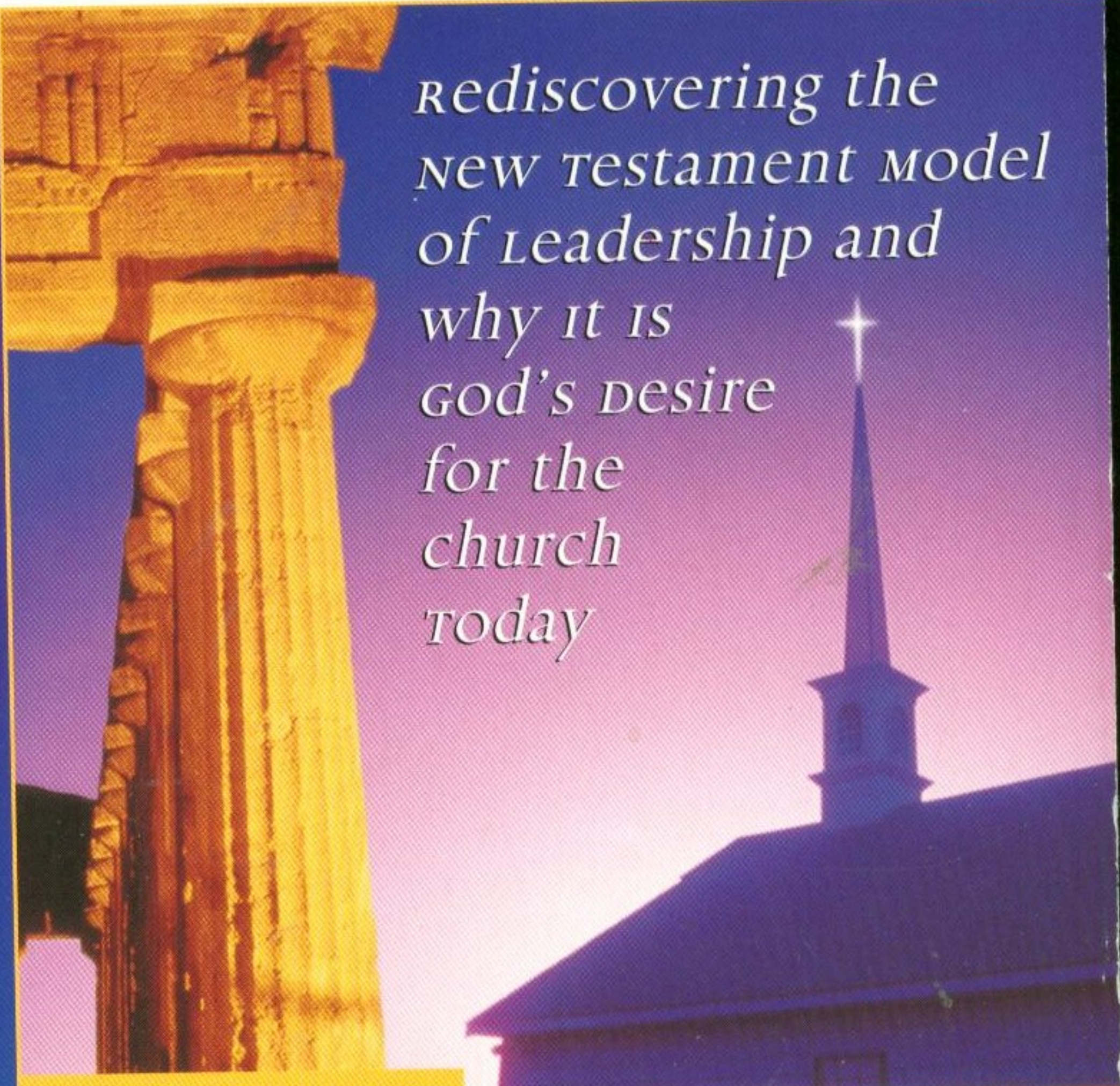


THE NEW APOSTOLIC CHURCHES

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*Rediscovering the
New Testament model
of leadership and
why it is
God's desire
for the
church
today*

