor's heart and diligent financial planning. Under Fuller's stewardship, two church buildings were appropriated for the congregation, one a former fruit and vegetable shop and the next a custom built hall with all the amenities.

Pastor Hedges' appointment presented the church with its first major conflict. John Hedges, so unlike Jeffrey Fuller, was loved by most, disliked by an influential few. Hedges' permanent status was, for those antagonists who stayed, a constant reminder of the end of a 'golden age'. The 1980s witnessed the end of two further eras.

Hedges' resignation and Roy Dale's appointment bypassed official church policy that was subsequently altered and added to a number of times without the consultation of church members. These alterations accommodated the various shifts in theology and teaching that Roy brought to the church. A contradiction permeated the experience of the church at that time. In worship meetings and teaching sessions, the congregation were encouraged to invite the Holy Spirit into

their lives, to seek ‘blessing in abundance’ and to surrender completely to the will and direction of God. People were exhorted to be ‘released in praise and worship’, and to ‘experience God within the veil’. The greater the intensity of feeling and abandonment to the Holy Spirit, the closer one’s walk with God became. There was an emphasis on being ‘free from bondage’ and to enjoy a new kind of liberty in the Christian life.

While most of the congregation responded to this teaching and sought liberty in praise and worship and the experiential, the ‘behind the scenes’ leadership of the fellowship had never been so rigidly enforced. Running parallel to this freedom was a system of control that sought to ensure total compliance and submission to the authority of the oversight team. Members were reprimanded, ‘shepherded’ (in the ‘heavy’ sense), brought into line, disciplined and in extreme cases, expelled from the church. As the church appeared to be ‘released’ in the eyes of the onlooker and to other churches in the city, an iron hand underpinned the experience. The contradiction was that as the level of ‘freedom’ increased, so too did the level of control.

This apparent dichotomy can be partly understood as a reaction towards a conflict of interest between the position of the minister and the nature of the ministry within a Pentecostal church. Pastors find themselves having to negotiate between the free flowing of the Holy Spirit and the tenability of their position. On this Wilson writes,

...the minister is responsible for infusing into his following a distinctive tenet of Pentecostalism and of encouraging Pentecostal phenomena – glossalalia being the most common – and is warned against checking spontaneous expression; yet he also has to keep order, guide Pentecostal demonstration, and prevent expression that might challenge his own leadership or bring his Spirit election into doubt (Wilson, 1959: 497).

In addition, sectarian Pentecostalism has emphasised the direct connection between believers and God. This qualifies both pastor and layperson alike to be preachers and ministers. Gerlach and Hine suggest that, ‘The concept of “the priesthood of believers” is basic to all Christian theology, but the Pentecostals take it more seriously than do members of most denominations, and they act upon it’ (Gerlach & Hine, 1970: 42). Within any given congregation there exists the potential for numerous expressions of ministry and yet in order to maintain their own position, and legitimate their status, a pastor must ensure that steps are taken to do so. These steps, in the case of the City Christian Centre, expressed themselves in the level of control exerted over the congregation.

A different interpretation has been offered to account for this same occurrence. In an attempt to create a ‘dialogue’ between rational choice theory and phenomenological interpretations of religious experience, Lawrence Young (1997) suggests that reciprocity can exist between the two stances. Rational

choice, he suggests, ‘...can help us predict which segments of the population are most likely to be exposed to the sacred...’ (Young, 1997: 143). Phenomenology, on the other hand, serves to ‘...help us understand or sense why the encounter with the sacred is perceived to be rewarding’ (ibid). As an example of this fusion, Young offers the following proposition that supplies an interpretation of the dichotomy between freedom and control.

Because religious experience is a deeply personal phenomenon that is self-legitimizing and has multiple possible interpretations, religious organisations which encourage the pursuit of religious experience will a) seek to exercise greater control over religious symbols and stories and/or b) experience higher rates of sect formation (ibid).

Roy Dale’s departure brought an end to that particular regime, although cracks had been appearing for some time before his resignation announcement. Many were unable to reach the ‘heights’ that Roy had pointed to and the subsequent moroseness had begun to descend at various times throughout the fellowship, leaving no one feeling more uneasy about the situation than Roy himself.

A brief respite from conflict and intensity of leadership followed in the interim period between Dale’s exit and Young’s entrance. The ensuing battle between the oversight and the new Pastor echoed the ‘troubles’ in the past between John Hedges and Jeffrey Fuller. At the heart of the war was the issue of control. As in

the conflict in the 1970s the newcomer eventually prevailed. George Young was free to assert his own influence and authority untethered from the constraints of a team ministry ideology, which, in reality, never truly worked under Roy.

And so the City Christian Centre stabilised, somewhat, from the aftermath of the preceding years. Changes were made to the programme as well as the material structure of the building. The fig tree was uprooted and discarded, the 'pulpit' too was removed from the stage, perhaps signalling an end to the spreading of the Gospel in the traditional sense. Certainly the theological direction of the fellowship was shifting once again and a new spin on evangelism would be introduced.

#### ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> This doctrine holds that speaking in tongues is the initial sign or evidence of a person's baptism in the Holy Spirit.

<sup>2</sup> Reference has been made in chapter one of Margaret Young's comment on the fig tree growing near the entrance of the Fig Tree Gospel Hall, its presence being a memorial to Sister Craig and Sister Alan and the old Fig Tree House, the first building the fellowship occupied. Margaret Young was keen to remove the tree and therefore symbolically rid the City Christian Centre of the 'only thing in the Bible that Jesus ever cursed' fearing that any association with an accursed 'thing'

would somehow be a hindrance to the blessing of God. The association of a fig tree with a curse is found in the Gospels of Matthew 21 and Mark 11. Other references are made to fig trees in the Bible however, and these can be interpreted in less severe ways. In Matthew 24 we read 'Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near' (Matthew 24:32). Here Jesus is talking to His disciples about His Second Coming and the signs to look out for. He uses the fig tree as an indicator of seasons. This reference to the fig tree could be interpreted in a very positive light, the hope would be that Christians would be sensitive to the 'signs of the times' and, in the case of the Lord's return, be ready and prepared. Perhaps this is the 'spin' Sister Craig and Sister Alan put on their own fig tree and what it represented.

<sup>3</sup> In conversation with those who had known Jane Craig and Elizabeth Alan, the designation 'Sister' was always given. Within Pentecostal churches the use of 'Brother' and 'Sister' was used extensively to refer to another member of the fellowship. This practice served a number of functions: acceptance into the larger 'family of God', reinforcement of the equalising effects of the Gospel upon individuals, and in the case of Craig and Alan, a recognition of their spiritual authority. The title of 'pastor' would have been quite problematic for a 'mission' such as the one established and led by two women in Kingston. Although Craig and Alan were, for all intents and purposes 'pastors', the immediate chauvinistic male objections to women in leadership were instantly diffused by the omission

of that title. To compensate, the inclusion of 'Sister' whenever either was addressed maintained a stamp of authority while still appeasing a strong sexist tradition of male notions of leadership.

<sup>4</sup> The way a meeting was brought to a close would depend primarily on how the sermon concluded. Very often the message of the 'word' would be followed by a time of ministry and prayer for individual needs. A level of flexibility was tolerated and even welcomed as this was seen as an indication of a congregation and its pastor being open to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Even when no such time of ministry followed a sermon, it was not unusual for the duration of the message to go over the allotted forty minutes. Again this was seen to be allowing the Holy Spirit to move freely and to not be confined or restricted by concern for the time. Occasionally, if a sermon had been particularly long time-wise, the closing hymn would not be sung. The pastor would simply close the meeting in prayer after concluding the message. A common practice also, would be for the first and last verse only of the closing hymn to be sung.

<sup>5</sup> This term was widely used in the fellowship.

<sup>6</sup> Having had some initial disagreements with the Oversight regarding the teaching being introduced to the fellowship, the organist left the church in 1983.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Peter 5:5 reads, ‘Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility towards one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”’ (New International Version).

<sup>8</sup> The office of ‘apostle’ is discussed in Donald Guthrie’s *New Testament Theology* (1981). Using Paul as an example Guthrie states that, ‘As far as his own position is concerned, Paul unquestionably regarded his apostleship as investing him with particular authority. This is specially evident in the case of the incestuous person at Corinth (1 Cor.5:5). He makes his pronouncement and expects the assembled church to accept his decision. He does not even suggest that the matter should be discussed’ (Guthrie, 1981:762).

<sup>9</sup> Over the course of Roy’s appointment as Pastor and up until his subsequent resignation, a number of changes in personnel had taken place amongst the oversight of the church. Out of the original eight men who had been appointed ‘Elders’ shortly after Roy’s appointment, Graham Craven had resigned and left the church to work in a ministry in Spain. Richard Mann resigned due to ‘personal business pressure’ (information taken from an undated addition to the November 1985 Church Policy Document. This additional information entitled ‘Oversight Minute. Notes of Significant Changes’ was probably written shortly after Roy Dale had left the church at the end of 1987, and a little before George Young became the new minister in the middle of 1988). Patrick Derry had died.

John Hedges (the former Pastor) had left to become the pastor of an Assemblies of God church in Australia. Roy Dale, of course, had resigned in the hope of becoming more closely linked with the Assemblies of God national executive body. And Derek Smart had been 'asked to step down as an Elder by Dale due to self confessed marital difficulties and moral indiscretions'. There now remained three of the original members: Paul Summers, Eric Roberts and Bill Hartley.

<sup>10</sup> As an enthusiastic member of the City Christian Centre myself at that time, I was instrumental in instigating the first home fellowship meetings. They were born out of a desire, simply, to meet with other Christians and to be an active participant in Bible studies.

## **The Concept of 'Class' in the Hybrid Church**

In this chapter I will consider issues of social class within the City Christian Centre and the wider Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal experience. My concern is to show that changes in class composition are characteristic of the process of hybridisation. My findings suggest that Pentecostal churches such as the City Christian Centre no longer predominantly attract those individuals who occupy the lower end of the social class scale but now appeal, also, to an increasing number of middle class Christians and potential converts. Socio-economic group distinctions pertaining to the traditionally perceived notion of cultural difference are undermined within the hybrid church and the subsequent inosculation creates a unique form of homogeneity. Differences in income, education levels, 'life chances' (Dahrendorf, 1979) and status 'honour', in the Weberian sense (Weber, 1962), *do*, however, co-exist within the fellowship. A diverse social stratum is represented, resembling that of the wider society, and yet there exists a particular theological understanding, in the beliefs of the congregation, which radically alters any secular explanation of social position or standing. Again we see that a distinctly social phenomenon, in this case social status, is filtered through religious belief and, consequently, this has had a leveling effect upon the group. Socio-economic status, be it related solely to wealth and economic standing or to status 'honour' and culture, is regarded through 'spiritual eyes'.

Although class distinctions clearly exist, the allocating of individuals into one class or another is not perceived as the result of social structures. Determinism rests in the will of God. Even with the emerging teaching on prosperity and the newer doctrine of wealth that is slowly permeating many Charismatic fellowships, the emphasis lies not in the secular but in the sacred. The accumulation of wealth and prosperity is not confined to those of a higher social class; it is accessible to all.

I will first consider the notion of *class* and church affiliation and how earlier work (and traditional views) have associated social groups with particular forms of religious practice. I will give an explanation of inter-class participation within the hybrid church based upon the broad appeal of the individual fellowships - their changing form, style of worship and church life. Class dynamics at the City Christian Centre will be examined later in the chapter along with some discussion on the related concept of wealth and prosperity. To varying degrees 'prosperity' teaching is becoming increasingly popular within the Charismatic/Restoration movement. In considering some of its features we can better understand the believer's relationship to and understanding of issues relating to economic standing - a position that highlights the contrast between sociologically familiar conceptions of stratification and those of the believer.

## **Class**

Hunter has stated that evangelicals in the United States are strongest in rural, small town areas and that church membership, in such areas, consists predominantly of those from the lower social classes.

Evangelicals [in the USA] are grossly under represented in the large cities. They are most greatly represented in the lower echelons of educational achievement, income level, and occupational status; they fall mostly in the lower middle and working classes (Hunter, 1983:59).

This delineation suggests that a distinction can be made regarding social class and religious affiliation. Following Hunter's model, the lower classes tend towards more fundamental evangelicalism, while the higher 'echelons' affiliate themselves with mainstream religious institutions. Alternatively, those in a higher social bracket may not attend church at all, or very rarely, having little inclination to spirituality or a belief in God. Grace Davie has stated that the more educated a person, the greater the possibility of refuting religious claims, '...increased educational levels (normally associated with higher social class) have a negative effect on religious belief' (Davie, 1994:107).

The French historian, Francois Bedarida, makes reference to a dividing line between the higher and lower social classes which has traditionally been thought to represent a demarcation between the religious and ideological views of classes

in nineteenth century Britain. Bedarida attempts to define social classes by formulating the following elements into a workable schema:

(1) the position in the system of production, i.e. occupation, income and standard of living; (2) a collective consciousness of belonging to a certain class; and (3) the sharing of common values by virtue of way of life, education and status...(Bedarida, 1990: 39).

Bedarida is quick to point out that further dividing lines exist between classes and that these tend to present a two-tier model rather than a three-tier conception that he prefers. Distinctions are made in the area of political ideology – ‘Tories, Whigs and Radicals’, society – ‘town and country’, nationality – ‘Scots, Welsh and Irish’, and *religion* – ‘Anglican and Dissenters’ (Bedarida, 1990: 39). Here we see a reflection of Hunter’s earlier comment: the higher up the social scale one is to be found the greater chance of church affiliation (if there is to be any involvement at all) with mainstream institutions. Similarly, the lower down the scale, the greater the likelihood of affiliation with Nonconformist churches which include (amongst a variety of others) fundamental, evangelical, and Charismatic/Pentecostal groups.

Nevertheless, the *present* demographics of religious affiliation in Britain are no longer clearly divided by class and socio-economic status. Abercrombie suggests that, ‘Religiosity does not, however, seem to vary at all with social class

membership' (Abercrombie et al, 1994:463). This claim reinforces the assertion made by David Gerard who states that regarding an individual's 'religiosity', 'neither social class nor physical location significantly affect commitment' (Gerard, 1985: 68. See also Stoetzel, 1983). Although Abercrombie's reasoning behind the leveling of distinction between social class and religiosity is far too simplistic – that religion or superstition result from 'situations of crisis and anxiety' (Abercrombie et al, 1970: 113), the point is made that religiosity and social classes do not coincide with Hunter's evaluation. The American model he supplies does not fit into the British context. Moreover, research conducted in the UK by Francis, Lankshear and Jones (2000) showed that the charismatic movement had taken root among Anglicans in urban communities far more strongly than in suburban or rural areas. Bedarida's evaluation relates (in the reference used earlier) to the mid nineteenth century and that, also, no longer reflects the current 'scene'. Certainly, the example of the City Christian Centre represents a definite move towards a class integrated congregation. Since the early 1980s the congregation of the church has reflected a growing number of middle class members.

Why should social class integration be largely the norm today in Pentecostal, neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic evangelical circles? Can we evaluate the growth of the middle classes in these churches by simply making the observation that working class participation is declining generally? In her book *Religion in Britain Since 1945* (Davie, 1994), Davie looks at the religious experiences of

those who are at the lower end of the socio-economic scale and who live in either working class areas or the inner city (see chapter 2 of Davie: 1994, pp. 93-116). She uses the notions of 'believing and belonging' to distinguish between persons who hold some level of religious belief and yet do not tend to 'belong' or practise their faith in a church. Writing of this particular socio-economic group, who share similar geographical space she states,

Here belief persists (albeit in a depressed form), but the expected reluctance to practise religion is compounded by the further factor, a mistrust of institutional life of any kind, the churches included (Davie, 1994:106).

