

**Historical and Theological Reflection
on the Concept of “Church”
Within the *British New Church Movement*, 1950-2010**

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ABSTRACT

The British New Church Movement has roots in the period before the *Charismatic Movement* of the 1960s, and developed in parallel with it. Restorationist in character and charismatic in practice, many believed in modern day apostles (and prophets), structuring themselves in networks under their leadership. A team of early pioneers at first worked closely together, but then split into two parties. John Wimber's influence in the 80s and 90s drew British churches, and particularly the New Churches, into transatlantic issues like the rise of the *Kansas City Prophets* and the *Toronto Blessing*. At the turn of the century a small group of about a dozen New Churches chose to disintegrate, citing a number of influences, from cityreaching and spiritual warfare to church unity and the Australian writer James Thwaites. This thesis is aimed at noting the ecclesiological issues raised by the deconstruction episode, and influenced by New Church history. The Catholic ecclesologist Nicholas M Healy's book *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* is used to assess British New Church ecclesial method. A hypothesis with three parts is offered. Firstly, there is a theological gap in British New Church ecclesiology. Secondly, this is best seen as an issue of ecclesial methodology. Thirdly, theological reflection on the church's actual identity rather than its theoretical identity will best assist New Churches in understanding the nature of the gap and developing responses to deal with it. The thesis is split into two parts. Part one describes British New Church history including the deconstruction episode, and part two develops a theological response based in ecclesial methodology. A number of findings can be noted. The tendency of the New Churches towards faddism displays a gap in ecclesial understanding. A focus on *Protestant principle* has led to a neglect of *Catholic substance*. Concentrating on the main tasks of the church (community, worship and mission) rather than reductionist and perfect models would serve the church better. Leadership conceived as a craft would aid in the necessary focus. !