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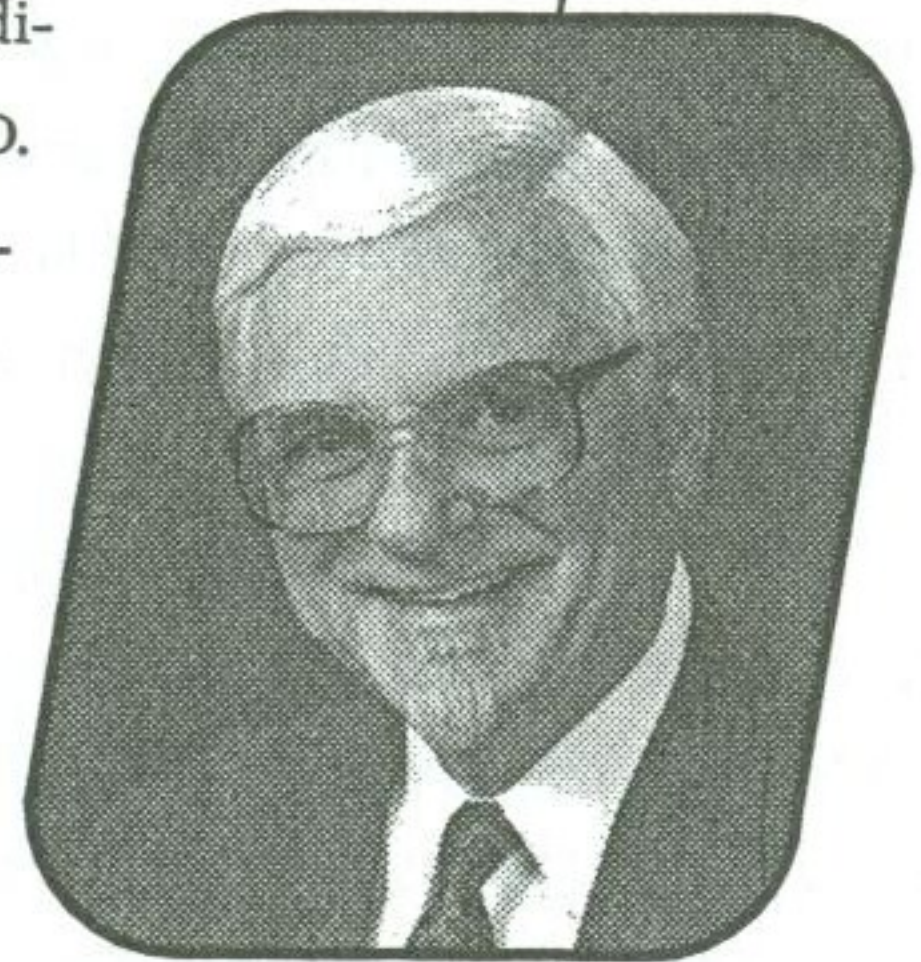
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THE NEW APOSTOLIC REFORMATION

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Dr. C. Peter Wagner is cofounder of the World Prayer Center in Colorado Springs and coordinator of the United Prayer Track of the A.D. 2000 and Beyond Movement. He is also a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary. He is the author/editor of more than 40 books.



I will soon complete 30 years as a professor of church growth on the graduate level. During these 30 years, I have studied countless Christian churches of all sizes, in all kinds of locations, from new church plants to those hundreds of years old, spanning virtually every theological tradition, and rooted in varieties of cultures on six continents. I have reported my research the best I have known how in an average of one or two books a year.

I have never been more excited about a book dealing with church growth than I am about this one, *The New Apostolic Churches*. Because I suggested to the other 18 authors that they begin their chapters with personal testimonies of how God has brought them to the places where they are now, I will follow suit. It will explain why I am so excited.

SEASONS OF RESEARCH

During my decades as a scholar, God has seen fit to focus my research energies on certain aspects of church growth for certain periods of time. As I have done that, I have tried to use what I have learned to develop new courses for my students at Fuller Theological Seminary, and many of the lessons eventually become books.

My mentor in church growth research was Donald A. McGavran, the founder of the whole field of church growth. He is now with the Lord, but for years I have had the singular privilege of carrying the title of the Donald A. McGavran Professor of Church Growth. One of the most basic lessons I learned from McGavran was that the best way to discover what makes churches grow is to study growing churches. As a result, my first season of research, spanning the 1970s and into the 1980s, was spent doing exactly that. In retrospect, I now look at this as researching the *technical* principles of church growth.