This provides a strong link between an underlying uncertainty and non-involvement amongst the working classes in Britain. Sheena Ashford and Noel Timms provide data pertaining to levels of trust and institutions in their work *What Europe Thinks* (1992). Drawing from the findings of the European Values Systems Study Group, and their empirical studies of 1981 and 1991, Timms and Ashford conclude that a, 'lack of confidence [in institutions generally, not just that of the church] tends to predominate' (Ashford and Timms, 1992: 16).<sup>1</sup> From my many conversations with people, both from the City Christian Centre and from those no longer affiliated, but who fall into a lower socio-economic category (Ashford and Timms study does not indicate social class in their analysis of 'trust/confidence' levels), a sense of 'mistrust' is apparent. Often, a

'them and us' mentality is expressed. From my own life experience, growing up within a strong working class tradition, I can relate to such feelings of mistrust. A communal tone of suspicion was projected against politicians, the police force *and* any number of churches and clergy operating within the parish district.

Davie's observation, therefore, is a compelling factor in the non-involvement of the lower social classes in organised religion. But this particular observation poses a number of questions, most significantly – why is there such a high proportion of working class people *committed* to both Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches and why are the attendance figures rising? In addition, we must ask, why is there such a high proportion of middle class people actively participating in the same churches?

Hunter's and Bedarida's work has summarised and more clearly defined that which was *traditionally* thought to be a true picture of middle and working class church involvement. The fact that both middle and working class groups are now actively engaged in the same particular kind of church life is an anomaly we would do well to consider for it is a key characteristic of the hybrid church. One possible interpretation lies in the overall structure and expression of the churches in question.

Pentecostal, Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal church groups centre on forms of spiritual expression that have only been witnessed infrequently throughout history since the early church experiences written of in the Book of Acts. The

heavy emphasis placed on *charismata*, the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and the events that took place on the day of Pentecost, reflects the tenets of belief that set Pentecostals and Charismatics apart from both the mainline denominations and the wider evangelical community. For many 'seekers' and 'searchers' their quest is to encounter those experiences. For some, the seeking out of a 'Spirit-filled' church entails a sort of divine inevitability. Jane Farley described her 'seeking' experience this way:

**Jane:** I just thought that it was God-led to go to it [City Christian Centre]. I'd never been into a Pentecostal church before, so you could say to me, 'why didn't you go to a Roman Catholic?' [Jane's parents had attended a Roman Catholic church]. I went looking for other churches, because you're searching. I didn't really know any churches. I didn't know this word 'denomination', it didn't mean a thing to me. I didn't know it was a Pentecostal, didn't even know what the word meant. I didn't know anything Mal, but that's why I say, it was definitely God-led.

*(Jane Farley, cleaner and drama student in her mid thirties. Joined the City Christian Centre in 1983 - an intermittent member due to work and college commitments taking her out of town)*

Kenneth Thompson suggests that there has been a steady decline in the membership of both the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church in Britain since the 1970s. At the same time, the Charismatic/Pentecostal groups

have been growing. Thompson draws our attention to the fact that the number of both Anglican and Roman Catholic congregations also declined in the 1970s and that this, '...contrasts with a spectacular growth in some sects and new religious movements, and the religions of immigrant groups' (Thompson, 1988:227). One explanation for this decline and growth is the steady transference of membership from mainstream churches to more active, experiential or strict religious movements. This exodus is due to the desire to 'get more serious' with God - again we are drawn to Dean Kelley's work (Kelley, 1972, 1978. See also Perrin, Kennedy & Miller, 1997). Some religious seekers within the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church are attracted to the spiritual empowering of the Holy Spirit within Pentecostal and Charismatic fellowships, especially in urban areas (Francis, Lankshear and Jones, 2000). They often regard the various manifestations evidenced in 'Spirit filled' meetings as a more authentic representation of the early church recorded in the Book of Acts.

If we are to attribute the drawing force of the new religious movements on predominantly middle class attendees of mainstream churches in this way, then we have still to explain the persistence of the large numbers of working class members. How is it that we have a successful integration of classes? Before attempting to answer that, I first want to summarise the issues involved.

- a) Earlier work has indicated that a social class divide has existed in relation to church affiliation.

- b) The class 'divide' is manifested in the type of church, denomination, or movement individuals from social groups become members of. The lower or working classes have been highly represented in more fundamental, evangelical, or Non-Conformist denominations. With particular reference to Pentecostalism, Wilson states that, 'Pentecostalism is predominantly the religion of the working-class and poor people' (Wilson, 1961: 105, see also Wilson, 1959). The middle and upper classes, on the other hand, are highly represented in mainstream churches, predominantly Anglican.
- c) Although lower social class groups, it has been suggested, have a basic mistrust of institutions generally – organised religion being one of them - membership remains strong within Pentecostal, Charismatic, and neo-Pentecostal churches.
- d) The same is not true of middle class 'seekers' who appear to be leaving their traditional churches in favour of a more active, charismatic, or (what is deemed to be) authentic religious experience.

*Middle class* religious 'seekers' are often initially affiliated to mainstream churches. Their desire to be more actively engaged in their faith is the driving force behind their search, departure, and affiliation to a more Charismatic and evangelical establishment. The following is taken from an interview with members (husband and wife) of the City Christian Centre who had previously been affiliated to Methodism. This sentiment was reiterated by a number of

members who had switched from mainline churches and is indicative of a desire to become more engaged in their faith and belief.

**Peter:** I rang round and I had a feeling that there were only two churches that I wanted to go to. Now you are probably going to ask me “why did I know I wanted to go?” The two churches were the City Christian Centre and Bourne Street [Elim Pentecostal]. Both churches were fairly similar at this time - we are going back ten years. Both churches were very lively, the style of worship was what we could handle, what we enjoyed coming from a traditional background. The worship was more... it wasn't just like singing from a book it was actually doing something, feeling close to God. The teaching was like we never had before, coming from a traditional church, the teaching is different, it's very personal, and it's adaptable and it makes you think. Whereas in a traditional setting it can be very wishy-washy and you can actually fall asleep half way through it.

*(Peter Michaels, manager of an internet service-provider in his mid thirties. Member of the City Christian Centre for five years)*

**Janet:** And a lot of the liberal theology was not very sound.

*(Janet Michaels, co-manager of an internet service-provider in her mid thirties. Member of the City Christian Centre for five years)*

The proportionally high attendance of the *lower classes* within Charismatic groups is made more likely because of the potential for informality within such organisations and even the active eschewing of institutionalised church practices. Data shows that the traditional, institutionalised churches with more formal services are declining in attendance, whereas various sects, churches of immigrant groups and new religious movements have witnessed a 'spectacular growth' over the last thirty years (Thompson, 1988: 227). But it is important to stress that the informality of Charismatic groups refers to their physical setting and the social relations between participants: not to their beliefs. They tend to hold very firmly to beliefs that they consider to be clear and consequential for their way of life. There is no contradiction or tension between the relative informality of City Christian Centre services and the highly demanding character of its members' religious beliefs.

Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal churches have a broad base of appeal to the working class. Such fellowships also attract 'seekers' (many of them middle class) from mainline institutions. In generalised terms, both groups are attracted to the promise of spiritual fulfilment and a deeper religious walk. This is not to suggest that a desire or an experience of the 'spiritual' is absent in mainline churches, or that members of either group do not find a level of fulfilment in them, the suggestion is only that for many they often seem unable to relate in those terms.

Being able to 'relate' provides a further reason why Charismatic, Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches have been effective in aligning themselves to the working classes. Writing on the experience of the relatively underprivileged population of inner city and urban dwellers, Andrew Walker states,

The pressure of modernity hit the poor in the inner cities harder than anyone else: unemployment is higher, education is of an inferior standard (or at least has fewer resources), racism is rampant, and housing is dilapidated. It is surely a witness to the human spirit that religiosity has survived. But this is not good news for the Christian churches unless the Christian faith can be integrated into the lives and reality of urban existence (Ahern & Davie, 1987:16).

Here Walker recognises a deeply embedded religiosity and the need for religious organisations to meet potential converts 'where they are'. The evangelical churches have endeavoured to do so. As well as the national outreaches such as Graham Kendrick's March For Jesus, a myriad of local outreaches, open-air meetings, Christian concerts, coffee bars and 'door-knocking' exercises have been tried and tried again. Such attempts at evangelism have often left a larger society quite baffled or irritated, but many individuals have been successfully proselytised into the numerous churches, fellowships, missions, assemblies or 'house' churches that have embarked on such witnessing strategies.

Along with the serious conviction of most evangelicals to 'go into all the world and make disciples', came a host of initiatives (as well as spontaneous developments) that carried the potential of being able to relate to the 'world outside'. An attempt was made to shrug off the often negative perception society held of 'boring Christians'. The 1970s, for example, saw the emergence of the Jesus Movement in North America in which Christian young people dropped many of the constraints, fashions and dogma of the post war era.<sup>2</sup> Many teenagers and young adult members of the movement who were saved during the late 1960s and early 1970s had been former hippies and traditional dress conventions in the churches were both questioned and challenged. It was no longer unusual to see Christian young people (and some older ones too) in afghan coats, psychedelic shirts, short tie-dyed dresses for the girls and, for all, the copious donning of flowers, beads and headbands. Hair lengths also reflected the times; young men began to wear their hair long.

Music has always been a strong tool of communication generally, whether in an evangelistic or a secular sense. During the heyday of the Jesus Movement, Christian rock music surfaced and has stayed on the contemporary Christian scene ever since (see Howard & Streck, 1999). Although the introduction of distorted guitars, largely indecipherable lyrics, pounding drums, flashing lights and pyrotechnics sparked considerable controversy within many churches (and in actual fact still does), the use of 'worldly' instruments and music was not a new concept in Christendom. William and Catherine Booth, the founders of the

Salvation Army in 1878<sup>3</sup>, established the organisation along military lines and incorporated the use of brass instruments in their evangelism. Not only were brass instruments considered highly unsuitable for the accompaniment of hymns and sacred songs in those days, but the Salvation Army went even further by putting hymns to the music of popular secular tunes of the day (see Hattersley, 2000; Robertson, 1967). The likes of Larry Norman and Randy Stonehill<sup>4</sup> in America, less than a hundred years after the Salvation Army had been established, were simply using the music of their generation to preach the Gospel in the same way the Booths had. This approach in music, along with the breaking down of traditional church norms of fashion, language, appearance and general convention played a significant role in changing the image of an 'out of touch' institution into one of relevance and social class indifference. A similar experience within many of the evangelical and Pentecostal churches occurred throughout Britain and a greater informality ensued. Although it had (and still has) a way to go, a particular brand of Christian expression had started to make positive steps towards integrating the Christian faith 'into the lives and reality of urban existence' (Ahern & Davie, 1987:16).

Of course the move towards the introduction of attributes of popular culture into the collective worship times of the church does not suit everyone's tastes. While presenting an attractive expression to many (predominantly the younger members of a congregation), changes in worship styles especially are not necessarily appreciated by others. Within the City Christian Centre, a group of approximately

ten (senior citizens) and just an one or two others (whom I met), objected specifically to the style (and volume) of music played by the worship band during the Sunday morning Celebration services and to a lesser degree the Tuesday evening Bible study. Although most, within this group, would, if given the option, display a clear preference for the older hymns and choruses which were effectively 'done away with' during the 1980s, a number of mitigating factors help to reduce (or appease) the dissonance felt by the distraction of largely up-tempo music of the praise and worship revolution.

Firstly, occasions for full congregational worship have been reduced (see Chapter 4 for a schedule of meetings held at the City Christian Centre past and present). With now just *two* services – the Sunday Celebration and the Tuesday Bible study – as distinct from a possible *five* in which the entire congregation used to be encouraged to participate, the potential for frustration is softened and occasions for fellowship and interaction with others do not, generally, include times of worship. During certain periods of the City Christian Centre's history, home groups (Thursday evenings) often included times of worship; the groups themselves however, organized their own service and songs and these largely accommodated the tastes of those present.

Another mitigating factor suggests a high level of tolerance, on the part of those whose preferences in worship style do not reflect that of the majority, which should not be underestimated. Much of this tolerance, I found, stemmed from a

genuine desire to encourage those who were a part of the ministry team and this included the worship band and singers. Certainly, for most of the older members, a strong belief in the value of ministry and 'getting involved in God's work' prevailed. This expressed itself in words of encouragement to the worship team members even though listening to the music they played was not always particularly easy.

A final factor only became known to me after my fieldwork at the City Christian Centre had ended. During a visit to Kingston and while spending an evening with a number of City Christian Centre members, a concept was introduced to me that I had not picked up on during my research. It is pertinent because it informs the present discussion on tolerance of worship styles. Two active members of the church - Carla Harris and Glenda Roe – told me of a view that had been gathering some momentum at the City Christian Centre. The idea linked directly the blessing of God with the actual *style* of worship music and song. Whereas before, the worship style was regarded simply as a contemporary expression originating from the cultural preferences of those who wrote and played it, the *expression* itself was becoming theologically significant. The contemporary style had become God's preference! Such a notion, if adopted, would be a compelling factor for the exercising of toleration in the realm of collective worship at the City Christian Centre.

Given the above qualification, to a great extent, many of the evangelical denominations and religious groups did become much more accessible to those on the lower socio-economic scale who had regarded the institution of the church as irrelevant to their lives. The traditional perception of religious church life – cold uninviting buildings, religious symbolism that made very little sense to the uninitiated, and, quite possibly, a sermon that was either hard to understand, dry or relatively unchallenging – became altered in the light of the seeming informality and ‘down to earth’ approach of the evangelical churches combined with their demanding teachings.

The fact that Charismatic forms of worship have spread through many Anglican, Roman Catholic and Free Churches without apparently attracting an influx of new members from the working class calls for an explanation. Again, the important factor is the virtually unavoidable formality of the physical and social setting of worship in churches with ordained clergy, influential seminaries, imposing buildings and a majority of self-evidently middle class participants. Although these features can be mitigated or disguised in some churches, the probability that people from a working class background would expect to feel ‘at home’ in them is significantly lower than it is for fellowships meeting in modest premises and in down-scale neighbourhoods. In other words, the general informality of Charismatic worship is not, in itself, likely to override the factors that have historically deterred many people from working class backgrounds from joining mainstream Christian churches. But the combination of informality,

lack of institutional 'trappings' and the use of popular musical styles in the City Christian Centre was enough to tempt such people through its doors.

We must be careful, however, not to suggest by the use of the term 'informality', a *compromised message*. I am referring here merely to the *appearance and order* of the services and meetings of any given fellowship. Within the City Christian Centre and countless other Charismatic, Pentecostal, neo- Pentecostal, *and* evangelical non Charismatic churches, there is no set liturgy, no 'set in stone' programme, few, if any, hymns sung from a hymn book. The organ has been replaced by the keyboard, guitar, bass and drums; the very architecture and physical buildings of the places of worship are mostly carpeted, pew-less and increasingly without a pulpit from which the sermon is delivered. Creche facilities are widely available making the experience of going to church much more accessible for families and individuals with young children. Even with those churches without facilities for the children, one finds that an increased level of tolerance exists, on the part of the grown ups, for the restlessness of young children often displayed by fidgeting, drawing, playing, or crying during a meeting.

The minister's attire is not generally different from that of the majority of the congregation. He or she does not wear distinctive clothing such as robes. An atmosphere of this kind reduces much of the discomfort of observing polite protocol and 'high church' etiquette associated with many of the mainstream

churches. There is no incense burning, no processions with vestments and mitre. On the outside, many evangelical churches appear to have displaced the accoutrements of mainstream institutionalised religious ceremony. They have provided establishments for a wider spectrum of social groups and localised cultures, enabling many to feel more 'at home' in participating in a religious life within a church structure.

