

## The Shepherding Movement: A Case Study in Charismatic Ecclesiology

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The Charismatic Renewal of the 1960s and 1970s has been characterized in various ways over the last three decades. Its remarkable ecumenism, its emphasis on the charismata, and its contribution to personal spiritual renewal are recognized features of this Neo-Pentecostal movement.<sup>1</sup> It is certainly not known for a particular ecclesiology since it has blended such diverse ecclesiastical perspectives under the banner of Spirit baptism. Yet, one of the most influential and controversial expressions of the North American Charismatic Renewal was “ecclesiocentric.”<sup>2</sup> The “Shepherding movement,”<sup>3</sup> as it became known, was in essence a movement centered in the exploration and renewal of church structures. It was a movement impassioned to discover new ways of “doing church” that produced visible, countercultural Christian communities.

In 1975, the burgeoning Charismatic Renewal’s ecumenical character was nearly split asunder by the Shepherding

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Hocken, *The Glory and the Shame* (Guildford, England: Eagle, 1994); Richard Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics II*. 2d rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983); Margaret Paloma, *The Charismatic Movement* (Boston: Twayne, 1982). Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997). A comprehensive history needs to be written on the Charismatic Renewal.

<sup>2</sup> I borrow this term from Rodney Clapp and others who have drawn attention to a renewed focus on the contemporary importance of the doctrine of the church. Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> The movement has sometimes been called the Discipleship/Shepherding movement or just the Discipleship movement. The term “Shepherding movement” used in this essay is concise and more descriptive of the movement’s emphasis on personal pastoral care. For Charles Simpson and those who continue the movement’s heritage, the term “Covenant movement” is preferred.

movement and the controversy over its teachings and practices.<sup>4</sup> The debate focused on five popular Bible teachers: Don Basham, Ern Baxter, Bob Mumford, Derek Prince, and Charles Simpson, each a regular on the Charismatic conference and convention circuit. The five men were closely associated with the Ft. Lauderdale, Florida-based Christian Growth Ministries, which published the most widely circulated charismatic periodical, *New Wine Magazine*.<sup>5</sup> Mumford and Prince, in particular, were in high demand as teachers within the Charismatic Renewal.

Mumford and the other men became the leaders of the first identifiable local church movement in the Renewal.<sup>6</sup> Three annual "Shepherds conferences" between 1973 and 1975 had helped create an association of leaders and churches that was "submitted" to the five men. Critics saw this association as an attempt to take over the large and highly independent sector of the Charismatic Renewal, comprised of those who had left their denominational affiliations. Some charged that the men were also drawing denominational Charismatics into the new movement. Critics believed this movement was starting a "Charismatic denomination" in which the five teachers would be the leaders.<sup>7</sup> Mumford and the other four vehemently denied the charges. Nevertheless, they found themselves leading a rapidly growing house church movement,<sup>8</sup> a network

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<sup>4</sup> Kilian McDonnell, "Seven Documents on the Discipleship Question," Kilian McDonnell, ed., in *Presence, Power, Praise: Documents on the Charismatic Renewal*, 3 vols. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1980), 2:116.

<sup>5</sup> Don Basham, "Forum: CGM and New Wine," *New Wine Magazine*, December 1976, 31. Charles Simpson, letter to Mrs. Carolyn Rodman, 18 September 1974, private holding, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Some may suggest that Calvary Chapel, pastored by Chuck Smith, and its associated churches which predated the Shepherding movement, are a part of the Charismatic Renewal. From my perspective, Calvary Chapel churches are only remotely charismatic. Their services are not charismatic in practice. The charismata are discouraged in public worship services and put into ancillary services if practiced at all.

<sup>7</sup> McDonnell, "Seven Documents on the Discipleship Question," 2:120.

<sup>8</sup> In one of the few serious attempts to understand its ecclesiology, the Shepherding

they always said they never intended to start. In their view, they were simply stewarding a sovereign response their ministries had catalyzed.

The movement's teachings on "discipleship" and "shepherding" emphasized the need for personal, one-on-one pastoral care for every Christian, including pastors. This emphasis became highly controversial and critics alleged that the teachings brought believers under the domination of human leaders. The controversy over these issues was so furious that the movement's distinct and focused ecclesial character has been overlooked. As is often the case with renewal groups, the movement has largely been defined by its critics and disillusioned former members who have focused on its faults and excesses. Until recently no serious and dispassionate study has been undertaken to understand this unique expression of the Charismatic Renewal.