During that time, I began to notice something I obviously did not have the mental equipment to understand or to assimilate into my analysis of church growth. I noticed that the churches worldwide that seemed to grow the most rapidly were, for the most part, those that outwardly featured the immediate present-day supernatural ministry of the Holy Spirit.

My mentor for helping me make a paradigm shift into what I now call the *spiritual* principles of church growth was John Wimber, founder of the Association of Vineyard Churches and Vineyard Ministries International, to whom this book is dedicated. This began my second season of research, focusing first of all on the relationship between supernatural signs and wonders and church growth, then on prayer and spiritual warfare. This began in the early 1980s and continued to the mid-1990s.

My third season of research is now focusing on the New Apostolic Reformation, the subject of this book. I am very excited because the new apostolic churches, better than any I have previously studied, combine, on the highest level, solid *technical* principles of church growth with solid *spiritual* principles of church growth. I will tell more about that later.

UNITY + GIFTS = GROWTH

One of the most explicit Scripture verses about church growth is Ephesians 4:16, which says that the Body of which Jesus is the head, "joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes *growth* of the body" (italics added). A formula for growth, then, is: Unity (joined together) + Gifts (every part does its share) = Growth.

Paul tells us in verse 7 that each one of us has a "measure" of grace, just as Romans 12:3 says we have a "measure" of faith, the measure being our spiritual gifts. Then Ephesians 4:8 says that Jesus, when He ascended, "gave gifts to men," and it goes on to tell us that He gave gifted people to the Church on two levels: (1) the government level (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers) in verse 11, and (2) the ministry of the saints in general in verse 12. When the government is in its proper place, biblical unity of the saints emerges and "every part can do its share."

How do these biblical principles unfold in real life? For 2,000 years, the Church of Jesus Christ has grown and spread into every continent. Jesus said, "I will build My church," and He has been doing it. As we review those 2,000 years, however, it is quite obvious that Jesus does not always build His Church in the same ways. He did it one way in the Roman Empire before Constantine; another way after Constantine; another way in the Middle Ages; another way following the Reformation; another way during the era of European colonization; and yet another way post-World War II, just to name a few.

GROWTH: A STORY OF NEW WINESKINS

Every time Jesus began building His Church in a new way throughout history, He provided new wineskins. While He was still on earth, He said that such a thing would be necessary: "Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved" (Matt. 9:17). The growth of the Church through the ages is, in part, a story of new wineskins.

Because this is the case, a crucial question not only for professors of church growth, but also for Christians in general, is this: *What are the new wineskins Jesus is providing as we move into the twenty-first century?*

FOUR CRUCIAL QUESTIONS

My experience as a church growth scholar has led me constantly to ask four crucial questions:

1. Why does the blessing of God rest where it does?
2. Churches are not all equal. Why is it that at certain times, some churches are more blessed than others?
3. Can any pattern of divine blessing be discerned?
4. Do those churches that seem to be unusually blessed have any common characteristics?

As I have tried to answer these questions, it is important to realize that I am a very traditional Christian. For decades I have been an ordained Congregational minister, and I still am. We Congregationalists came over on the *Mayflower*! I find myself in one of the oldest wineskins on record. Furthermore, I am a *conservative* Congregationalist (ordained in the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference). This was definitely an obstacle to my early church growth research because while I was a missionary in Bolivia I was anti-Pentecostal, and the fastest-growing churches in Latin America at the time happened to be Pentecostal churches.

I finally overcame my biases, however, and, in 1973, wrote *Look Out! The Pentecostals Are Coming!* (Creation House). At that time, Pentecostal churches were one of the new wineskins, and their growth was showing it.

WINESKINS OF THE 1990S

That was back in the 1970s. What, however, are the new wineskins of the 1990s? Where does the blessing of God seem to be resting today?

The answer to this question began coming into focus in 1993. As a professional missiologist, I had picked up certain bits and pieces of information through the years, but until then, at least in my mind,

these bits and pieces were unrelated. Then, however, I did begin to see a pattern among three amazing church growth movements:

1. *The African Independent Churches.* These roots go back to the turn of the century when large numbers of contextualized African churches began breaking away from the traditional mission churches. Throughout the century, the growth of the independent churches in Africa has far exceeded the growth of the traditional churches.
2. *The Chinese house churches.* Particularly since the end of the Cultural Revolution in the mid-1970s, the multiplication of house churches under a hostile Marxist government in China has been a missiological phenomenon.
3. *Latin American grassroots churches.* During the past 20 years, the largest churches that have been launched in virtually every metropolitan area of Latin America are largely those that are pastored by individuals who have had no formative experience with foreign missionaries or mission-initiated institutions.