While it is true that many Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal groups are relatively less informal in their operation, some qualification must be made at this point. This 'informality' should not be regarded as equating to a notion of casualness. Although seemingly relaxed, and unencumbered by many of the ceremonial observances of mainline denominations, the shift from a formal ecclesiastical infrastructure to the informal 'celebration' meetings of the Pentecostals, does not denote a perceived move away from personal integrity (as defined by one's belief) and adherence to the strict tenets of conservative evangelical charismatic Christianity. To be 'liberated', for the Pentecostal, is not the same as becoming 'liberal'. The requirement to 'be holy' still largely *demand*s a high level of personal piety in the life of the believer.<sup>5</sup>

A great number of groups *are* highly controlled and institutionalised albeit in an expression that differs from that of mainstream churches. If we were to consider some of the more dominant Charismatic/Pentecostal groups, we would identify

levels of structure and order along a continuum. Nigel Wright (1997) gives a most useful summary of the diversity within Charismatic fellowships and communities. In his chapter *The Nature and Variety of Restorationism and the 'House Church' Movement* (in Hunt, Hamilton and Walter, 1997: 60-77) Wright provides a '...spectrum drawn as it were from left to right (but without political connotations) according to the degree of 'sectarian otherness' which the groups of churches feel about themselves...' (ibid: 66). Looking at Charismatic fellowships in this way enables us to chart the level of underlying structure (and formality) within the major Charismatic groups in Britain.

At the far right of the continuum, Wright includes the emergence of the early house churches established by G.W. North. Although no longer in the forefront of the Charismatic movement, North, along with the fellowships in South Chard are, 'groups regarded in some sense as forerunners by the Restorationist Movement' (ibid). Wright also includes the Jesus Fellowship or Jesus Army that originated in the small village of Bugbrooke in Northamptonshire, some thirty years ago. The Jesus Fellowship was established by a former Baptist minister (Noel Stanton) who became 'Spirit filled' in the late 1960s. This experience led to a radical new approach to his ministry and soon several communities of believers were established throughout the area. Many families would live together in large houses and submit their income and former property to the communal purse. Authoritarian leadership was (and still is) very strong within the Jesus Fellowship. As 'Bugbrooke' became known in many evangelical and Pentecostal

churches throughout England, it became synonymous with the concept of 'heavy shepherding'. Reports started to filter through that members had to seek permission from the Elders before they were allowed to make various financial decisions for themselves – choosing a car to buy, for instance, or making certain important purchases. Such counsel from the leadership would be applied to both those who lived 'in community' *and* to those members who remained within their own homes. In practical terms, however, it was far easier to dominate those within the community houses. Submission to the leaders became a major theme within the Jesus Fellowship. Members were restricted in recreational pursuits, reading material and relationships. Even married couples had to go through set times of abstaining from making love (see Young & Farrant, 1991).

Although authoritarian and increasingly 'cult-like' in their lifestyle, the Jesus Fellowship were (and are now) expressing a certain brand of the Charismatic movement. Their aim was to set, as their example, the early church - to share, to be 'in community' and to practise a form of authoritative leadership that was considered to be true to New Testament doctrine, albeit one man's interpretation of it.

Moving further along the continuum we find a number of establishments within the Charismatic/Restoration movement that lie somewhere in between the conservative and liberal extremes. Still leaning decidedly to the right are the 'Salt and Light' churches in and around the Basingstoke area. Their leader, Barney

Coombs – who was influenced greatly by some early personalities within the Charismatic Movement in North America - stressed the notion of submission to authority and 'shepherding' (Wright, 1997: 67). As with the Jesus Fellowship, their level of 'sectarian otherness' caused periods of considerable unease within evangelical circles.

The ministry of Bryn and Keri Jones occupies a middle position on Wright's continuum. They established a home network of fellowships in the Bradford area. Again, the underlining doctrine of what became known as Harvestime and then Covenant Ministries (Hunt, Hamilton and Walter, 1997: 68) incorporated the aspects of 'shepherding' and a strong patriarchal structure. Significantly, however, their annual Dales Bible week became a big attraction to Christians far and wide; mitigating some of the more questionable aspects of the Restoration movement. As the City Christian Centre started to witness the dramatic increase of membership in the early to mid 1980s, a large number of the congregation would spend the week camping in the Dales to attend the Harvestime event. Over a short period, the City Christian Centre was greatly influenced by the doctrine of the Bradford House Churches. So much so, in fact, that many of the weekly home fellowships adopted a Bible study course (*Sword of the Spirit*) which had been written by Bryn Jones.

Further along the 'line' we find New Frontiers based in Brighton and headed by Terry Virgo (ibid: 69); John Noble and Gerald Coates based in Cobham, Surrey

(ibid: 70), and Roger Forster's London based Icthus Fellowship. Although these organisations are strongly Restorationist, they provide a less sectarian image and the leaders of these groups are widely considered to be (within Charismatic/ Restorationist and Neo – Pentecostal circles), the 'spiritual leaders of the nation'. At this point on the continuum, Restorationist and Charismatic groups project themselves as the innovators and forerunners of revival. They have distinguished themselves from a position of relative obscurity, suspicion and a cult-like image, to achieve a position of some prominence within British contemporary Christianity.

The ministry career of David Tomlinson is taken by Wright as an example of far left Restorationism (ibid: 71,72). Having been closely linked to W.R. North and Bryn Jones, Tomlinson has since departed from the more authoritarian expressions of the Charismatic movement and focused his vision more on direct social issues. Tomlinson's book, *The Post-Evangelical* (1995), attempts to introduce changes in the role of the church in light of the shift from the modern to the postmodern era. In it he questions many of the assumed tenets of traditional evangelicalism (see Cray et al, 1997). After gaining some notoriety as the leader of Holy Joe's – a small fellowship group that met in a pub - Tomlinson is now involved with the Church of England.

David Tomlinson (and the theological journey he has taken) is significant to our present discussion in two ways. Firstly, he is used to represent the far left of

Wright's continuum of 'sectarian otherness'. The style and expression of Holy Joe's, for instance, is vastly different from that of any other Restorationist church meeting. Secondly, there is a sense in which Charismatic experience has turned full circle. From its sectarian eschewing of traditional ecclesiasticism in the home churches, to an embracing of symbols and rituals, in Tomlinson's post-evangelical Restorationism, in which *inclusivity* is stressed.

Levels of formality/informality, structure/chaos exist within an array of Charismatic churches which, as we have seen, covers a wide spectrum of expression and individual taste. One need not be excluded from the banner of 'Charismatic believer' simply because one 'style' of worship is preferred over another. The growing number of Charismatics within the Catholic church is a clear indication of the diversity the movement encompasses (see McGuire, 1982; Neitz, 1987; O'Connor, 1971; Ranaghan, 1969). Restorationism appeals to a population of 'switchers', 'searchers' and 'seekers' like no single church or denomination can. Its propensity to adapt and accommodate, as we have seen with Wright's summation, helps to nullify traditional conceptions of class and religious affiliation. Teaching is not geared towards specific social groups and, although distinctions of income, employment, education and culture are realities within any given fellowship, a mixing of social status results.

I now turn to the more practical application of class at the City Christian Centre and an examination of the conception of socio-economic groups within the

fellowship's congregation. Although differences exist (and often the disparity between individuals is extensive), it is the spiritual conception of social position which prevails in the believer's understanding of this particular reality.

### **Conceptions of Class at the City Christian Centre**

Given the increasingly diverse mixture of social class backgrounds that we have considered in the first half of this chapter, and the assimilation of different socio-economic groups - how are relations negotiated within a fellowship? To suggest that social class distinctions relinquish a significant claim to any notion of the traditionally held conceptions of differences in culture between classes does not alter the fact that, according to a plethora of sociological literature, differences in class culture exist. This section considers the experience of the members at the City Christian Centre with issues relating to social class.

In purely quantifiable terms, the class structure within the City Christian Centre has changed since the mid 1970s. The debate over the definition of class within the social sciences has always been a significant factor in the discipline. I do not wish to attempt any major revision of the past and present arguments relating to the sociological field of stratification, save those inferences made above regarding religiosity and class assimilation within Charismatic and Pentecostal groups. In this section, I will provide an approximate break down of the various socio-economic groups that are present in the Church in relation to

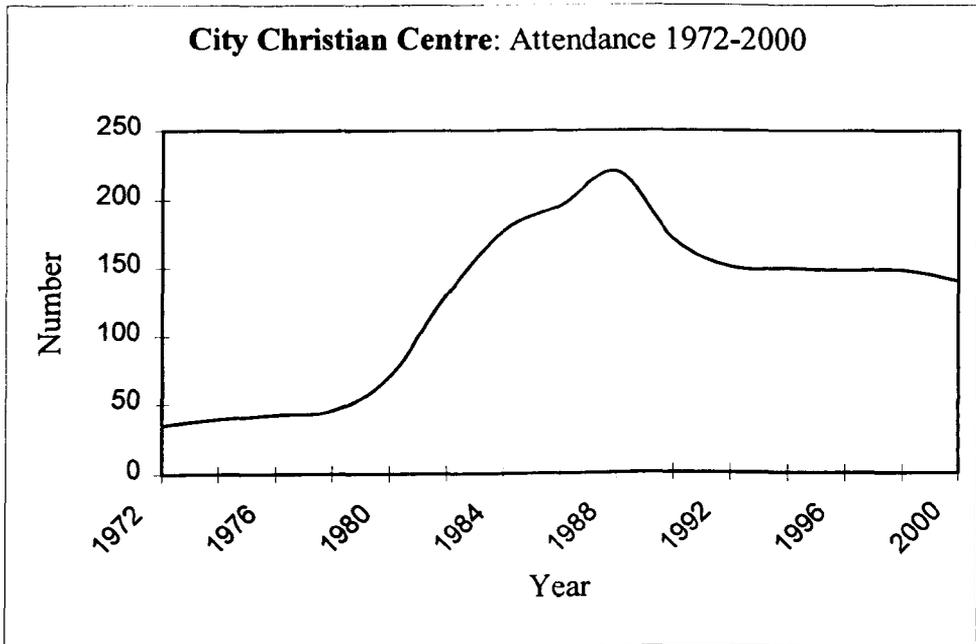
understandings of class. Of greater significance, are the *attitudes* of the believers at the City Christian Centre towards issues of class and social status and the members of higher or lower social groups. Not surprisingly, a person's socio-economic position is filtered through the theological understanding of the believer and is not thought to relate to secular political or sociological interpretations.

In order to give an approximation of social class, I am utilising the model Mark Abrams used in his work *Demographic Correlates of Values* in the book, *Values and Social Class in Britain* (Abrams, Gerard and Timms, 1985). Groups are broken down into the following categories which are dependent upon 'the occupation of the head of the household' (Abrams, Gerard and Timms, 1985:21).

- AB = professional/managerial
- C1 = sales, clerical and other non-manual
- C2 = skilled manual workers
- DE = Semi-skilled, unskilled, unemployed or pensioner.<sup>6</sup>

Up until the 1970s the occupational make-up of the City Christian Centre was predominantly that of the three lowest categories on Abrams' scale: C2 skilled manual and DE semi-skilled, unskilled, unemployed or pensioner (see Figure 4 for overall attendance levels for the past 30 years. See Figure 5 for C2 and DE members). The number of unemployed members rose during the late 70s and 80s.

A very small percentage (two or three members) occupied *CI* skilled non-manual and other non-manual work. In the mid 1970s the number of skilled non-manual workers and intermediate professionals rose slightly. There was also the first *AB* professional attending, in the shape of Paul Summers who was a business accountant, later to enter management.



**Figure 4**

Throughout the 1980s, there was a steady increase in the number of skilled non-manual occupations represented in the fellowship. Many of the young couples, who had met at the church and married in the first half of the decade, had either worked through various apprenticeships or acquired secretarial or administration

skills upon leaving school. The majority had not graduated from a university although some had attended college and gained vocational qualifications.

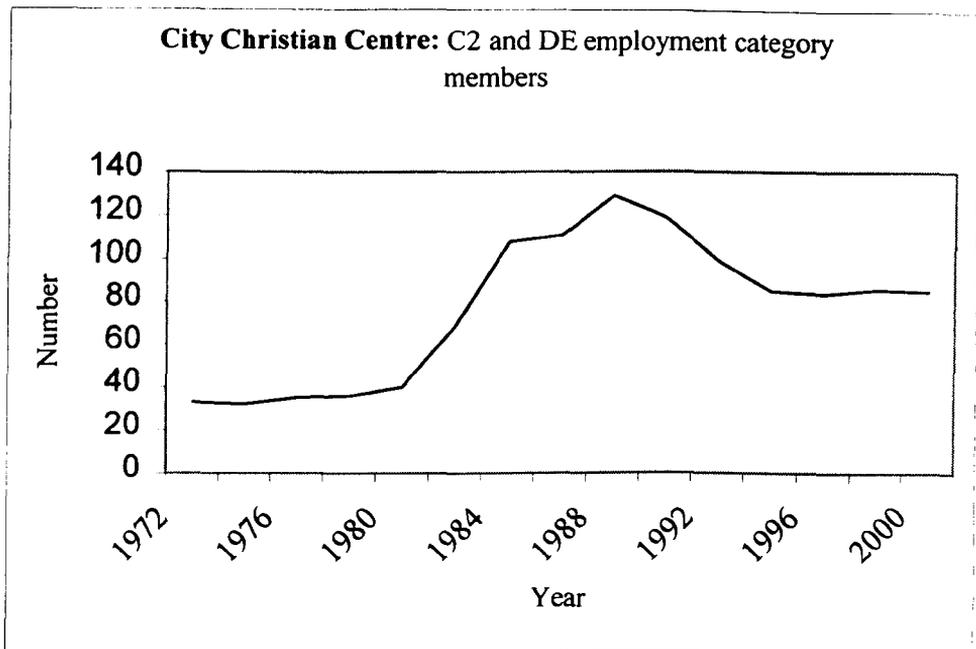
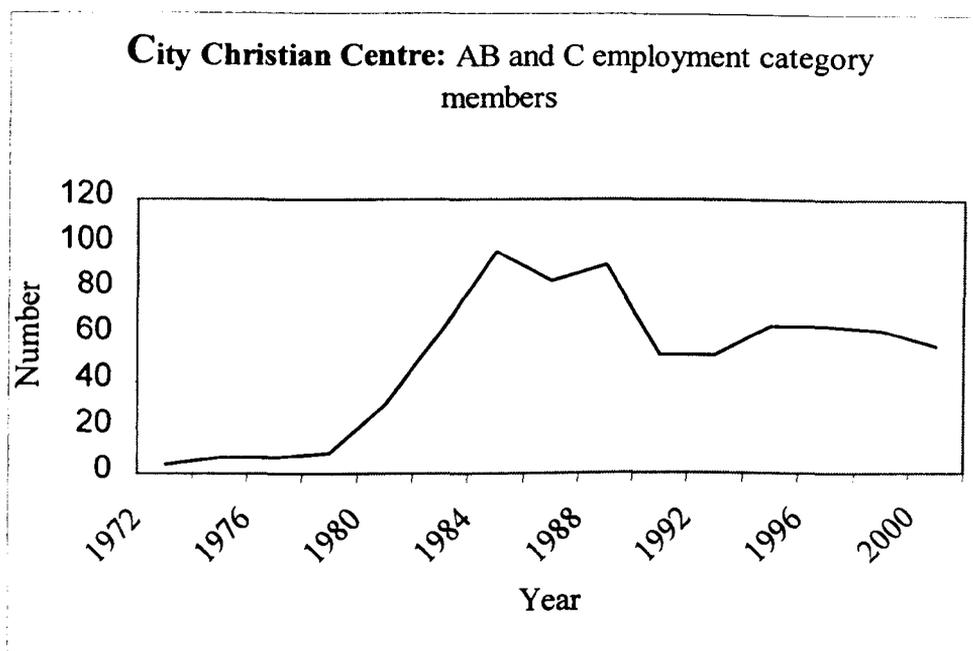


Figure 5

An increasing number of university graduates *were* represented in the membership of the church in the 1980s however; most of them had been introduced to the City Christian Centre while studying at the University of Lincolnshire and Humberside. Characteristics of this growing set typified the position of the middle and upper middle classes. After completing their degrees, many stayed in or around Kingston. Upon finding employment, they typically owned their own homes and cars, took holidays and tried to save.