In 1995, I began a scholarly effort to write a history of the movement. This research culminated in a doctoral dissertation completed in 1999 and published by Sheffield Academic Press.<sup>9</sup> I came to the project cautiously expecting an entirely negative assessment of the Shepherding movement, at least in part as a result of my own experience with the movement in which I had pastored for eight years. I left in the early 1980s because of my concern over its extremes.<sup>10</sup> My research, while chronicling serious problems within the movement, found no takeover attempt of the Charismatic Renewal or a plan to dominate followers. To the contrary, the historical record indicated that the movement's leaders, while at times

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movement was called "the most extensive expression of the house church movement in the United States." See: Kirk Hadaway, Stuart A. Wright, and Francis M. DuBose, *Home Cell Groups and House Churches* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1987), 30.

<sup>9</sup> S. David Moore, *The Shepherding Movement: History, Controversy, Ecclesiology* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> After leaving the movement I associated myself with the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, a classical Pentecostal denomination. I continue pastoring at this writing.

idealistic and naive, were well intentioned and seriously attempting to grapple with problems they perceived in the Charismatic Renewal through developing new church structures.

The movement's history is a complex but engaging story and its chronicle gives a unique perspective on the larger Charismatic Renewal. More than anything, its history provides a unique case study in renewal ecclesiology, an ecclesiology that was central to the Shepherding movement's self-understanding. In this essay, after a brief historical overview, I want to define the movement's early ecclesiological mindset that motivated and directed its practices.

### *Historical Sketch*

In the early 1970s, America was still reacting to and processing the cultural upheaval of the 1960s. President Nixon's Watergate scandal had only added to the social malaise and institutional mistrust. Many Americans were feeling increasingly isolated and defensive, unsure about the future. Within this context the Charismatic Renewal was growing in response to the societal changes and also in response to the nominalism of the mainline Protestant denominations and the Catholic Church. A spiritual hunger was being satisfied through the charismatic emphasis on spiritual experience.

The Shepherding movement was a part of this cultural and religious climate. Its leaders were concerned with the extreme individualism among many Charismatics who seemed to travel from one teaching conference to another and had no permanent church affiliation. In addition, Mumford, Simpson, Basham, and Prince had observed a serious lack of personal integrity and Christian character among some Renewal leaders. In October 1970, the four men, joined by Baxter in 1974, committed themselves in mutual accountability and submission to help preserve one another's personal and ministerial

integrity.

At the time of their association Basham, Mumford, Prince, and Simpson were each maintaining independent ministries within the Charismatic Renewal. After their 1970 association, the men continued their individual ministries while making an effort to work together as often as possible. They began to meet regularly and from their growing union emerged their teachings on submission, spiritual authority, discipleship, pastoral care, covenant relationship, and Christian community. Their considerable teaching gifts and skilled use of media through books, audio tapes, and particularly *New Wine Magazine* popularized their teaching themes throughout the Renewal.<sup>11</sup>

The four men traveled extensively, teaching on the need for individual discipleship, training, and accountability. These teachings fell into a leadership vacuum. Many Charismatics were leading small prayer groups and home meetings, yet were untrained and feeling isolated. Moreover, the Jesus People movement, which was strongly influenced by a charismatic emphasis, had created a vast number of young Christians groping about looking for leadership. These two groups responded to the teachings by Mumford and the others by seeking to submit to their authority to be discipled and trained for ministry. By 1975, thousands of young leaders were networked together under the leadership of Baxter, Basham, Mumford, Prince, and Simpson. At its height, the Shepherding movement would grow to 100,000 adherents according to one estimate, and included as many as 500 churches.<sup>12</sup>

In late 1975 and early 1976, three national meetings were held establishing a dialogue among major Charismatic

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Harper, *Three Sisters* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1979), 30.

<sup>12</sup> David Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopedia* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1982), 722. Robert Digitale, "An Idea Whose Time Is Gone?" *Christianity Today*, 19 March 1990, 40; Charles Simpson, personal interview with author, 3 August 1998.

Renewal leaders to try to resolve the growing controversy occasioned by the charge of authoritarianism. The meetings quieted the controversy but brought no significant resolution. In the years after 1976, numerous accusations continued to be raised over the authoritarian nature of the movement's pastoral relationships. Critics from within and without the movement charged that many shepherds were controlling the lives of their followers and abusing the privilege of their spiritual authority. The movement's principal leaders spent much time dealing with such problems and have admitted serious mistakes and extremes in practice.

Controversy over its teachings would be a continued distraction to the movement's development, and it began to decline in size and influence from 1982 on. In 1983, Prince quietly withdrew and in 1986 the remaining four men dissolved their formal association and ceased publishing *New Wine Magazine*. Today a number of smaller groups continue the movement's emphases in a moderated form.