I would put these three together with the rapid growth of the American independent charismatic churches I researched for the *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, published by Zondervan in 1987. My article, entitled "Church Growth," pointed out that this was the fastest-growing segment of Christianity in the United States in our times.

What happened in 1993, then, was the realization in my mind that, indeed, a pattern of divine blessing today on certain identifiable groups of churches is discernible (Question #3). The next question then becomes (Question #4): What are their common characteristics?

A CHURCHQUAKE!

In the balance of this chapter, I will outline the nine most common characteristics of these churches I have been able to discern to date. My exposition and comments about each will, of necessity, be brief so as to keep the size of this chapter proportionate to the others in this book.

I am simultaneously working on my textbook about the subject,

which will provide abundant details. The title I am considering for the textbook is *Churchquake!*, which, to me, reflects the magnitude of change these new wineskins are bringing to the Body of Christ. In fact, I am sure we are seeing before our very eyes the most radical change in the way of doing church since the Protestant Reformation.

Let's take a brief look at nine components of the new wineskins that are shaping the Church for the twenty-first century.

1. A NEW NAME

When I began researching the Pentecostal movement years ago, it already had a name. This new movement, however, did not have a name. Because I was planning to teach a seminary course based on it, I needed a name for my course. For a couple of years I experimented

The New Apostolic Reformation is an extraordinary work of God at the close of the twentieth century that is, to a significant extent, changing the shape of Protestant Christianity around the world.

with "postdenominationalism," but strong protests from my denominational friends persuaded me that it might not be the best name. Besides, many of the new apostolic churches have remained within their denominations. "Independent charismatic" does not seem to fit either because (1) these churches see themselves as *interdependent*, as opposed to *independent*, and (2) they are not all charismatic in orientation.

The name I have settled on for the movement is the New Apostolic Reformation, and individual churches being designated as new apostolic churches.

I use "reformation" because, as I have said, these new wineskins appear to be *at least as radical as those of the Protestant Reformation almost 500 years ago*. "Apostolic" connotes a strong focus on outreach

plus a recognition of present-day apostolic ministries. "New" adds a contemporary spin to the name.

Although many people were begging for a definition of the New Apostolic Reformation from the beginning, I resisted formulating one until I believed I had a more mature grasp of the movement. Now that I have taught my first Fuller Seminary course about the subject, I believe it is time to take the risk of a definition, hoping that it will not have to be revised too frequently in the future:

The New Apostolic Reformation is an extraordinary work of God at the close of the twentieth century that is, to a significant extent, changing the shape of Protestant Christianity around the world. For almost 500 years, Christian churches have largely functioned within traditional denominational structures of one kind or another. Particularly in the 1990s, but having roots going back for almost a century, new forms and operational procedures are now emerging in areas such as local church government, interchurch relationships, financing, evangelism, missions, prayer, leadership selection and training, the role of supernatural power, worship and other important aspects of church life. Some of these changes are being seen within denominations themselves, but for the most part they are taking the form of loosely structured apostolic networks. In virtually every region of the world, these new apostolic churches constitute the fastest-growing segment of Christianity.

Infinite creativity seems to be the watchword for assigning names to local churches. The "Crystal Cathedral" and "Community Church of Joy" are among the most prominent congregations in our country. "Icthus" churches are multiplying in England. On a recent visit to the Philippines I came in contact with "The Warm Body of Jesus Church." One of my favorite churches in Argentina is "Waves of Love and Peace." In Kenya, Thomas Muthee pastors "The Prayer Cave." A friend told me of a church in Zimbabwe called the "Dodge the Devil and Go Straight to Heaven Church"!

2. NEW AUTHORITY STRUCTURE

In my judgment, views of leadership and leadership authority constitute the most radical of the nine changes from traditional Christianity. Here is the main difference: *The amount of spiritual authority delegated*

by the Holy Spirit to individuals. I have attempted to use each word in that statement advisedly. We are seeing a transition from bureaucratic authority to personal authority, from legal structure to relational structure, from control to coordination and from rational leadership to charismatic leadership. This all manifests itself on two levels: the local level and the translocal level.