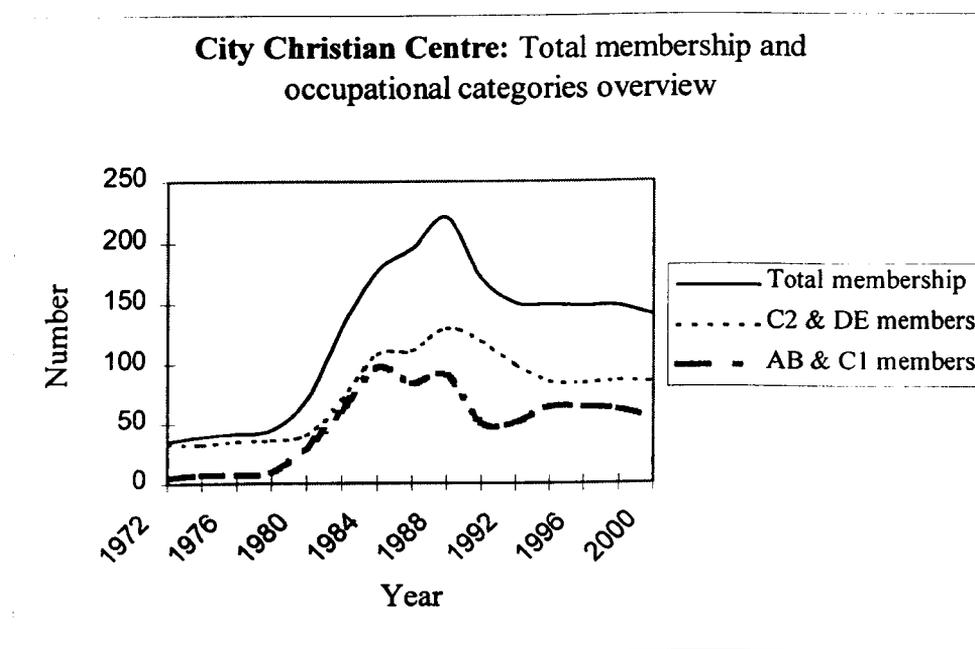


**Figure 6**

In addition to the upwardly mobile contingent from within the fellowship, the 1980s also witnessed an increase of middle-aged professionals moving into the area and looking for a church in which to get involved (see Figure 6, Figure 7 provides an overview of all these figures). Civil servants, teachers, managers and other professionals began to alter the class structure of the church. Although the lower income groups have remained a significant proportion of the congregation throughout, there has been a marked increase in professional, intermediate and skilled non-manual occupations.

Towards the late 1990s, the number of people with higher income jobs in the church is seen to fall away slightly, increasing the overall percentage of those at the lower end of the labour force. This should not be regarded as an indicator of a

major socio-economic shift for the church. It is merely the result of several individuals leaving the area around the same time due to work opportunities and promotions to other parts of the country. Those who occupy the higher income brackets (who, by and large, have invested more time in their formal education) may be disposed to leave any given geographical area due to work commitments or opportunities to advance their careers elsewhere. With the increased opportunities for upward mobility comes an increase in the possibility of relocation (see Hunter,1983:60). A successful career is considered to be a good witness to the outside world, so excellence is pursued and encouraged.



**Figure 7**

While I was undertaking my field work for this study, a much valued family at the church were preparing to relocate to Manchester. This accounts for the noticeable decline in membership, at the church, towards the end of the 1990s.

For those members with a lower terminal age in education, the chances for upward mobility are considerably less and, so too, are the chances of upward mobility and possible relocation.

Understandings of social class, to the members of the City Christian Centre, take on an otherworldly interpretation. In many respects, it is necessary to divorce oneself from traditional and contemporary debates surrounding class structure and stratification in order to appreciate the seemingly apolitical stance of many in the church. That is not to suggest that the majority of members are blind to a wider political and social setting, or that they do not exercise their right to participate in both national and local elections. The worldview of Pentecostal believers, however, is not one that is ordered by secular political systems although they are full recipients of all that the system apportions to each member of society. When the interest rate goes up, so do the mortgage payments for the Youngs and Brenda and Derek Smart. When unemployment is high, the number of members receiving income support rises. The world of the believer is affected by the world of politics and social change. Significantly, however, the believer's *perception* of social position stems, not from social categorisations, but from the identity of a Christian in a fallen world.

Although the Pentecostal recognises the concepts of class, status, life chances and stratification, they would reject the notion that social forces alone determine one's social position and access to a higher (or lower) level on the economic, or

prestige scale. This may have been the case prior to conversion, but according to Schwartz,

...once he is a committed member of the group its religious ideology legitimates his status aspirations or lack of them and validates his perception of his position on a moving status continuum - whether he is going somewhere, standing still, or falling in the prestige system (Schwartz, 1970: 44).

Schwartz later goes on to suggest that people who join religious groups do so, in part, to overcome a basic sense of deprivation. 'People join sects because they seek to redress the lack of deference and esteem they feel is rightfully theirs' (Schwartz, 1970: 41). They do this by adopting a particular religious ideology that explains and legitimates their status, '...resolving [their] status problems...in religious terms' (ibid: 42). While I would disagree with Schwartz's use of the concept of deprivation to explain religious affiliation, his later description of how the Pentecostal perceives his or her position in life highlights the other-worldly attitude of the believer. He writes,

...intimate contact with God elevates the believer above the ordinary run of men and establishes his status on incontrovertible grounds. This religious system which so joyously embraces the sensate world actually flees it. It maintains that a man's accomplishments and failures in the

usual affairs of life have no enduring significance; they are essentially trivial and ephemeral (Schwartz, 1970: 212).

A Christian is 'placed' within a particular social stratum because that is where God wants them to be. A witness to the Gospel is required in every social group and there needs to be a fair distribution of those who can 'spread the Word' represented in each. This train of thought emphasises the necessity to *relate*. A low-income family that is struggling to make ends meet would find it easier to relate to a Christian who is from a similar economic and cultural background than they would a wealthy managing director of a business. Similarly, the business executive could better evangelise the managing director. The emphasis is also placed upon each Christian *knowing* the will of God in their lives and accepting whichever socio-economic lifestyle they may find themselves a part of.

This is not to suggest that complacency is tacitly condoned regarding an ethos of hard work and application to one's career or education. The believers at the City Christian Centre are encouraged to excel in their work and in so doing become a witness to others. There is a sense, however, that hard work alone is not that which decides your level of social mobility or circumstance; that decision is up to the Lord. Ultimately social and economic position is out of the Christian's hands and the realisation of this emasculates many of the harsher tendencies and conflicts commonly associated with class tension. A levelling of social status results.<sup>7</sup> In acknowledging the 'fallen' nature of every human, no one person or

group can aspire to any higher status position than another, unless God grants that it should be so for the purpose of further establishing His Kingdom.

It is from this doctrinal background and the implications of a distinct other worldly view of class, that issues of wealth and prosperity surface. New teaching within many Charismatic, Pentecostal churches is challenging the traditionally held belief of modesty in the possession of material goods and a simple lifestyle relatively uncluttered with 'worldly' concerns for riches and wealth. Within 'prosperity' teaching an individual is able to acquire material wealth and attribute it, not to the hard labours of a secular career, but to the reprioritising of their relationship with God and a significant shift of emphasis regarding the love of money and the 'root of all evil'. The believers at the City Christian Centre find themselves unable to relate to issues of social class in an abstract sociological sense. Increasingly, however, shifts in theological outlook engage, most forcefully, earlier perceptions of how born again believers should live in relation to their income - it is to this we now turn.

### **Wealth and Prosperity**

We have considered, throughout this work, many elements within the theological framework of the Church that have changed over a relatively short period. These changes have combined to alter the expression of the City Christian Centre and make it different from many other Pentecostal churches that share similar characteristics such as location and size of congregation. This new Pentecostal

expression I have called the *hybrid church*. Not surprisingly, teaching on finances has altered over the years too. Much of the present teaching is influenced by American Pentecostal counterparts whose ideas of prosperity have seeped into mainstream Pentecostal and Charismatic teaching. Cox (1995) has observed this growing emphasis on material wealth. He writes,

Money – why you don't have enough and how to get more – has come to play such a role in many Pentecostal churches that recently a whole new theology has grown up around it. It is premised on the belief that God not only wills eternal life for all believers, but robust health and material prosperity as well (Cox, 1995: 271).

Up until the 1980s, questions relating to wealth and prosperity were inconsequential to the members of the church in Kingston. The issue of prosperity had been, in effect, a non-issue, for few in the fellowship had any substantial wealth. A compulsion to acquire wealth did not exist, the prime urgency being that of witnessing and bringing others into the Kingdom. Certainly, there was no 'prosperity' teaching prevalent, at that time, directly aimed at the members of the church, although occasionally stories of the excessive teaching of American televangelists surfaced.

The wealthiest family in the Church in the late 1970s and early 1980s were the Summers – Victoria, Paul and baby Marie. Although it was obvious to all that

Paul and Victoria had money - a large house in one of Kingston's most prestigious surrounding villages, and two cars - it was also obvious that they spread it around, quite selflessly, as needs arose within the Church. No one equated the Summers' wealth and social status with the prosperity teaching that was beginning to emerge and that has since become a major theme within the lives and ministries of many Pentecostal and Charismatic preachers. That is not to suggest that the Summers' social and financial position was not accredited to God, for all who knew them, indeed, they themselves, attributed their secure economic standing to God. The difference between the former and the present understanding of God's providence in the area of wealth lies in a new interpretation of what God desires us to have on this earth.

Teaching on prosperity is a natural corollary of Restoration theology. The question inevitably is asked, 'if I am a Christian living in victory and the Bride is being perfected for the Groom, then why should I struggle financially?' - or indeed experience hardship of any kind. It is a reasonable question if one is set upon a course of restoration and renewal. Within Pentecostal circles today there are many proponents of prosperity teaching. Predominantly, the essential figures have been, and still are, Americans, although some influential church leaders in Britain have embraced many principles of the teaching. In the USA, Kenneth Copeland introduces his listeners and readers to a common assumption shared by most of the prosperity teachers, that it is God's will for us to have wealth (Copeland, 1974). From this premise, other proponents attempt to explain why

Christians often suffer financial hardship in the first place. Marilyn Hickey, in her book *Break the Generation Curse* (Hickey, 1988) suggests that spiritual curses are passed from generation to generation and subsequently block God's blessing from appropriation by the Christian who is under the curse. Through spiritual deliverance, curses can be lifted, claims Hickey, and blessings received.

John F. Avanzini puts forward concrete ways to reap financial blessing from God. He is the author of such books as, *It's Not Working, Brother John* (Avanzini, 1997), *Always Abounding: The Way to Prosper in Good Times, Bad Times, Any Time* (1990), and *Thirty Sixty Hundredfold: Your Financial Harvest* (1989). Avanzini teaches his readers how to ensure a bounteous return on their 'seed' giving. To reap a financial harvest one first has to sow an investment of cash in order to enjoy the returns. The concept of 'seed-faith partners' is becoming more widespread in the United States. A preacher will ask individuals to give financially to their ministry while making bold promises of economic rewards in the future. Leading televangelist Rod Parsley (broadcasting via TBN<sup>8</sup> from Columbus, Ohio) is a big proponent of 'seed faith' giving. His message of prosperity is summed up well in the title of one of his publications, *No More Crumbs: Your Invitation to Sit and Feast at the King's Table* (1997). Other regular (prosperity) advocates on TBN include Jesse Duplantis and Creflo A Dollar Jr., authors of *God is Not Enough, He's Too Much* (Duplantis, 1997) and *Total Life Prosperity: 14 Practical Steps to Receiving God's Full Blessing* (Dollar, 1999).

Prosperity teachings are relatively new in conservative Evangelical circles, but very similar ideas have been in circulation in the 'inspirational literature' of American popular religion since the 1920s according to Schneider and Dornbusch (1958). Their research identified a list of themes associated with the earlier phase of prosperity religion. Those who espoused the virtues of prosperity teaching advocated that,

- Religion promotes success, successful living, life-mastery.
  - It is true [both] that religious faith is asserted to bring happiness and satisfaction in this world. It is further claimed that religion brings emotional security.
  - Religious faith is... likely to bring either wealth or (emotional or physical) health.
  - Although [man]...is involved in interpersonal relations, within the family, on the job, and so on, [he] lives remarkably unaffected by institutional realities, in a world where [his] destiny is ostensibly largely remote from social, political, or economic circumstance.
  - The association with poverty and virtue is nearly absent.
  - [Christians should cultivate] a technology of affirming positive thoughts, denying negative thoughts, denying the negative by affirming the positive.
- A corresponding stress on thought control is quite evident, and rather

frequent emphasis is given to the view of the metaphysical primacy of the mental over the material (Schneider and Dornbusch, 1958: 38-9).

This substratum of American 'positive thinking' and popular religion underlies today's prosperity teachings.

A vast number of Pentecostal and Charismatic believers in America have bought into 'name it and claim it'<sup>9</sup> prosperity teaching since the 1980s, so too have many believers in Britain. Exposure to the American televangelists, touring preachers and teachers, has played a significant role in establishing more than just a level of acceptance towards prosperity teaching (for work on televangelism see Bruce, 1988; Frankl, 1987; Hadden & Shupe, 1988; Hadden & Swann, 1981). Several of the larger Pentecostal churches throughout the British Isles are led by pastors who advocate the principles of 'name it and claim it'. Ken Gott, pastor of the Sunderland Christian Centre, the largest Assembly of God church in the country, is a good friend of Kenneth Copeland and a fervent expounder of prosperity doctrine. So too is Ray Bevan, pastor of one of the largest independent Pentecostal churches in Wales. Walker, Wright and Smail (1994), in their chapter entitled *The Faith Movement and the Question of Heresy*, also place evangelists Don Double and Colin Urqhart within the Word faith camp. Significantly, George Young's son, Steve, attended Colin Urqhart's training centre in the early 1990s.

Roy Dale, a name we are already quite familiar with, presents us with an interesting postscript to his time in Kingston relating to the issue presently under consideration. Upon resigning his position at the City Christian Centre, Roy served, for a short time, on the executive body of the Assemblies of God National Youth Council. It was suspected by many, back in Kingston, that his intention was to eventually leave the NYC to join the National Executive Council of the Assemblies of God. This would be promotion to a position of significant recognition within the movement. The offer to join the Executive was not forthcoming however, and Roy, instead, became the pastor of one of the largest Assembly of God churches in the West Midlands – Amblecote Christian Centre. After a major overhaul of leadership and the exodus of a number of members who could not reconcile themselves to Roy's ministry, Amblecote left the Assemblies of God and became an independent Pentecostal fellowship. A number of rumours subsequently abounded as to the reason for the split, which was, for most in the church, a total surprise. Roy, it was said, had felt let down by the Assemblies of God, having been 'passed over' by the Executive. In all likelihood, this was probably true but a second, more compelling reason had more to do with Amblecote's departure than it did Roy's personal frustration at having been sidestepped. Ian Scott takes up the narrative.

**Ian:** Roy wanted to be on the top ten people in the Assemblies of God, wanted to be on the National General Council. He was on the National Youth Council but I don't know what happened to that, I think it went

bankrupt or something. But he wanted to be on the Executive Council and I don't know what happened but he thought he was going to make it that year. He never made it. I only found out in the last year that he pulled out of the Assemblies of God. So I don't know if he didn't make the achievement that he wanted so he suddenly decided that, it was put to me, that he decided that the Assemblies of God was holding him back. He didn't like to be associated with some of the 'nutters' who are involved. Who aren't 'nutters' they are just very opinionated people really, so he pulled out. It's another one of those coincidences maybe, he couldn't get on to the Committee, he couldn't then change anything really from where he was sat, so about that time he was going to go. It did come to me that he wanted to fellowship with a broader amount of people and the Assemblies of God wouldn't let him do that if he stayed.