### *Renewal Ecclesiology*

In understanding the Shepherding movement's distinctive ecclesiological emphasis, self-concept needs to be considered. As already mentioned, the movement's leaders felt they were responding to their times. This response was fueled by their perception that society was coming apart in all dimensions, providing great opportunity for the church to shine in the midst of dark and difficult days.<sup>13</sup> Mumford and the leaders were particularly concerned over the marginalization and immaturity of the American church and its inability to respond fully to the opportunity to represent Christ. These perspectives helped engender an eschatologically focused restorationism.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Bob Mumford, "A Personal Word From Bob Mumford" (Ft. Lauderdale, FL, 1974, personal newsletter), 1.

<sup>14</sup> I am using the word "restorationism" to refer to a quest to restore the primitive

Especially characteristic of the five's teachings from 1971 to 1977 were their repeated references to a restoration of the New Testament church order and practice. They were convinced that their teachings, particularly as related to church government, were a part of God's ongoing renewal process. Typical of the restorationist impulse, Mumford believed that soon after Constantine the church declined, giving way to a dead institutionalism. While there had always remained a faithful remnant, the Protestant Reformation ushered in the beginning of God's restoring work, which had continued with the English and American awakenings under Wesley and Edwards. The Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, with their emphasis on the person and work of the Holy Spirit, were also a part of this renewal continuum. Now, in their day, God was restoring the ecclesiological dimensions of New Testament life. This restoration centered around church leadership and structure, with special emphasis on the role of the pastor or "shepherd" as they termed it.<sup>15</sup>

Another factor influencing their ecclesiology was the varied backgrounds of the five men. Basham was an ordained Disciples of Christ minister; Baxter, a Canadian Pentecostal; Mumford, a Charismatic originally ordained in the Assemblies of God; Prince, a philosopher turned Pentecostal; and Simpson, a Southern Baptist pastor. It was a peculiar and, at times, strained confluence, rooted in relationship more than theological agreement. Basham, Mumford, and Simpson were each seminary trained and Prince received graduate training in philosophy, Greek, and Hebrew at Cambridge; only Baxter

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New Testament church experience. Restorationism, sometimes used interchangeably with the term "primitivism," is the subject of a collection of essays edited by Richard Hughes. See Richard Hughes, ed., *The American Quest for the Primitive Church* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

<sup>15</sup> This concept of restoration was more fully elaborated in a 1979 message by Mumford to a group of his leaders. The title itself is revealing. Bob Mumford, *Decline/Dark Ages/Restoration of the Church, Part I* (Oklahoma City, OK: September 1977, audiocassette).

was without formal higher education. Despite his lack of training, Baxter, self-taught, was perhaps the most theologically astute, taking a strong Reformed Theological stance. Additionally, by the early 1970s, all five men considered themselves non-denominational and valued their independence of institutional church structures.

Of the five, Bob Mumford and Charles Simpson most influenced the movement's ecclesiological development. Mumford was the energetic, colorful, prophetic persona who invigorated the movement's constituency, while Simpson, the most pastoral of the group, was the movement's ecclesiological architect and builder. Baxter and Prince contributed conceptually; Basham, more a journalist than anything, helped to publish their ideas through *New Wine Magazine*.

As the movement began in 1974 and 1975, the five had not worked out a mutually agreed upon ecclesiology. Besides their differences, they were too busy responding to the momentum their teachings had generated. At times their public teachings seem to be almost a commentary on their actual developing practices with house churches and cell groups. Still at other times, their ecclesiological practices were directed by the concepts Mumford, Simpson, and the other three were teaching. Both concept and practice were informing each other. They were intentionally working to build authentic Christian communities but it was as much an experiment as anything.

What follows is a brief descriptive summary of the Shepherding movement's ecclesiology in 1976. It provides a kind of snapshot of what they taught,<sup>16</sup> drawn from their own

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<sup>16</sup> The five leaders developed a complicated, dynamic, and nuanced theological and ecclesiological stance uncharacteristic of the theologically shallow stereotype often ascribed to Pentecostals and Charismatics. I must acknowledge some discomfort about my brevity in defining their ecclesiology, knowing both how complex it was and how much it changed over the years, becoming more intentionally shaped and moderated near its dissolution.



materials as the emerging movement was still trying both to understand and define itself. While there would be adjustments in the following years, by 1976 several distinct developments clearly shaped the movement's ethos.<sup>17</sup>

### *The Kingdom of God and the Church*

The movement's ecclesiology was rooted in its view of the Kingdom of God. Though discipleship and shepherding were the most controversial characteristics, the Kingdom of God was its strongest motif.<sup>18</sup> The five teachers shared a "conviction that the Lord is doing something new—not new biblically—but a new emphasis in restoration of the concepts of the Kingdom of God, which will result in the maturity of the believer."<sup>19</sup> They believed this new emphasis on the Kingdom of God was to take the Charismatic Renewal beyond the emphasis on Spirit baptism and spiritual gifts to a more fundamental dimension in which God established "His love and authority in the individual believer, and then through that believer to the nations of the world (Matt. 28:19)."<sup>20</sup>

In their view, the Kingdom of God spoke of the reign and rule of God. They believed that the message of the Kingdom of God was the primary theme of the Bible and of Jesus' ministry. This message of God's rule necessarily raised the issue of authority. The message of the Kingdom was about God's "authority coming into a time, space, world and bringing man into a willing obedience to the order of God."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> For a picture of its more developed theology and ecclesiology, see Mumford, *Focusing on Present Issues*, 1-24; Charles Simpson, *Christian Life Seminar* (Mobile, AL: Integrity, 1977); Simpson, *The Covenant and the Kingdom*.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Simpson, "What Is the Gospel?" *New Wine Magazine*, June 1974, 4-7. This was the first of a series of articles by Simpson on the Kingdom of God and the church. They were published later as a book: Charles Simpson, *A New Way to Live* (Greensburg, PA: Manna Christian Outreach, 1975).

<sup>19</sup> Mumford, *Life Changers Newsletter*, November 1975, 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Ern Baxter, Transcript of "Thy Kingdom Come" (message delivered at the

Jesus' earthly ministry expressed God's breaking into the human situation to restore a new dimension of God's rule that had been lost by Adam's fall. After defeating Satan through his death and resurrection, Christ ascended and was seated at his Father's right hand and given full authority over all creation. At Christ's ascension and enthronement, he gave gifts to people, that is, the fivefold office ministries of apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, and teacher, as delegated authorities for his Kingdom rule. Mumford wrote:

The message of God's Rule and the impact of the whole New Testament speaks to us about God's reign over His Church through those whom He delegates (see Ephesians 4:11-13) to implement that authority. When we speak of authority we mean simply God's order, not authoritarianism. Submission, authority, and discipleship, as I understand and teach them, are the uncomplicated and basic ingredients necessary for the practical outworking of the Lordship of Christ in the life of every believer.<sup>22</sup>

Drawing from Psalm 110, the movement believed that Christ was to remain seated in heaven until his enemies in the earth were subdued by the activity of the "redeemed community" whereby he would establish God's sovereign right to reign in his own redeemed earth."<sup>23</sup> The church, therefore, was the key to the establishment of God's Kingdom.<sup>24</sup>

The delegated authorities in the church then serve to mediate God's rule through their exercise of spiritual authority. By submitting to delegated authority, believers were submitting to Christ.<sup>25</sup> It becomes plain that this concept drove their emerg-

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National Men's Shepherds Conference, Holy Spirit Research Center, Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, OK, 1975), 2.

<sup>22</sup> Mumford, *Life Changers Newsletter*, November 1975, 3. Ephesians 4:9-12 was central to the movement's view of church leadership.

<sup>23</sup> Baxter, "Thy Kingdom Come," 13.

<sup>24</sup> The movement never fully embraced a post-millennial view though it often came close. Since Prince was strongly dispensational and Baxter post-millennial, and the other three somewhere in between, their eschatology was never developed and agreed upon systematically.

<sup>25</sup> "Forum: God's Government," *New Wine Magazine*, June 1974, 30.

ing ecclesiology. They were convinced that “within the concepts of divine authority, discipleship, and shepherding, lie the eventual health and well-being of the body of Christ.”<sup>26</sup> Since the church was the center and vehicle of God’s Kingdom expression on earth, nothing could be of greater importance than its restoration to the biblical ideal.

The term “Kingdom of God” was frequently replaced by what was believed to be a synonymous term, the “government of God.” God was the ultimate ruler of all creation and was establishing the divine government on earth through the church.