*(Ian Scott, a concert 'roadie' in his mid thirties. A former member of the City Christian Centre for sixteen years, currently with no church affiliation)*

Roy had started to feel constrained by the more traditional forces within the movement's leadership. A significant element within the Assemblies of God Executive had not bought into either the newer Toronto/Brownsville notion of 'blessing', restoration and renewal, or prosperity teaching<sup>10</sup> - patterns of experience and doctrine that Roy had long since adopted. Like Pastor Gott in Sunderland, Roy was, and is, an adherent of Kenneth and Gloria Copeland's

ministry –strong advocates of prosperity. Tired of contending with Assembly of God intolerance to Roy's teaching and ministry and rather than rebelling within the movement and possibly losing some credibility amongst his peers, his preferred option was to 'go it alone'. Certainly, Amblecote Christian Centre, with its several hundred members, was in a strong position to leave the Assemblies of God and maintain its high profile status. It could then pursue its own path unfettered by the more traditional elements within the wider movement.

As with our own City Christian Centre, Amblecote is reaching for a level of expression that does not always sit well with the mainstream teaching of the Assemblies of God. Because of the level of autonomy within the movement, there is considerable freedom for churches to adopt a diversity of Christian experiences and doctrines. Many within the Assemblies have integrated prosperity and 'blessing' teaching into their theology, many have not. When we consider the City Christian Centre we observe factions which echo the larger movement; we see individuals who remain part of the same body of believers, yet adhere to different interpretations of doctrine. The City Christian Centre is, in many respects, a microcosm of the Pentecostal experience in Britain.

A small but influential number of Christian speakers and scholars provide a critique of the recent teaching on prosperity and the notion of revival and 'the blessing' generally (See Hanegraaff, 1993, 1997 and MacArthur, 1992).

Sociologist and popular preacher Anthony Campolo, in his book *20 Hot Potatoes*

*Christians are Afraid to Touch* (Campolo, 1988), asks the question “can rich people get into heaven (or, can a Christian own a BMW)?” (Campolo, 1988:93. See also Campolo, 1997 chapter 2). A significant book of the late 1970s and early 1980s was Ronald J. Sider’s *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (Sider, 1977). This book remains an important addition to the bookshelves of those Christians who feel a commitment to the spreading of a *social*, as well as a *spiritual*, Gospel. Sider comes down heavily against the accumulation of worldly possessions. He writes,

Most Christians in the Northern Hemisphere simply do not believe Jesus’s teaching about the deadly danger of possessions. We all know that Jesus warned that possessions are highly dangerous – so dangerous, in fact, that it is extremely difficult for a rich person to be a Christian at all. ‘It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God’ (Luke 18:25). But we do not believe Jesus (Sider, 1990:111).

The teaching on prosperity put forward in *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* informed the theological outlook (concerning the issue of wealth) of most believers at the City Christian Centre up until the early 1980s. When Roy introduced alternate understandings, not everyone was convinced and today a spectrum of opinion exists.

The following passages are taken from interviews with active members of the City Christian Centre. The first section shows the extent to which prosperity teaching has permeated the Church. There is a specific belief expressed that God desires His people to have wealth.

I do believe that God wants us to prosper. I don't have any problem with Christians being rich. It's the attitude of the heart; it's the love of money not money...

But I am also aware that you can't turn round to God and say "you have to make me rich" as Paul said. In other words it's contentment is the key issue not what you've got and what you haven't got. And so, put in its right balance I have no problem with it. I haven't come across the intense abuses that you might find in the States over here. I've heard snippets of it but I'm not a crusader in the sense of "let's find out what so and so is saying and try to see if I agree with him or not". I believe in prosperity, I believe in Christians being rich, I have no problem with that...

But I think in England we have tailored the poverty side of the Gospel, because there is a side you know, "give it all to the Gospel". We've tailored it to fit our false sense of humility that English people tend to have.

*(Steve Young, worship musician and assistant leader of the City Christian Centre in his mid twenties. With the City Christian Centre for twelve years)*

Although not fully attuned to the rhetoric of some of the American prosperity teachers, the words of Steve Young indicate a significant drift towards the principles of, what MacArthur calls, the Word Faith movement which is in his words, 'a subdivision of the charismatic movement' (MacArthur, 1992:323).<sup>11</sup> Given the strong influence of Restoration theology, it is difficult to imagine that the City Christian Centre will not adopt more of the teaching espoused by those within this particular movement. During my time observing the fellowship, a number of situations in the church arose that related to 'Name It and Claim It' theology.

In the early part of 1998, Steve Young declared in one of his sermons that his status and, indeed the status of every true born again believer, was that of 'a god'. This notion draws directly from an interpretation of the words of the Apostle Peter when he states in his second epistle that those in Christ are 'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Peter 1:4).<sup>12</sup> This 'divinity', according to the teaching of Kenneth Copeland guarantees to every believer, 'healing... deliverance... financial prosperity, mental prosperity, physical prosperity, [and] family prosperity' (Copeland, 1987 cited in MacArthur, 1992:332).<sup>13</sup> Clearly Steve,

who over the years has visited various 'strongholds' of Faith Word teaching, has been significantly influenced by that particular train of thought.

His claim did not go unchallenged; significantly, however, the objection did not come from a 'member' of the fellowship, but from an occasional visitor who enjoyed the style of praise and worship offered at the City Christian Centre. This woman was, in fact, a full member of an evangelical Church of England congregation in a small village outside of Kingston (the same one, incidentally, that the Summers had made their home church after leaving the City Christian Centre). Saint Barnabas was, and is still, thriving and its full time vicar, Richard Hill is well liked and respected throughout the area. It was to Reverend Hill that news of Steve's sermon (and deification!) was relayed. Upon being told, Hill contacted the body of the Evangelical Alliance and expressed his concerns over the questionable teaching of Steve Young and the City Christian Centre generally.

The Evangelical Alliance (established in 1980) operates as a unifying body amongst the evangelical churches in Britain. Its primary goal is to act as a political lobby group – effectively being the 'voice' of the evangelical community. The Federation of Independent Evangelical Churches is a similar organisation and was established in 1922. Compared to the Evangelical Alliance however, the FIEC is much smaller and far less influential with only 450 member churches. The EA boast over 3000. If a voice in politics is, in the Mertonian

sense (Merton, 1957), the Evangelical Alliance's manifest function, its latent function is that of legitimating the theological content of those churches who are its members. Affiliation to the EA carries with it a presumed doctrinal standard that is free from serious error. To lose one's affiliation with the EA would suggest, to the wider evangelical community, some breach in bona fide teaching and would, as far as it was made known, bring the 'offending' church into disrepute. The City Christian Centre came desperately close to being asked to leave the EA in 1998 as a result of Reverend Hill's telephone call. It is not known just what was said between the EA and the City Christian Centre regarding Steve's controversial sermon. The church in Kingston remains, to date, in fellowship with the EA and this suggests that Pastor Young was able to smooth things over and possibly make certain assurances for future messages.

This episode highlights the degree to which the Word Faith movement has influenced the teaching of the City Christian Centre. Their membership with the EA remains intact, but there is a growing sense that boundaries are being pushed; it may only be a matter of time before the affiliation is terminated. No significant change in sermon content ensued after these events took place. Although the challenge to Steve's teaching came from a non-member, not everyone in the fellowship accepts his teachings. A significant number are, in many ways, quite opposed to the current 'regime' and yet for various reasons choose to remain within the fellowship. In relation to the concerns of this chapter – the Christian and socio-economic status, wealth and prosperity and issues relating to the

believer and finances/income – the following account from a senior couple from the church suggests a totally different interpretation of God's provision. While Eric and Edna Roberts do not deny that God desires to 'give', their understanding differs significantly from the 'name it and claim it' approach.

Here they talk of a 'vision' God had given them some time ago. Eric and Edna believe that they should buy a specific building to be used as a Christian counseling centre.

**Edna:** Well the Lord has promised us a house. We know where it is, He told us about this house in a vision. And we would be used in this house for people - not long term, but for people who needed somewhere for a short time, or visitors, we took it would be missionaries...and then He said "this house belongs to a doctor" and there are certain features about this house. Some one rung up at one time and he said to me "are you moving from where you live?" And I said well not that I know of, not yet. And then he said to me, "I've got this vision of you and your windows was boarded up but you were moving to somewhere else, I have got this vision of this house." So I said "oh yes go on then." And the strange thing was, the next day a chap came from the housing office and said "I've come to board your windows up" and I said "you haven't!" It was a funny thing wasn't it?

*(Edna Roberts, a pensioner in her late sixties. Member of the City Christian  
Centre for twenty-two years)*

**Eric:** Like a witness.

*(Eric Roberts, retired bus driver in his early seventies. Member of the  
City Christian Centre for twenty-two years)*

The Roberts's revealed to me the location of the house they feel will, one day, be theirs. Presently a Member of Parliament owns it. Their vision is known by few in the fellowship and I am sure that the only reason they shared it with me was due to my relationship with them in the past. My 'former member' status had allowed me, not only to be generally accepted by the wider congregation, but it also opened up the possibility for me to study the 'wheels within wheels' of the fellowship. A position that is both full of potential *and* precarious at the same time. Amongst the others who knew of Eric and Edna's vision were Pastor and Mrs Hedges.

**Edna:** John Hedges he really shook it out of us.

**Eric:** He did, he got to know about it and we had to take them both outside this house, John and Jean Hedges, and we all prayed outside. Jean Hedges she came here didn't she and how much did she have? Was it three pound?

**Edna:** She had three-pound and some pence.

**Eric:** She came, the Lord said she had to come here and we had to put it in a building society towards this house.

**Edna:** Three pounds and some pence!

**Eric:** So, that's what we did. We put it in Halifax Building Society. We added a bit more to it.

**Edna:** We put just over one hundred pound in.

**Eric:** But we haven't bothered with it we have just left it. But recently, they've come to be a bank and we've got now fifteen hundred pound in it. What do you think to that? It's gone up from three pound and some pence to over fifteen hundred! We aren't touching it, we will just leave it.

Here we see an alternative, more traditional, interpretation of God's provision. Eric and Edna are quite content to wait patiently for a further increase in capital to fund their vision of a counseling centre. Such fortitude is rarely displayed in the newer expression of Restoration theology. Here, the understanding centres on the 'right' of every believer to claim whatsoever he or she deems to be God's will

for their lives. Eric and Edna have a clear perspective of what God would have them do, but wait for God to bring the vision into fruition, and on His terms. This does not suggest inactivity on the part of Eric and Edna for they strive to be open to God's voice and are willing to 'obey' any commands that are issued.

From the example above, we see how different perspectives are evident within the fellowship. To Eric and Edna, the emphasis placed upon financial prosperity and, certainly, the belief that it is every Christian's right to be wealthy, seems almost arrogant. To those who are strongly influenced by 'name it and claim it' teaching, resistance to its precepts is believed to be a denial of the inheritance of true believers; consequently, this denial limits the power of God in individuals' lives.

Present within the City Christian Centre is a 'middle' group consisting of members who do not adhere strongly to either set of views. My data suggests however, that this neutral group are a minority and that their understanding of the relevant issues is limited. Many who fall into this category were newer members and came from backgrounds in which such interpretations had not been present or, at least, present but to a lesser degree. To contrast this experience of newer members, many people would join the City Christian Centre fully aware of the fellowship's dominant theology and its Word Faith emphasis. They would do so with the full intent of joining a church that better suited their own doctrinal disposition.

Increasingly those who are theologically opposed to the Word Faith influence become marginalised. By far the biggest faction within the church is pro Word Faith and the rhetoric of the doctrine has become a potent force for both the 'out-group' (those who do not adhere to it) *and* the neutral group that occupies the middle ground. For the 'out-group' a consistent pressure to conform is exerted by the holders of the more dominant view. The 'in-group' (those who have adapted elements of the Word Faith movement) are most prolific in the preaching and teaching of their beliefs and this has had a pervasive effect on the middle ground. The 'out-group' exert very little public influence generally and so the theological drift is increasingly towards that of the larger faction.

The Word Faith view encompasses much more than teaching on finances and wealth. 'Name it and claim it' touches all areas of a believer's experience and 'walk'. Its chief objective is for the empowering of every believer with a 'divine authority' in order to 'claim victory in Jesus' name'. This 'victorious' life includes the breaking of spiritual forces that are thought to be a hindrance in the life of the believer. In considering issues of social class, the diverse views on financial income and the pervasive emphasis on prosperity in all things, we see a group of people aloof from sociological and political interpretations of stratification. Upon conversion, no individual is born into the Kingdom of God inherently richer than the next. Status is achieved, not through the accumulation of capital but through the depth of the relationship one has with the Lord.

Material wealth, however, is *increasingly* being regarded as a reflection of the spirituality such a relationship confers.

Steve Bruce (1990) has argued that economic deprivation (as a particular form of relative deprivation) has been a major cause in the turn to prosperity teaching in many conservative evangelical churches. He states that, 'All members of our societies are encouraged to want and expect the same "good things" out of life' (Bruce, 1990: 159). Not everyone in society however will be able to appropriate legitimately those 'good things'. 'Some people have a strong head start and others are patently handicapped' (ibid.) Subsequently there is a feeling of relative deprivation amongst those who are unable to secure the standard of living they desire. In relation to the attraction of prosperity teaching, Bruce assumes that it is the working class and the lower middle class who will be more drawn to it, seeking economic parity with higher social classes. He posits two possible responses to combat relative deprivation. Firstly, people can simply work harder, get a second job or find some other way of boosting their income, Bruce calls this an 'instrumental response' (ibid). A second response for the conservative evangelical believer is to look to supernatural solutions and to

...fall back instead on the magical promises of prosperity theology and 'name it and claim it'. The success in fund-raising of those television

evangelists who make such promises demonstrates the demand, the need, which exists for miraculous solutions to socio-economic problems (ibid).

While Bruce's explanation of the appeal of prosperity religion can be used to understand a particular period in the City Christian Centre's history in which notions of relative deprivation can be applied, the theory does not fully account for the present context in which health and wealth are stressed. During the 1980s when growth in membership was the most rapid, the obvious disparity between a former, predominantly working class congregation and the many newcomers who were from the middle class was also most apparent. The subsequent interaction provided ample opportunity for comparisons of lifestyle and possessions. In addition to this, Pastor Dale displayed quite an entrepreneurial zeal, and his example (and counsel) was instrumental in producing similar leanings in others. For some in the fellowship this actually proved to be quite harmful in that various business endeavours and investments failed.

The emergence of prosperity religion at the City Christian Centre became much more apparent at a time when increasing numbers of middle class families and individuals started to attend. It is interesting to note that prosperity teaching had not played a part in the theology of the Fig Tree Gospel Hall until then. How can we account for this? In his work on the evangelical revival in Africa, Paul Gifford (1990) offers an explanation for the appeal of prosperity religion amongst white (affluent) Christians in South Africa and Zimbabwe. He writes,

Any form of Christianity that insists that their disproportionate wealth is nothing to be guilty about, but on the contrary is the sign of a true Christian, provides considerable comfort (Gifford, 1990: 382).

This justification for lifestyle and material possessions can be (to a thriving middle class sector of a congregation) a convenient theology to apply to their status. To equate the 'good life' with the blessing of God is a powerful deterrent against those who may voice dissent and suggest that a more modest lifestyle is God's ideal. This ties in to Schneider and Dornbusch's list and their point that, 'The association with poverty and virtue is nearly absent' (Schneider and Dornbusch, 1958: 39).

While Gifford's explanation can be applied to the experience of some of the believers at the City Christian Centre, there is a more subtle origin for the appeal of prosperity religion. Again we can make reference to Schneider and Dornbusch's list and the belief that

It is true both that religious faith is asserted to bring happiness and satisfaction in this world....Religion promotes success, successful living, life-mastery (Schneider and Dornbusch, 1958: 38).