In the Shepherding movement’s developing ecclesiology, the church was the gathered people of God. In the historical tradition of the believers’ church, the Shepherding movement emphasized the church as “the covenanted and disciplined community of those walking in the way of Jesus Christ the believing people.”<sup>27</sup> They acknowledged the invisible, universal church, but stressed the visible and local nature of the church as its essential character.<sup>28</sup> As with critics of the believers’ church position, the Shepherding movement was accused of being opposed to the historic and institutional churches. This is part of the movement’s paradoxical story. Basham, Baxter, Mumford, Prince, and Simpson worked hard at maintaining their commitment to the revitalization of the historic institutional churches. Before, during, and after the heated controversy, they were major speakers in denominational Charismatic conferences.<sup>29</sup> This controversy and their emphasis on developing their own churches did slow their

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Donald Durnbaugh, *The Believers’ Church* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1964), 33.

<sup>28</sup> Bob Mumford, “The Vision of the Local Church,” *New Wine Magazine*, July-August 1975, 4-8.

<sup>29</sup> Bob Mumford, “Disciple Position Paper,” 1976, 11.

conference activity, but it never ceased.<sup>30</sup> They did believe, however, that the current church structures were inadequate to manifest fully the church in its role of demonstrating the Kingdom of God.<sup>31</sup> This quest for building local churches that visibly manifest the Kingdom became their main priority.

The church then was to be a visible “alternate society which sets forth unequivocal norms for behavior and community life [that will] produce the kind and quality of people capable of influencing our society.”<sup>32</sup> They believed “the ultimate of evangelism in this age is to be the manifestation of God’s power to the total of life of the redeemed community.”<sup>33</sup>

### *Discipleship and Shepherding*

These convictions concerning the nature of the church necessitated practical spiritual authority to provide leadership to believers. Convinced that God was working to take the Renewal beyond its focus on “spiritual blessings” to the need for corporate maturity, they emphasized the practical restoration of apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. The concept of delegated authority undergirded discipleship and shepherding practices. It was through these ministry offices that God “would bring into existence a community of men and women who would resemble Christ.”<sup>34</sup> Of these five offices, the shepherd was the most vital to the realization of their ideal of an alternate society. They believed shepherds were “in charge of the redeemed community to develop it to maturity and attract the world to an alternate society and

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<sup>30</sup> After 1975 they were no longer welcome at many independent Charismatic conferences but continued to speak for Catholics, Lutherans, and other denominational Charismatic conferences.

<sup>31</sup> Mumford, “Discipleship Position Paper,” 5.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Baxter, “Thy Kingdom Come,” 14.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

counter-culture.”<sup>35</sup>

After their association in 1970, the movement’s teachers had worked at discovering biblical foundations to introduce “the concept of divine authority into our decadent and rebellious society.”<sup>36</sup> Discipleship and Shepherding were the essential components they felt they had found in the Scriptures.

Drawing from the relationship of Jesus to the Twelve as a pattern for the discipling relationship,<sup>37</sup> a shepherd/leader was to disciple a small group of men, spending time not only teaching them, but also training them by example and assignment. In their view, it had been Jesus’ method, and it was to be theirs as well.<sup>38</sup> Mumford believed discipleship

was a very fundamental and vital ongoing relationship which brings maturity to the believer in every phase of his life. The Christian life is not simply knowledge to be learned, classes to be attended, etc., but rather a life-style which is primarily imparted and passed on by sharing closely with others who know the Way. This is the relationship that the ‘youngest brother’ Timothy had with Paul. We believe the Lord is leading us to ‘grow up’ or mature some disciples so that they will be capable of discipling and bringing others to a similar degree of maturity. As the older Christian teaches the younger, he is able to watch over his life, and often to prescribe what is needed for his continued growth and maturity. These prescriptions may come in the form of books to read, tapes to listen to, teachers to sit under, and various other input into one’s life. It also involves feedback, oversight concerning his life-style, where he goes and what he does. It is my conviction that discipleship should be an ongoing part of every Christian’s experience. The circumstances may vary, but what we want to transmit is not information or procedures, but a way of life. The life of Christ flowing between two persons is a manifestation of discipleship.<sup>39</sup>

While initially a distinction was made between discipleship (a more intense and focused relationship) and shepherd-

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>36</sup> Mumford, *Life Changers Newsletter*, November 1975, 2.

<sup>37</sup> Charles Simpson, letter to Chuck Farah, 8 May 1975, 12. Simpson often stressed Jesus as a pattern for Christian life.

<sup>38</sup> Simpson, “Making Disciples,” 5.

<sup>39</sup> Mumford, *Life Changers Newsletter*, 2.

ing care (a less intense nurturing relationship), in practice the distinction was blurred, with both discipleship and shepherding being nearly synonymous. As the movement matured, there was little reference made to discipleship, as the sheep/shepherd relationship was more the focus.<sup>40</sup>

Nothing more distinguished the movement than its teaching on shepherding care. Every believer was to have a personal, definite, committed relationship with a shepherd affirmed by a verbal, and occasionally written, covenant agreement. The need for "personal pastoral care" was the cornerstone of the movement's ecclesiological practice. A person joined one of the movement's churches through establishing relationship with a shepherd/pastor, a practice that alarmed some observers who saw it as ascribing a soteriological dimension to the sheep/shepherd relationship.<sup>41</sup> The movement's leaders responded by affirming that salvation and entry into the universal, invisible church was solely through faith in Christ, who alone was "the Door." They did believe that participation in local church necessitated a personal commitment to a shepherd who served as "a door," caring for the sheep on Jesus' behalf.<sup>42</sup>

The movement taught that submission to a shepherd provided spiritual "covering" by being in right relationship to God's delegated authority in the church. The shepherd assumed responsibility for the well-being of his sheep. This responsibility included not just their spiritual well-being, but their full development emotionally, educationally, financially, vocationally, and socially.<sup>43</sup> Submitting to a shepherd neces-

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<sup>40</sup> The concepts of discipleship were, in the view of the five teachers, affirmed by the practices of Dawson Trotman of the Navigators. Robert Coleman's *The Master Plan of Evangelism* was not only recommended but sent to the movement's critics as a kind of apologetic to their practices. Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Old Tappan, NJ: Flemming H. Revell, 1964).

<sup>41</sup> Howard M. Ervin, letter to Derek Prince, 27 September 1976, private holding, 1-10.

<sup>42</sup> Bob Mumford, *Life Changers Newsletter*, November 1975, pgs. 3-4.

<sup>43</sup> Ern Baxter, Bob Mumford, *Elder's Meeting* (Ft. Lauderdale: Audio

sarily involved a thoughtful recognition of “those whom God has placed over us and required a deeper level of transparency and openness” than many in the Charismatic Renewal were accustomed to.<sup>44</sup> According to Mumford:

Submission means that we intend to share our lives and decisions as openly as possible. This means that major decisions, such as occupational changes, large financial expenditures, schedule changes, and other matters that affect us personally, as well as the group to which we are related, will be open to the group before they are finalized.

Categorically, let me say: The group or the shepherd does not make any ultimate determination as to whether the individual can or cannot make the decision, but they give feedback, guidance, and counsel which is expected to be seriously considered before action is taken. [There] is a need to embrace true Biblical and balanced authority if the Lordship of Christ is to become practical and applicable in this critical hour of world history.<sup>45</sup>

Many of the movement’s early followers were young people who wanted and needed the discipline the shepherding relationship brought with its concept of authority and submission. Shepherds were to lead their sheep and provide practical guidance in etiquette, personal dress, management, budgeting, and basic home, yard, and automobile care. Moreover, shepherds were to assist “people in their financial difficulties, family complications, or similar intricate personal problems. To do so effectively requires an adequate degree of biblical authority,” Mumford wrote.<sup>46</sup>

Followers were challenged to make a commitment to a shepherd that included an invitation to be discipled and pastored in all areas of life.<sup>47</sup> Thus, the shepherd had permission

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Publications, 16 Nov. 1975), Audiocassette; Mumford, “Disciple Position Paper, pg. 5.

<sup>44</sup> Mumford, *Life Changers Newsletter*, 5.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>47</sup> Don Basham, “Leadership, A Biblical Look,” *New Wine Magazine*, March 1974, 16-17.

to speak into his sheep's lives. The movement's leaders believed this approach prevented the exercise of unwanted spiritual authority, since individuals had asked for it. In practice, for a person to be a committed member of one of the movement's churches required this definite commitment to a shepherd. One was either "in or out," based on one's willingness to be pastored personally. As a result, because they wanted to be a part of an elite spiritual vanguard, many followers committed to the system without recognizing the full implications of their commitment. Once submitted to a shepherd, some became uncooperative or disillusioned by the degree of authority exercised. Many of these people left and told of their negative experiences. Others found their submission and commitment an avenue to spiritual maturity and fruitful service in Christ's church.

In the movement, house churches or cell groups, led by shepherds, were the fundamental building blocks of church structure. These small groups were not auxiliary, but the very center of church life. The house church structure was validated both by the New Testament example and by the Old Testament pattern in Exodus 18 of captains of tens, fifties, hundreds, and thousands. This approach created a need for many small group shepherd/leaders. The shepherds were seldom professionally trained, but were products of the discipleship and shepherding system. Most shepherds were lay people serving only part time in their roles, though many did move into vocational Christian service.