In many respects the notions of prosperity, health, happiness and assertion (both on an individual level and as a church body) are integral to Charismatic/Restorationist belief. As Christ's Church and representatives on this earth, the believer is spiritually empowered to 'claim the land' and to establish God's Kingdom on earth. It is in the power of each individual to exercise his or her spiritual authority and to live no longer in defeat but in victory. 'Defeat' and 'victory' in many cases, applies to a number of issues relating to the personal well being of the believer. In areas of health for instance, 'defeat' would mean to live in poor health or with some physical affliction, and 'victory' would entail being supernaturally healed. In the area of finances, 'defeat' could mean to be in debt, and 'victory' would equate to the blessing of God bringing wealth. Increasingly, such theological interpretations are unable to explain adequately the presence of debt or poor health in the life of the believer. If God's blessing means good health and wealth, then the implication is that, for those members who do not have good health or wealth, they are not experiencing the 'blessing'. Such an understanding can be a motivating factor for congregational appeal to prosperity teaching, but significantly, it is the desire to be in the perceived 'blessing of God' rather than materialism that is its origin.

It may seem ironic that prosperity teachings began to flourish in the City Christian Centre roughly at the same as the proportion of middle class participants also began to increase. But there is no irony. It is a case of what

Max Weber would have called an 'elective affinity' between a social status position and a worldview. They are congruent with each other.

#### ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> The countries studied by the EVSSG included: Great Britain, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, West Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Italy, Spain and Portugal. The 'institutions' specifically mentioned in the study were: the Church, the army, education, law, the press, trade unions, the police force, parliament, the civil service, major companies, the social security system, the E.C. and N.A.T.O. (See Ashford and Timms, 1992, chapter 2).

<sup>2</sup> For material on the Jesus Movement see Blessitt & Wagner, 1971, Di Sabatino, 1999. For information on 'witnessing' strategies see Blessitt, 1972.

<sup>3</sup> The Salvation Army sprang from an earlier organisation founded by William and Catherine Booth – the Christian Mission in Whitechapel established in 1865.

<sup>4</sup> Larry Norman, to most who still remember him, is regarded as one of the 'originals' of the Jesus People Movement. His recording career began in the mid 1960s with the album *We Need a Whole Lot More of Jesus (And a Lot Less Rock*

*and Roll*). His main genre has been that of rock music although most of his concerts today are simply performed with acoustic guitar and piano. He does not fit easily into any set mould; although his music would appeal to a secular audience as well as a Christian one, his uncompromising Gospel message isolates him from many non-Christians. Similarly his call for greater spiritual and social conscience in believers has isolated him somewhat, in recent years, from the Christian music scene. His most famous songs (which have been covered by various artists over the years, including Cliff Richard) are *I Wish We'd All Been Ready* (a song about the rapture of the church) and *Why Should The Devil Have All the Good Music?* (a critique of the traditional hymns associated with 'church'). Randy Stonehill was a contemporary of Larry Norman and it is widely reported that Stonehill became a Christian through the personal witness of Norman. They have performed and made albums together. As with Larry Norman, Randy Stonehill is also now on the periphery of the Christian music scene, having moved out of its centre along with Larry Norman. The increasing alienation and changing status of these two Christian musicians reflect the changing audience as opposed to a changing message. Stonehill's and Norman's work and Christian convictions have remained very consistent throughout time. Mainstream evangelicalism, however, has undergone, and is in the process of, many changes – a constant theme of this thesis.

<sup>5</sup> This still holds when compared to churches that fall into the category of liberalist mainstream denominations. See Chapter 3 for my suggestion that a

process of hybridisation is, to some extent, eroding notions of strict discipleship that have been a characteristic of conservative churches.

<sup>6</sup> Glass (1954) and Goldthorpe (1980) provide similar tables to delineate social class occupations. Their models incorporate seven categories and subsequently provide slightly more detail particularly within the mid and lower range groups. While greater insight regarding *types* of occupation is gained in Glass and Goldthorpe's work, Abrams' model provides greater overall clarity for the current discussion.

<sup>7</sup> There are many Scriptures that reinforce the ineptitude of humanity and the folly of thinking that one's destiny is self made: Romans 3: 23 reads, '...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (New International Version). Isaiah 64: 6 is another well used verse in the life of the Pentecostal, 'All of us are like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags...' (New International Version).

<sup>8</sup> Trinity Broadcast Network is the largest Christian television network in America; it is also broadcast via satellite to many parts of the world including Europe, Russia, Africa and South America. Paul and Jan Crouch who still host large segments of the show established TBN in 1973. The programme consists of both national and regional items, predominantly praise and teaching/preaching

meetings filmed in churches, plus interview 'chat' style programmes. Pat Robertson and the 700 Club provide news coverage each afternoon.

<sup>9</sup> The term 'name it and claim it' was introduced by Frederick Price, a pastor and teacher in Los Angeles, California (see Price, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> This information was made known to me during an interview with David Petts, the Principal of the Assemblies of God Bible College at Mattersey Hall and Chairman of the National Executive Committee

<sup>11</sup> John F. MacArthur, in his book *Charismatic Chaos*, states that the Word Faith Movement is also known as the following: Word - Faith Formula, Word of Faith, Hyper-Faith, Positive Confession, Name It and Claim It, and Health, Wealth and Prosperity teaching (MacArthur, 1992:323). Howard and Streck (1999) suggest that advocates of Word Faith teaching are '...united in their almost universal adherence to prosperity doctrine – a "health and wealth" theology rooted in a strain of pietistic Calvinism that suggests worldly success to be a sign of God's favour' (Howard & Streck, 1999: 213).

<sup>12</sup> In the *New American Standard Bible* 2 Peter 1:3,4 reads, 'seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent

promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust’.

<sup>13</sup> MacArthur outlines the ‘little gods’ teaching thoroughly in his book *Charismatic Chaos* chapter 12 (1992). He also supplies a conservative evangelical rebuttal to the beliefs and teaching of Word Faith proponents who also include Charles Capps (1986), Earl Paulk (1985), and Robert Tilton (1983).

## 8

**Conclusion**

My aim here is to summarise the five main contributions that my thesis makes to sociological debates about religion and to give an extended consideration of the key concept of the *hybrid church*. Discussion will focus on my attempts to challenge some of the sociological categories that have all too neatly summed up religious and spiritual experience in the lives of conservative evangelical Christians – *secularisation theory* and *rational choice theory*. Also, I have sought to highlight the significance of conversion and to show how, within the theological understanding of what it is to be born again, believers find their identity and develop a particular view of the world and their place within it. This view often clashes with that of sociologists of religion who, I have suggested, have a tendency to impose their own meaning on concepts and states of being experienced by the believer. I have demonstrated this with reference to Bibby and Brinkerhoff's *Circulation of the Saints* study.

Given the distinctive character of Pentecostal Christians, it is easy to view them as homogeneous and indeed, this is largely so in many important areas - salvation being the common denominator. Yet, closer investigation has revealed a much more dynamic picture of Pentecostal life. Seeking to move away from issues concerning the positionality of religious groups, I have attempted to give an

account of the internal processes of an Assembly of God church. These processes or stages have witnessed the church displaying a variety of expressions and exhibiting a number of characteristics: traditional, vibrant, inclusive, exclusive, dynamic, static. To characterise the City Christian Centre, I have used the term *hybrid church*. I am cognisant of some of the dangers of evoking such metaphors in attempting to explain/describe certain forms of social interaction. Later in this conclusion I shall give my reasons for doing so. Before discussing further the notion of hybridity and issues relating to the complexity of change, I begin my summation with the work of Bibby and Brinkerhoff. Some last thoughts regarding rational choice theory and secularisation I shall leave to the end.

### **Circulation of the Saints**

The first main contribution of my research has been to show that some sociological interpretations of what it is to be a proselyte, church switcher or a child of church members, though valuable, does not do justice to the changing nature of contemporary Pentecostalism. In particular, Bibby and Brinkerhoff's categorisation of church members fails to define adequately the labels attached to each group. While the categories of 're-affiliate', 'retained' and 'proselyte' approximate to church membership types on a general level, significant details pertaining to each group are omitted. The subsequent claims which were made as a result of the 'Circulation of the Saints' project need to be reassessed in the light of a more qualitative approach. The broad categories introduced by Bibby and Brinkerhoff, I have argued, lack clear definition. My research has revealed

aspects of conservative Evangelical and Charismatic groups that are obscured by these labels.

Firstly, Bibby and Brinkerhoff, largely in response to Kelley's book *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*, set out to chart the membership rates of a number of conservative evangelical churches over a five-year period. They did this by interviewing the pastor/minister of their selected churches. From their data they concluded that three distinct groups could be identified. The re-affiliate was any new member who had switched from another church or who had not attended any church for a period of time. The re-affiliate accounted for 72% of all new members. The retained were the offspring of existing church members and accounted for approximately 18% of new members. The third category, that of proselyte, accounted for approximately 10% of all new members.

Still with Kelley's work in mind, Bibby and Brinkerhoff were quick to discount as true converts all but the 10% who were proselytes. These were considered to be 'true' because they were people who had had no prior church experience or contact. The re-affiliates and the retained, on the other hand, were not considered true converts because of their connection, either through familial bonds or past experiences, with the evangelical Christian community.

Bibby and Brinkerhoff make a distinction between 'outsiders' and those whom they regard as coming from or being part of a religious community. The latter, on

the strength of their prior affiliation, are thereby disqualified from being labelled 'convert'. Thus, Bibby and Brinkerhoff found little basis for the notion that the number of new recruits to conservative evangelical churches was actually increasing. What was taken by some to be church growth was, according to Bibby and Brinkerhoff, just the result of church switching and the ability to retain a percentage of established members' offspring.

I argued in chapter 3, however, that the Circulation of the Saints study failed to develop sufficiently refined categories of church members. When the perceptions of the members themselves are taken into account, a very different picture emerges. In the case of the re-affiliate, past church membership does not necessarily guarantee that the new member has been 'saved' or that he or she shares a common thread of doctrine. It could also be possible that the motivation for the 'switch' of churches was a salvation (or spiritual) experience that had either not been tolerated at the believer's former church, or had occurred at some extra church event. In these circumstances, the newly saved person had then switched to a church perceived to be possibly more accommodating. Bibby and Brinkerhoff also group in this category those who return to their faith after a period of inactivity. Many conservative evangelical churches (including the City Christian Centre) would regard someone who had been inactive in their faith as a 'backslider' and in need of making a re-commitment to God. Whereas a re-commitment is not regarded with the same significance as an initial salvation experience or conversion, it is, nevertheless, an important act of religious

rededication. The status of the restored re-affiliate is altered from that of a 'lost sheep' to that of a found one, and this has significant implications regarding the level of participation in which he or she can reasonably expect to engage. It also affects the possibility that an individual could be called upon to fulfil some area of service or ministry in the church.

As with the category of the re-affiliate, Bibby and Brinkerhoff suggest that the retained or offspring of church members should not be regarded as true converts. They say that it is 'misleading to consider them proselytes when they are really the offspring of evangelicals' (Bibby and Brinkerhoff, 1973: 275). Again, I have suggested that this disqualification highlights the need for a more discriminating, qualitative approach in the formulation of such categories. Certainly the hopes (and prayers) of evangelical Christian parents express the desire for their children to 'follow in the way of the Lord', but it is not the case that salvation is a foregone conclusion; nor is it that offspring are automatically 'saved' simply because their parents are. It is believed that to be a 'born-again' believer, everyone must undergo a conversion, a re-birth, regardless of parentage. The salvation process is the same for the offspring of church members as it is for those who have never been exposed to any kind of religion.

In reviewing Bibby and Brinkerhoff's work, Steve Bruce suggests that the growth of more conservative evangelical churches, compared with the decline in liberal Protestant churches, 'owes little to the recruitment of people who were previously

atheists or even liberal Christians. The real difference lies in the retention of children' (Bruce, 1996: 88) Referring explicitly to Bibby and Brinkerhoff's membership categories he writes,

...the explanation for the differing fate of the denominational and sectarian versions of Protestantism has more to do with the ability to retain children rather than attractiveness to outsiders (ibid).

Here Bruce makes the same distinction as Bibby and Brinkerhoff in assigning the 'outsider' and 'insider' status, making, as they do, the same assumption about their perceived spiritual status. Although he does refer to offspring as 'converts' (ibid), he clearly makes no attempt at suggesting that retained members should be considered as 'true' converts in the sense that a 'true' conversion could only be experienced by an 'outsider'. I have argued that, from the groups' own perspective, no distinction is made between the salvation of offspring and that of outsiders or proselytes. Nor should we conclude that all re-affiliates, prior to their attendance at a particular church after 'switching', understand their religiosity (or spiritual catharsis) in the same manner as the host church. In exploring the definitions of the re-affiliate, retained and proselyte, we can see that careful research on church growth should not simply be a case of counting heads.

Although attempting to put forward a new perspective on the status and experience of the proselyte, retained and re-affiliate, my concern has not been to

engage in the debate regarding whether or not conservative Christians are increasing numerically. Rather, I have focussed on the progressive nature of Pentecostalism in the United Kingdom. ‘Circulating saints’ in particular have been instrumental in creating a synthesis of spiritual expression and theological innovation between classical Pentecostals and the wider Charismatic community - spawning the *hybrid church*. The significance of the ‘switcher’ lies not in what he or she tells us about church demographics but in the changes that ensue as a result of the interaction.

### **The notion of hybridity**

Charismatic beliefs have spread through sections of the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches, as well as a number of other mainline denominations. In the lives of many individuals and in the collective experience of some congregations, the ‘renewal’ movement has been most influential, but the emergent expression of belief and lifestyle differs significantly from that of the hybrid church. Just as the pervasive nature of the Charismatic movement within Pentecostal fellowships does not make Pentecostals Charismatic, so charismata within mainline churches do not make Charismatics Pentecostal. What is distinctive about the hybrid expression is the fusion of tradition and sub culture. Without the Pentecostal’s various lifestyle demands and strict adherence to the inerrant ‘word of God’, the Charismatic arm would incline towards the experiential unrestrained. Similarly, without the Charismatic’s propensity to the experiential (often at the risk of bypassing Scripture), the Pentecostal stock within the hybrid church would be

steeped in Pentecostal, (and in the case of the City Christian Centre) Assemblies of God tradition. The fusion of Charismatic and Pentecostal elements produces a qualitatively different outcome.

According to Margaret Poloma (1990), however, this is not always the case. She argues that the influence of the Charismatic Movement on Assembly of God churches in the United States has had a dampening effect on some of the more extreme expressions of 'spirit-filled' worship. By contrast, in the City Christian Centre, the fusion of the Charismatic Movement with traditional Pentecostalism has revolutionized the form of praise and worship and generated intense periods of emotion. According to Poloma, Charismatic involvement In North American churches has done just the opposite.

As increasingly more members of the American Assemblies of God churches have moved out of the lower-income bracket and have been joined by middle-class charismatic defectors from mainline churches, their worship has become more contained. Attractively designed church buildings now dot suburban landscapes, replacing the storefronts and worn-out buildings that housed earlier [Assembly of God] congregations. These architecturally appealing houses of worship, as well as the more formal and subdued worship taking place within their walls, however, may indicate that with its prosperity the [Assemblies of God] has lost

some of its distinctiveness as a Pentecostal denomination (Poloma, 1990: 932).

I have suggested that the City Christian Centre underwent a significant transformation and could now be regarded as a hybrid church. The use of the term 'hybrid' is, in many respects problematic. The analogy suggests complex social dynamics - the evolutionary processes of an evangelical church - by invoking a term that is most often associated with botany, genetics or the science of biology. There is plenty of room for overstating my case, and I concede that such analogies have at best limited descriptive power. The tendency is to read too much into them and to mould the data to fit the analogy, thereby distorting results and conclusions. Given this reservation, however, the use of this particular analogy can be justified.

I want to be careful not to take my analogy too far, for a particular danger inherent in doing so is to make the inference '...that if things agree in some respects they probably agree in others'. Taking a rather modest definition of 'analogy', that there is 'similarity in some respects between things that are otherwise dissimilar', the term 'hybrid' is applicable to some aspects of the changes that took place in the City Christian Centre. Again though, I am careful not to take too narrow a definition of the notion of 'hybridity'.