It was taught that the pathway into ministry was through a submitted relationship to a shepherd. Under a shepherd, a man was to prove responsible in the natural affairs of life: family, job, finance, and property stewardship, a process that prepared him for spiritual leadership.<sup>48</sup> It was often said, "First the nat-

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<sup>48</sup> Charles Simpson, "Faithful in the Natural Things," *New Wine Magazine*, September 1975, 24-29.



ural, then the spiritual.”<sup>49</sup>

The movement held high expectations for participation and involvement. In addition to full submission to their shepherd’s counsel, members were expected verbally to commit themselves to tithe their income and be fully involved in all aspects of church life. Members were confronted by their shepherds if they failed to live up to their commitments.

Together, these concepts directly shaped church organization. Churches within the movement were led by a lead pastor/shepherd who was submitted, often trans-locally, to one of the five men or his apostolic designate. The local church shepherd/pastor then pastored other shepherds in the congregation, who in turn pastored one to ten individuals or families in the house churches/cell groups. While the movement’s leaders argued against the terms, the descending chain of authority was “hierarchical” and “pyramidal” in practice.<sup>50</sup>

The movement grew rapidly from 1974 through 1978 but never produced enough leaders to fit its model of church structure and pastoral care. There simply were not enough mature leaders for a one-to-ten ratio of pastoral care. Still, they continued to try to make the model fit and, consequently, young or untested leaders found themselves in positions of authority, which led to many unfortunate situations in which people were hurt.

These were the core ecclesiological characteristics in 1976 that were so disturbing to many Charismatic leaders. At the time, shepherding, house churches, and cell groups were revolutionary concepts for the North American church, especially for Pentecostals and Charismatics. Unfortunately, the public debate tended toward inflammatory rhetoric and *ad hominem* arguments. Admittedly, the movement was in the process of

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<sup>49</sup> A common phrase in the movement (1 Corinthians 15:46 NIV).

<sup>50</sup> The movement’s leaders would prefer the term “patriarchal” instead of “hierarchical.” Nevertheless, the strong emphasis on submission to authority tied to the national network of trans-local relationship created a very clear chain of command.

self-definition and did not always articulate its positions well. The controversy was a sad underside of Neo-Pentecostal history.

### *Reflections*

A quarter of a century has passed since the Charismatic Renewal struggled over the Shepherding movement. With the advantage of some historical distance, I want to offer some reflections.

The movement's eventual dissolution was caused by several factors. External controversy and internal conflict over doctrine and practice created enormous pressures. The movement's idealism and early momentum made them at times vulnerable to a triumphalism that limited their ability to listen to their critics. Believing they were being persecuted for their commitment to restore biblical church practice, they became defensive, which hindered their ability to be adequately self-critical. The movement's lack of a formal church polity meant that there were no structures to adjudicate disputes and decide grievances. Combined with the highly relational and vertical pastoral relationships, this lack of polity contributed to an almost total inability of followers to challenge leaders. Finally, the five teachers' strong personalities, independent ministries, and diverse backgrounds caused recurring disagreements that regularly challenged their union. It is surprising that they stayed together for sixteen years.

I would suggest that the Shepherding movement has been unnecessarily vilified by its critics. Without argument, there were extremes in doctrine and practice, but in the furor over its problems, core issues were missed. For example, the debate about its exercise of spiritual authority failed to take notice of a legitimate issue the movement was trying to address: how could they practically develop structures to train and disciple believers without some measure of real authority to hold

members accountable to their commitments and conduct? They realized that their quest to build visible alternative Christian communities in a highly independent and anti-authoritarian culture was problematic, and they struggled over the degree of spiritual authority that was biblically and practically appropriate in fostering devoted disciples.<sup>51</sup>

The Shepherding movement's emphasis on vertically oriented pastoral relationships easily led to authoritarian tendencies. Leaders were vested with significant and broad ranging authority that was often mishandled. The conceptual intention of Mumford and the others was to develop maturity, not to abuse or control members. The five leaders believed that the voluntary nature of the pastoral relationship would be a safeguard against any abuse of authority. They were wrong.

Nearly two decades after its dissolution many believe that all of the movement's participants became injured casualties. This is not true. There are thousands who gladly continue among the movement's remnant and thousands like myself who left without injury and bitterness. Indeed, many were hurt but many were helped as well.

Certainly, the Shepherding movement was a curious mix ecclesologically. On the one hand they were clearly in the free church tradition, defining the church as visible, local, covenant communities of disciples. Their restorationism made them strongly anti-institutional in their rhetoric and they consistently refused to call themselves a denomination. Through all the years of their association, Mumford and the other four maintained that their church network was a voluntary association based solely on personal relationships.