Here I draw from a number of elementary definitions of the term 'hybrid'. In the science of genetics, a *hybrid* is, 'the offspring of genetically dissimilar parents or stock, especially the offspring produced by breeding plants or animals of different varieties, species, or races'. Or more simply, 'something of mixed origin or composition'<sup>1</sup>. Another similar definition is that of, 'the offspring of the union of two distinct species; an animal or plant produced from the mixture of two species'<sup>2</sup>. Clearly there is some question over how 'distinct' the 'species' of the classical Pentecostal movement is from the Charismatic movement, but my research suggests that on a number of key points, quite foundational differences can be observed between the two groups. These include possible differences in cultural background, modes of worship and ecclesiastical organisation. Such differences have prompted Bebbington to write, 'For all its legacy from Pentecostalism, the Charismatic movement had different cultural affinities' (Bebbington, 1989: 232).

The main area of distinction, however, is the potential for Charismatic believers associated with mainline denominations to have strong ties to a liberal tradition and not to be as 'grounded in the Word' as many Pentecostals would like or require from their own church members. The possibility of compromise over Scripture really gets to the heart of the distinction, for it is from the premise of sound doctrine that classical Pentecostals have traditionally filtered their religious experience. Charismatics, on the other hand, have a propensity to filter their doctrine through their experience. This tendency has challenged many of the

fundamental classical Pentecostal understandings on the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the charismatic gifts. The following illustration highlights the distinctive tendency of each tradition and how they are expressed in the City Christian Centre.

Pastor Young recounted an incident that took place during a particularly intense and exuberant praise and worship session in a Sunday morning Celebration service. An altar call had been given for people to receive the 'laying on of hands'. Those with a desire to experience the 'blessing' or to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit came forward and Pastor Young and some others (members of the ministry team) began to pray for them. A young man, whom Young did not know, upon being prayed for, began to speak in tongues; this he continued to do for some time. Towards the end of the meeting Pastor Young introduced himself to the young man and asked him if he was 'saved'. The man informed him that he was not and so, with some apparent embarrassment, Pastor Young said, "well, we'd better get you saved quick then". He then led the man in the sinner's prayer asking Jesus into his life and committing himself to God.

What is significant in this story is the clash of traditions that Pastor Young grapples with and the altered cultural climate in which such an incident could take place. A number of elements need to be identified in order to highlight the significance of this event. Firstly, traditional Pentecostalism would regard the baptism of the Holy Spirit as something that is reserved only for the born-again

believer. Conversion, therefore, is what might be called a prerequisite to such spiritual manifestations as speaking in tongues. The young man in Pastor Young's account, however, experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit before his conversion experience. This order of events would be (for the classical Pentecostal of the Assemblies of God tradition) out of sequence and therefore doctrinally unacceptable.

Secondly, we have the response of Pastor Young's, suggesting something of his own internal theological conflict. There is a meeting (or rather clash) between a prevailing property of each tradition - charismatic and Pentecostal - that is the emphasis of the experiential and the traditional Pentecostal emphasis on doctrine and adherence to the 'Word of God'. In the hybrid church both are accommodated up to a point but not in their traditional form. The order of conversion and baptism in the Spirit was formerly understood to be very significant, whereas now a greater tolerance and flexibility is shown towards such 'moves' of God. This tolerance allows for a less doctrinally based religious belief and an inclination to the experiential. Yet doctrine must still be adhered to, and this explains the tension displayed in Pastor Young's account and the eventual salvation experience of the young man in question.

A third factor tells us something about the malleable social context in which such an occurrence could take place. It implies that the leaders of the church (plus some key individuals) are not the sole initiators of the transformation of the City

Christian Centre from its classical Pentecostalism to its hybrid expression which fuses both Pentecostal and Charismatic/Restorationist properties. The spiritual, theological mindset of the fellowship was such that the social milieu, expressed through its agents, established the social context in which a level of doctrinal ambiguity could exist and in which a more (relatively) casual approach to doctrine could be exercised. The doctrine is not discarded, however, and the tension between the competing forces was highlighted most graphically during the tongues/conversion scenario described above.

In this instance we see an example of a religious phenomenon mediated through different – fused – traditions. Another dictionary definition of the word ‘hybrid’ is that which is ‘produced by crossbreeding (synonyms: crossed, interbred, intercrossed’<sup>3</sup>. This understanding of the term gets very close to the word ‘mongrel’ – ‘an animal or a plant resulting from various interbreedings, especially a dog of mixed or undetermined breed’, or more appropriately, ‘a cross between different breeds, groups, or varieties, especially a mixture that is or appears to be incongruous’<sup>4</sup>. Although in many respects this last definition fits as well as any I have used, I prefer the use of the term ‘hybrid church’ rather than ‘mongrel church’.

My assertion is that the Charismatic influence on The City Christian Centre is not reducible to the efforts and persuasion of Pastor Young or others who take on (or

have taken on) a ministry role within the church. Clearly, however, distinctive leadership traits play a part in the direction of the fellowship but they alone cannot account for the considerable changes that have occurred at the City Christian Centre. I have suggested that the proliferation in Christian resources has aided, in some respects but not in all, a general homogenisation of evangelical Christian expression (see chapter 3). At the City Christian Centre, over the course of the last thirty years, the number of outings to Assembly of God inter-church meetings has declined drastically. In chapter 4 mention was made of the 'Life Liner' coach; its primary function being the collection of church members for the Fig Tree Gospel Hall's key weekly services. Its secondary use was for the transportation of the fellowship to various inter-church meetings and events. These special services were usually organised to celebrate neighbouring Assembly of God church anniversaries or the induction of a new pastor. During my field research at the City Christian Centre (which took approximately one year) no such trips were planned, or even advertised, for Assembly of God events. *Inter-church functions were attended*, however, but since the mid 1980s these were predominantly nation-wide inter-denominational events such as Spring Harvest, the Fresh Ground weekend, the Greenbelt festival, and the March For Jesus crusades.

By far the largest of these events are the Spring Harvest Christian festivals/holidays that are held annually in a number of locations including Ayr,

Minehead, Pwllheli and Skegness. The first Spring Harvest was held in Prestatyn, Wales in 1979; 2,700 Christians from differing denominations attended the first event. By 1986, 38,000 were in attendance at two locations and by the end of the 1980s that figure had risen to 50,000. The 1990s saw that figure rise further to over 70,000<sup>5</sup>. Spring Harvest's interdenominational mix caters for Christians from a number of backgrounds. It attracts both charismatic and non-charismatic believers. Certainly, though, a strong shift towards the experiential in both theology and worship practice can be observed. Consider this description of a Spring Harvest, up coming (2002) youth meeting called 'Holy Space',

Holy space is a collaborative worship event which builds on what has taken place during the day. Fluid, creative, visual, and worshipful, Holy Space is a time to come together as a generation of people longing to hear God speak, longing to see Him change lives, and longing to see His vision for His church and His world.

([http://www.springh.org/youth/youth\\_evolution.html](http://www.springh.org/youth/youth_evolution.html))

Key terms here display a particular charismatic bent – 'fluid' worship times, the longing to hear 'God speak' and 'to see His vision for His church and His world'. A recent worship song book published by Spring Harvest called *Worship Today*, collated data from the Christian Copyright Licensing agency and put together five hundred of the most frequently used worship songs (sung between October 1999

and March 2000)<sup>6</sup>, a significant number of the songs are in essence Charismatic. Although it is difficult to estimate the precise allegiance and theological standing of each of the songs' authors, out of the five hundred songs in the collection well over a third of them have been penned by individuals who have, at least, strong ties to the Charismatic movement. Authors include: Darlene Zchech, Graham Kendrick, Chris Bowater, John Wimber, Gerald Coates (leader of the Pioneer church movement), Matt Redman (one of his entries being *I will Dance Undignified*), Robin Mark (*These are the days of Elijah*, see chapter 4), and the City Christian Centre's own Steve Young.

My suggestion here is that a significant national and interdenominational charismatic influence has permeated the hearts and minds of many Christians generally and that the fusion of traditions witnessed at the City Christian Centre is more a result of an undulation of new theological and spiritual ideas introduced to the church by collective immersion into a growing charismatic 'culture'.

Another area in which this immersion has been facilitated is through the widespread adoption of the Alpha course. Designed for new Christians or for those who are non-churchgoers but who are looking to find out more about the Christian faith, the Alpha course is a Bible study course spread out over a number of months. It usually takes place at the convenor's home and at some point in the evening a meal is served (See Gumbel, 1994). The course has been widely

accepted by a number of denominations and is used also at the City Christian Centre. Although adopted by charismatics and non-charismatics alike, some non-charismatics have voiced concern over the content of Alpha and have highlighted those sections that introduce ideas associated specifically with the Charismatic movement, the Toronto Blessing and an emphasis on the experiential. In his article entitled *The Alpha Course: Is It Bible-Based Or Hell-Inspired?* Paul Fitton (1989) makes this very connection,

This doctrine [Alpha content] has been described in a variety of ways - Restorationism, or Dominion Theology, to name a few. It is a unique and new form of Pentecostalism and it is the basis of the Toronto Blessing. In fact it has been said that as to its theology and practice the Toronto Blessing is 'Wimberism' (Fitton, 1998).

There is a section of the Alpha course which deals specifically with the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian. Often this part of the course is covered during a weekend retreat away. On this, Jonathan Bayes writes,

I suspect that the true motivation for a three-session time away is that the Course is intentionally designed to produce Christians with a charismatic outlook, and that with a longer term aim of bringing about the

'charismaticisation' of the entire Church. It is probably thought that, in the rarefied atmosphere of a mini-holiday, people will be more susceptible to pressure to seek the "*filling of the Spirit*" (Bayes, 1999).

Although Alpha course materials and teaching techniques can be altered and moulded to a certain extent to fit more closely the theological emphasis that a church places on theological issues, there is, it would seem, a strong Charismatic theme running through the course which, at some level, introduces those who take the course to a particular spiritual expression. - collective immersion into a growing charismatic 'culture'.

### **The complexity of change**

A further contribution has been to chart a process of multi-layered change within the City Christian Centre. In considering the experience of this particular fellowship, I tentatively discern a reflection of a transformation that is taking place within the larger movement of the Assemblies of God in Britain. The three pastors whom I have introduced, John Hedges, Roy Dale and George Young, differed significantly in personality, expression, strategies for the church, and doctrine. Yet, it would be wrong simply to suggest that the origin of change in the local activities was due to the vastly different orientations of the pastors employed at the City Christian Centre over the past thirty years. The local changes are reflections of a larger experience within Charismatic and Pentecostal fellowships and the synthesis that is taking place between the two movements.

Hedges exemplifies a Pentecostal traditionalist. He was a man of immense charisma, a powerful orator, a 'one man band' and 'pastor' in the Biblical sense of the word. He spent time visiting his 'flock' and he nurtured and encouraged on an individual basis.

Dale introduced teaching into the church that would undermine former understandings of discipline and application in one's Christian life. He elevated the 'supernatural' in an already otherworldly environment and prepared the ground for the pursuit of greater intensity in ecstatic praise and worship experiences. George Young had developed a particular brand of Restorationism before his appointment at the City Christian Centre. The Youngs' charismatic experience had been unfettered by the more traditional elements within the Assemblies of God possibly because of the geographical distance of their first fellowship in Gibraltar. Although it was an Assembly of God church, they were far enough away from the 'circuit' to cultivate their own interpretation of God's plan and design. The teaching and input they themselves received was not confined to a staple diet of British Assembly of God doctrine, but drew, instead, from a wider Charismatic community. Roy Dale had to tread lightly (until his departure from the Assemblies of God) between his traditional Pentecostal roots and the 'new moves' of God. Young's exposure to 'the blessing', however, has been and is celebrated and encouraged.

In delineating the history, both doctrinal and bureaucratic, of the fellowship I have attempted to distinguish analytically between the theological and the political. There is in practice a great deal of overlap between doctrine and polity – and this is an indication of the dominant role religion plays in the life of the City Christian Centre’s members. There is little to distinguish the *social* from the *spiritual*. This is displayed in every area of the believer’s life. A grievance in one area, church politics for instance, is tied to a particular theological stance; the grievance exists because of the theology. This is why disputes within the church have displayed such inflexibility between the warring factions.

The cornerstone of belief, for the Pentecostal, is the ‘Word of God’. A believer’s perception of the world is formed from his or her understanding of the Bible. Interpretation may differ, of course, but theology is central. The centrality of a theological worldview sets the believers at the City Christian Centre apart from the wider society. Even when internal divisions are the cause of numerous disputes, conflicts, excommunications and general bitterness, the unified front remains to all but those who are, or have been, ensconced in the fellowship. The process of change in the City Christian Centre takes place, then, in different dimensions that are intricately intertwined. It is essential to keep in mind the high degree of interrelatedness between the spirituality of particular Pastors, the theological and ‘liturgical’ innovations that each of them introduced, and the different notions of church governance that developed with them. At the same time, changes in theological fashions, styles of worship, popular culture and

socio-economic conditions outside the City Christian Centre also helped to shape its response. The advantage of a study focused mainly on a single fellowship is that it facilitated an exploration of all these internal and external factors.

### **The ‘free rider’ problem**

Discussion turned to aspects of rational choice theory at various points in my thesis. In addition to questioning the assumptions on which this approach is based, in documenting various conflicts and times of difficulty, both on an individual and church wide level (see Chapters 5 and 6), my observations also make a contribution by raising an issue that is particularly pertinent to studies of conservative Evangelical fellowships, namely, that of the *free rider* problem. Iannaccone writes, ‘The same perverse dynamic threatens *all* groups engaged in the production of collective goods’ (Iannaccone, 1997: 35). He then follows this up with ‘Assumption 9’ that states, ‘Collective religious activities are susceptible to free rider problems’ (ibid). Indeed, studies of ‘high demand’ religious groups take it for granted that, from a rational choice point of view, participants who are not willing to incur the high costs of membership will somehow be deterred or excluded. A constant checking, an *invisible hand*, would supposedly eliminate the threat of complacency and continue to provide the adherents of strict religious groups with the opportunity *and* the necessity to optimise their benefits.

Yet, free riding could also be interpreted very differently. Whereas Iannaccone understands free riding to be a negative force within collective forms of religious

expression, it can also be regarded as a positive, or at least unavoidable, element within any and all church life. Within the context of conservative Christian fellowships, members are encouraged to develop their own particular ministry. The exercising of individual ministry entails the support, care and counsel of what are often termed in such churches 'problem people'. Free riders would presumably fall into this category, but instead of causing discontent within the group, their presence supplies numerous opportunities for others to hone their distinctive individual ministries. Such interaction acts as a form of social cement in that people begin to feel that they are not merely 'pew fillers' but that they are active participants in the work of the church who fulfil a specific role. Subsequently the life of the church appears to be vibrant and moving forward, producing fruit.

This interpretation of the forces working against the quick expulsion of free riders is compatible with Beckford's (2000) view that some of the insights from rational choice theory might throw interesting light on the strategies that religious organizations adopt in competitive markets. It is also compatible with Beckford's (1975) interpretation of the incidental purposes served by the door-to-door outreach of Jehovah's Witnesses. They do not realistically expect to convert householders by 'cold calling', but the payoff in terms of the local congregation's increased sense of unity, purpose and solidarity outweighs the costs of time and discomfort that individual Witnesses have to incur in order to remain 'in good

standing'. The motives of individual Witnesses are not at issue. It is the collective strategy of the Watch Tower Society that makes 'rational' sense.

In the case of the City Christian Centre, 'problem people' exist within the fellowship as well as in the outside world. 'Free riders' represent a challenge, rather than an offence, to the other members. Consequently, there is theological justification as well as evangelical encouragement to retain them instead of expelling them. Iannaccone's application of the free rider principle draws the boundary between those who pay the required costs and those who do not in the wrong place. Having some free riders inside the fellowship produces a collective benefit, but their number is likely to be low at any given time.