Yet, growth and controversy forced them to organize and they became functionally and increasingly hierarchical institu-

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<sup>51</sup> Mumford, Simpson and the other leaders always emphasized freedom of conscience while maintaining the need for submission to leadership. The balance proved very difficult to find.

tionally. Howard Snyder has observed that renewal or restorationist movements are “typically naive concerning institutional and sociological realities and blind to the institutional dimensions of their own movement.” This was true for the Shepherding movement.<sup>52</sup> Although it was regularly denied, the Shepherding movement had a functional headquarters in Mobile, Alabama from at least 1978. There was a functional, if not formal, leadership structure that acted in a chain of command. There were central unifying doctrines, and the movement held regional and national conferences for its leaders and members. Moreover, *New Wine Magazine* served as a corporate voice for the movement.

Nevertheless, the movement’s leaders did not believe they were a denominational organization. It is noteworthy to observe that the movement never formally organized itself into a legal corporation of churches. It was always a voluntary association of churches that never kept or maintained a formal roster of affiliated churches. Each associated church or cluster of churches incorporated independently.

The lack of a legally formalized polity for the movement’s larger structures made its dissolution inevitable. Since the movement was tied together by relationships alone, when the four remaining teachers separated in 1986, the movement easily came apart. In retrospect, the movement’s dissolution, while painful to the movement’s leaders, was in their minds proof of what they always maintained: the Shepherding movement was not a denomination.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Howard Snyder, *Signs of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), 273.

<sup>53</sup> The issue of becoming a denomination or not is inherent in the movement’s history and an ongoing part of its controversy and tension. When the five leaders used the term they were referring to a formally and legally organized corporation of churches. Using this definition, they never became a denomination. They were not using the term in its sense in modern sociological classification. The movement is hard to classify because of its curious mix of separatism and ecumenism and its charismatic versus institutional tension. I believe the movement is best described as

The movement's hierarchically oriented church government was unusual, given their anti-institutional and believer's church orientation. They saw their structures as similar to John Wesley's bands and classes, in which believers were regularly challenged to be fully devoted to Christ. On several occasions the movement's leaders openly identified their church practices as similar to those in Methodism, Puritanism, and even Monasticism.<sup>54</sup> At the same time they consciously saw themselves as a renewal force being persecuted in part because they were confronting the institutional church much in the manner of the Anabaptists.<sup>55</sup>

In summary, their goal was to develop countercultural Christian communities that were models of the reality of the Kingdom of God. As the culture disintegrated these "communities of the King" would shine in the midst of the surrounding darkness.<sup>56</sup> They were certain their teachings on discipleship, shepherding, authority, and submission were necessary to build such local churches within an increasingly lawless and individualistic society.

Today the church faces new challenges that are, nevertheless, similar to those the Shepherding movement's leaders faced. The North American church is more a vendor of religious goods and services than a countercultural force acting as an effective agent of the Kingdom. Respected voices continue to note the church's failure to build visible Christian commu-

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a religious sect. See Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics II*, 175-79; Paloma, *The Charismatic Movement*, 193-95.

<sup>54</sup> Howard Snyder's books were influential in confirming the movement's approach to church structure, particularly so for Baxter and Mumford. Howard Snyder, *The Community of the King* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977); *The Problem of Wine Skins* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1975); *The Radical Wesley and Patterns for Church Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980).

<sup>55</sup> Leonard Verduin, *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1964). The movement recommended this book on the Anabaptist controversy.

<sup>56</sup> The movement often quoted Isaiah 60:1-3 as a text for the restoration of New Testament church life.

nities and develop devoted disciples.<sup>57</sup> Can this be remedied? What level of spiritual authority may pastoral leaders appropriately exercise in confronting extreme individualism and antinomian behavior among believers? What is the function of church government in producing Christian community and maturity in the unique cultural setting of North America?

These questions need to be addressed, and some are engaging in serious ecclesiological reflection and practice in this regard; but it is difficult work.<sup>58</sup> The Shepherding movement, despite its inadequacies, was engaged in this task and attempted to establish the church in all its primacy as God's redeemed people who announce and model God's reign. Its story is both a warning and a challenge.

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<sup>57</sup> Charles Van Engen, *God's Missionary People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991); Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1998).

<sup>58</sup> I have been impressed by the efforts of the Gospel and Our Culture Network to reflect and publish on the importance of ecclesiology and its relationship to developing missional churches within North America. See George Hunsberger, and Craig Von Gelder, eds., *The Church Between Gospel and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996); Darrell L. Guder, *The Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998).