### **Secularisation Theory**

As I mentioned in chapter two, the major thrust of this work has been towards examining the transformation of a Pentecostal church and not, primarily, to enter in to the debate over church growth and decline. Issues connected to secularisation are, nevertheless, significant because it places the experiences of contemporary Pentecostals within a specific context of social theorising regarding both the health and vibrancy of a group of believers or the corrosion of the same due to the potent effects of modernity. While Steve Bruce has asserted that

**The Reformation hastened the rise of individualism and of rationality, and both of these were fundamentally to change the nature of religion and its**

place in the world. Individualism threatened the communal basis of religious belief and behaviour, while rationality removed many of the purposes of religion and rendered many of its beliefs implausible (Bruce, 1996: 230).

While he concedes that people will still, at some level, hold religious beliefs, the earlier significance of religion in influencing society or wielding power will continue to diminish. Religiosity will persist but '...expressed through piecemeal and consumerist involvement in elements of a cultic world' (Bruce, 1996: 234).

Philip Hammond (1985) also advances a 'strong' reading of secularisation that highlights a 'linear' process in the decline of religious adherence. Secularisation, according to Hammond, is

the idea that society moves from some sacred condition to successively secular conditions in which the sacred evermore recedes. In fact, so much has the secularisation thesis dominated the social scientific study of religious change that it is now conventional wisdom (Hammond, 1985: 1).

While there are considerable data to show that religion (in the sense of church attendance, and the significance of religion in society as a social force) is declining, it is not necessarily the case that religious decline is a linear process and that the inevitable outcome for religion will be its diminution to the point of total obscurity. Indeed, a related form of theorising contends that, '...whilst

secularisation takes place in particular circumstances, in other contexts religions retain their vitality, even grow' (Woodhead and Heelas, 2000: 308). In their anthology, *Religion in Modern Times*, Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas point to the work of Martin (1990) to show that different social circumstances have a bearing on the growth or decline of religion.

The notion of 'coexistence' in relation to secularisation and religious vitality presents the sociology of religion with a much more acceptable, and in my view, accurate account of religious affiliation. I have sided with the view that some churches (liberal mainline) are declining numerically while other churches (conservative evangelical) are doing relatively well. Here we see an example of coexistence theory and according to Woodhead and Heelas, 'The picture that emerges is not of a uniformly disenchanted world, but a world in which vibrant and growing varieties of religion coexist with stagnant or declining ones' (Woodhead and Heelas, 2000: 481).<sup>7</sup> If we reject the notion of a linear progression in relation to aspects of modernity and religion, then we necessarily conclude that secularisation theory (its harsher reading at least) is not 'set in stone'. Thus, Hammonds' 'conventional wisdom' label for the secularisation thesis is in error.

To add to the mix, Heelas and Woodhead identify three different varieties of religion: *religions of difference* are characterised by the clear distinction they place between a transcendent divinity and mortal human beings. They have

mediators between God and humans either in the form of sacred texts or some priest figure or a mixture of the two. They place a significant emphasis on the act of worship and there is a strong notion and expectation of a coming utopia.

*Religions of humanity* incorporate notions of tolerance and freedom into the makeup of the divine. 'Rather than being viewed as awesome, fearful and set-apart, the deity is seen as much more approachable, tolerant, compassionate' (Woodhead and Heelas, 2000: 70). Another characteristic often found within religions of humanity is a basic positive belief in humanity. For the purposes of this work, the beliefs associated with the City Christian Centre would fall into the religions of difference category, whereas the liberal wing of the liberal mainline churches –would fall into the religions of humanity category.

A third variety is put forward - *spiritualities of life*. Characteristics include the belief that individuals are spiritual beings and that true happiness or fulfilment can only be gained through some connection with the 'inner self'. Significantly, '...authority is taken to lie within rather than without' (ibid: 111). There is also a great emphasis on spiritual experience.

Although we have identified the City Christian Centre with religions of difference, a further category suggested by Heelas and Woodhead describes, more specifically, the religious expression of this fellowship. *Experiential religions of difference* is a designation that combines '...characteristics of a spirituality of life (such as a strong stress on the authority of individual

experience) with elements of a religion of difference (such as an equally strong stress on the authority of scripture)' (ibid: 3).

Donald Miller (1997), in his book *Reinventing Christian Protestantism*.

*Christianity in the New Millennium* provides an example of an evangelical group of churches that display the characteristics of experiential religions of difference.

Miller's analysis of the Calvary Chapel, Vineyard Christian Fellowship and Hope Chapel highlights (among other things) the following elements. This group of churches, which he calls *new paradigm churches*, balance Biblical authority with experience. And yet, Miller suggests that more emphasis is placed on the experiential than on strict adherence to scripture. While the concept of salvation and a relationship with Jesus as 'personal Lord and saviour' is stressed (Miller, 1997: 129), Miller writes that, 'Over and over, the new paradigm Christians express their emphasis on personal conviction over doctrine' (ibid).

New paradigm churches encourage a high level of toleration for other denominations, styles and expressions of worship, which is seen to be a '...sign of Christian maturity' (ibid). This is a significant move away from notions of set denominational boundaries and sectarianism. People who attend a new paradigm church are considered to be part of the fellowship by virtue of their continued participation.

Miller suggests that worship plays an important role in such churches because it is

... attractive to people alienated from establishment tradition because it is in their own idiom; this worship and the corresponding message provided direct access to an experience of the sacred, which had the potential of transforming people's lives by addressing their deepest personal needs (ibid: 183).

A final point to be made regarding Miller's new paradigm churches is that, in terms of growth, they are doing well both in the three groups mentioned above and '...within the numerous independent churches that have proliferated in recent years' (ibid: 1). Groups that can be classified as experiential religions of difference are a combination of religions of difference and spiritualities of life. As an example of an experiential religion of difference, Heelas and Woodhead point to Charismatic Christianity and suggest that the movement's '...growth and vitality at the end of the twentieth century is matched only by resurgent Islam' (Woodhead and Heelas, 2000: 148, see Martin, 1996).

Bebbington (1994), noting the prevalence of both Scriptural authority and spiritual experience in certain groups, argues that evangelicals '...could differ wildly among themselves on the meaning of the Bible, but the Scriptures remained a bedrock of authority' (Bebbington, 1994: 129). This he follows with,

'...evangelicals shared a conviction that true religion required the experience of God' (ibid). Moreover, Steve Tipton (1984) observed this 'balance' during his research of the Living Word Fellowship in California and its ministry to those who were disillusioned with the 'predicament of doing your own thing without knowing why' (Tipton, 1984: 53). The combination of experience and set parameters has prompted Woodhead and Heelas to suggest that 'It seems likely that the success of Charismatic groups often lies in their ability to combine these different elements' (Woodhead and Heelas, 2000: 148).

While this may be so for many experiential religions of difference, what are we to conclude regarding the 'success' of the City Christian Centre? In table 4 (chapter 7) we see attendance levels over the last thirty years. The most significant growth in the City Christian Centre was during the 1980s and Pastor Dale's reign - but signs of growth were evident before then. With the prevailing stress on the supernatural and the 'heavy shepherding' ideas of the 1980s, growth could be explained by Kelley's thesis regarding strict churches. Certainly a lot was demanded of each congregant, and vagueness and ambiguity regarding ultimate meaning were not apparent. There was a strong sense of mission and a great emphasis on evangelising the community.

Eventually problems arose in the operation, and a combination of things brought an end to that particular period of growth. Pastor Dale resigned and moved on to new pastures and, speaking now from a personal perspective, the high demands

that were placed on the fellowship seemed to be unsustainable. They were also unacceptable to the newer members of the church, a considerable number of whom had switched from other – predominantly mainline – churches and a different religious culture.

The City Christian Centre's present incarnation has witnessed a decline in membership. While the intensity of praise and worship increases, the traditional, strict adherence to the Bible, that is so pivotal to the classical Pentecostals' religious life, appears to be in a process of decline as well. The size of the congregation has been quite steady for the last few years, although considerably smaller than it had been. The move towards a more Charismatic expression within the City Christian Centre, favouring the experiential over the doctrinal, imposes fewer requirements on its members and therefore loses something of its potential to demand *commitment*, to enforce *discipline*, and to instill in its members a *missionary zeal* (Kelley, 1962). Further research could perhaps determine the most successful 'balance' between experience and Scriptural authority with regard to growth and decline.

Whichever side of the secularization/sacralization debate we lean towards, clearly this work shows that religious decline is certainly not a linear process and that religious vitality can and does coexist with religious decline.

*The picture which emerges is not of a uniformly disenchanted world, but of a world in which vibrant and growing varieties of religion coexist with stagnant or declining ones (Woodhead and Heelas, 2000: 481)*

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition  
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<sup>2</sup> Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary, © 1996, 1998 MICRA, Inc.

<sup>3</sup> WordNet ® 1.6, © 1997 Princeton University

<sup>4</sup> The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition  
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<sup>5</sup> Information taken from the Spring Harvest official web pages -

[http://www.springh.org/information/vi\\_history.html](http://www.springh.org/information/vi_history.html). For other information on

Spring Harvest see <http://www.springh.org>

<sup>6</sup> Information drawn from 18,000 of CCL's church licence holders.

<sup>7</sup> Beckford's (2001: 233) discussion of the evidence about secularisation comes to a similar conclusion: 'rates of decline and growth vary from time to time, place to place, and group to group. It is as if we were looking at a kaleidoscopic image which is constantly changing in shape, color and intensity. There is no single dominant trend. And nothing is to be gained from trying to show that the kaleidoscopic pattern lends itself to a single "trump card" explanation.'

## APPENDIX 1

**Composition statistics for the three largest Pentecostal Churches in the  
United Kingdom**

The following tables (including notes) are taken from the *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends 1998/99. No. 1* (Brierley, 1998/99: 9.12).

Table 3

## Assemblies of God - membership

	<b>England</b>	<b>Wales</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>N. Ireland</b>	<b>Total UK</b>
<b>1980</b>	28,730	4,300	1,385	585	<b>35,000<sup>1</sup></b>
<b>1985</b>	32,835	4,915	1,585	665	<b>40,000<sup>1</sup></b>
<b>1990</b>	39,400	5,900	1,900	800	<b>48,000<sup>2</sup></b>
<b>1995</b>	44,818	6,558	2,186	1,093	<b>54,655</b>
<b>2000</b>	50,150	7,360	2,440	1,200	<b>61,150</b>

## Assemblies of God - churches

	<b>England</b>	<b>Wales</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>N. Ireland</b>	<b>Total UK</b>
<b>1980</b>	473	72	18	8	<b>571</b>
<b>1985</b>	499	73	27	7	<b>600</b>
<b>1990</b>	501	71	23	10	<b>605<sup>3</sup></b>
<b>1995</b>	535	73	27	11	<b>646</b>
<b>2000</b>	549	73	30	12	<b>664</b>

## Assemblies of God - ministers

	<b>England</b>	<b>Wales</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>N. Ireland</b>	<b>Total UK</b>
<b>1980</b>	550	83	20	9	<b>662</b>
<b>1985</b>	568	81	23	8	<b>680</b>
<b>1990</b>	576	82	25	12	<b>695</b>
<b>1995</b>	717	69	20	12	<b>818<sup>4</sup></b>
<b>2000</b>	730	69	23	14	<b>836</b>

## Elim Pentecostal Church - membership

	<b>England</b>	<b>Wales</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>N. Ireland</b>	<b>Total UK</b>
<b>1980</b>	20,530	1,670 <sup>1</sup>	1,050 <sup>1</sup>	7,500 <sup>1</sup>	<b>30,750<sup>6</sup></b>
<b>1985</b>	23,385 <sup>1</sup>	1,710 <sup>1</sup>	955 <sup>1</sup>	7,950 <sup>1</sup>	<b>34,000<sup>6</sup></b>
<b>1990</b>	30,785 <sup>1</sup>	2,265	1,480 <sup>1</sup>	10,570 <sup>1</sup>	<b>45,100<sup>6</sup></b>
<b>1995</b>	44,305	2,455	2,275	13,215	<b>62,650<sup>5</sup></b>
<b>2000</b>	49,330	2,750	2,490	14,750	<b>69,320</b>

## Elim Pentecostal Church - churches

	<b>England</b>	<b>Wales</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>N. Ireland</b>	<b>Total UK</b>
<b>1980</b>	263	29	21	41	<b>354</b>
<b>1985</b>	294	29	18	42	<b>383</b>
<b>1990</b>	332	33	24	48	<b>437</b>
<b>1995</b>	444	34	35	57	<b>577</b>
<b>2000</b>	479	36	37	61	<b>613</b>

## Elim Pentecostal Church – ministers

	<b>England</b>	<b>Wales</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>N. Ireland</b>	<b>Total UK</b>
<b>1980</b>	234	24 <sup>1</sup>	18 <sup>1</sup>	23 <sup>1</sup>	<b>310</b>
<b>1985</b>	298	29	16	52	<b>395</b>
<b>1990</b>	365	37	27	54	<b>483</b>
<b>1995</b>	485	28	29	58	<b>600<sup>7</sup></b>
<b>2000</b>	551	35	34	68	<b>688</b>

## New Testament Church of God – membership

	<b>England</b>	<b>Wales</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>N. Ireland</b>	<b>Total UK</b>
<b>1980</b>	6,369	0	0	0	<b>6,369</b>
<b>1985</b>	6,210	0	0	0	<b>6,210</b>
<b>1990</b>	6,502	130 <sup>1</sup>	0	0	<b>6,632</b>
<b>1995</b>	7,090	130 <sup>1</sup>	0	0	<b>7,220</b>
<b>2000</b>	7,160	130	0	0	<b>7,290</b>

## New Testament Church of God – churches

	<b>England</b>	<b>Wales</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>N. Ireland</b>	<b>Total UK</b>
<b>1980</b>	86	0	0	0	<b>86</b>
<b>1985</b>	95	0	0	0	<b>95</b>
<b>1990</b>	98	2	0	0	<b>100</b>
<b>1995</b>	108	2	0	0	<b>110</b>
<b>2000</b>	114	2	0	0	<b>116</b>

## New Testament Church of God – ministers

	<b>England</b>	<b>Wales</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>N. Ireland</b>	<b>Total UK</b>
<b>1980</b>	190	0	0	0	<b>190</b>
<b>1985</b>	169	0	0	0	<b>169</b>
<b>1990</b>	233 <sup>1</sup>	4 <sup>1</sup>	0	0	<b>237</b>
<b>1995</b>	226 <sup>1</sup>	4 <sup>1</sup>	0	0	<b>230<sup>1, 8</sup></b>
<b>2000</b>	248	4	0	0	<b>252</b>

<sup>1</sup> Estimate

<sup>2</sup> English Church Census 1989 suggests Sunday attendance could be 40% higher than membership.

<sup>3</sup> In the 1980s 132 new churches were started but others closed or left to become Independent or New Churches.

<sup>4</sup> Of which 13 were female.

<sup>5</sup> Membership rose to 68,750 in 1996.

<sup>6</sup> Revised figures.

<sup>7</sup> Of whom 22 were female.

<sup>8</sup> Of whom an estimated 40 were female.

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## APPENDIX 2

Table 4 - Churches attended during field research

<b>DENOMINATION</b>	<b>NON CHARISMATIC/ EVANGELICAL</b>	<b>CLASSICAL PENTECOSTAL</b>	<b>PENTECOSTAL/NEO -PENTECOSTAL/ CHARISMATIC</b>	<b>HYBRID</b>
<b>Anglican</b>	2		1	
<b>AoG</b>		10	3	3
<b>Baptist</b>	5		1	
<b>Brethren</b>	4			
<b>Congregational</b>	2			
<b>Elim</b>		2		
<b>Independent</b>	4		4	
<b>Methodist</b>	7		1	
<b>Nazarene</b>			1	
<b>Salvation Army</b>	3			
<b>United Reformed</b>			1	

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