On the local church level, the new apostolic pastors are the *leaders* of the church. In traditional Christianity, the pastors are regarded as *employees* of the church.

It is a question of trust. New apostolic congregations trust their pastor. Traditional congregations trust boards and committees. The difference between the two is enormous. The most passionate description of this difference I have yet seen is Lawrence Khong's chapter (15) in this book.

On the translocal level, one of the most surprising developments for those of us who are traditionalists is the growing affirmation of contemporary apostolic ministries. Our English "apostle" is a transliteration of the Greek *apostolos*, which means one who is sent out with a commission. This is an important dimension of what we are seeing, but the more surprising feature is the reaffirmation, not only of the New Testament *gift* of apostle, but also of the *office* of apostle. This is one of the first books I have seen that includes a chapter by one who designates himself "Apostle John Kelly," much like the apostle Paul did in most of his Epistles.

3. NEW LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Although new apostolic pastors are fervently dedicated to leading their churches, they are equally dedicated to releasing the people of their congregations to do the ministry of the church. A characteristic of many new apostolic churches is an abundance of volunteers. Church members are normally taught that part of being a good Christian is to discover the spiritual gifts God has given them and to minister to others through those gifts as well as through any natural talents they might also have.

Members of the paid pastoral staff of typical new apostolic churches are usually homegrown. As all the believers in the congregation become active in ministry, certain ones tend to rise to the top like

cream on fresh milk, and they are the ones who are then recruited for the staff. Because for many this involves a midlife career change, the possibility of their enrolling for two or three years in the residence program of a traditional seminary or Bible school is extremely remote. Therefore, academic requirements for ordination, so long the staple in traditional churches, are being scrapped. New apostolic ordination is primarily rooted in personal relationships, which verify character, and in proved ministry skills.

Traditional Christianity starts with the present situation and focuses on the past. New apostolic Christianity starts with the present situation and focuses on the future.

Continuing education for leaders more frequently takes place in conferences, seminars and retreats rather than in classrooms of accredited institutions. Little aversion is noticed for quality training, but the demands are many for alternate delivery systems. A disproportionate number of new apostolic churches, especially the large ones, are establishing their own in-house Bible schools.

One of the most notable features of new apostolic churches, which traditional church leaders soon discover to their amazement, is the absence of nominating committees (to place lay leaders within the congregation) and of search committees (to locate and recruit new staff members).

4. NEW MINISTRY FOCUS

Traditional Christianity starts with the present situation and focuses on the past. New apostolic Christianity starts with the present situation and focuses on the future.

Many traditional churches are *heritage driven*. "We must get back to our roots. We need to pray for renewal"—meaning that we should once again be what we used to be. The founders of the movement are

often thought of as standing shoulder to shoulder with the 12 apostles.

On the other hand, new apostolic church leaders are *vision driven*. In a conversation with a new apostolic senior pastor about his church, I once asked, "How many cell groups do you have?" I think that was sometime in 1996.

He replied, "We will have 600 by the year 2000!"

I can't seem to recall ever finding out how many cells he did have in 1996. As far as the pastor was concerned, though, that apparently didn't matter at all. In his mind, the 600 cells were not imaginary, they were real. The 600 was what really mattered.

5. NEW WORSHIP STYLE

In only a few exceptions, new apostolic churches use contemporary worship styles. Contemporary worship is the one characteristic of the New Apostolic Reformation that has already penetrated the most deeply into traditional and denominational churches across-the-board. Many churches that would not at all be considered new apostolic are now using contemporary worship in at least one of their weekend services.

Worship leaders have replaced music directors. Keyboards have replaced pipe organs. Casual worship teams have replaced robed choirs. Overhead projectors have replaced hymnals. Ten to 12 minutes of congregational singing is now 30 to 49 minutes or even more. Standing during worship is the rule, although a great amount of freedom for body language prevails.

As you scan a new apostolic congregation in worship, you will likely see some sitting, some kneeling, some looking at the ceiling, some lying prostrate on the floor, some holding up hands, some closing their eyes, some clapping their hands, some wiping tears from their eyes, some using tambourines, some dancing and some just walking around.

"Performance" is a naughty word for new apostolic worship leaders. Their goal is to help every person in the congregation become an active "participant" in worship. Frequent applause is not congratulating those on the platform for their musical excellence, but it is seen as high tribute to the triune God.

6. NEW PRAYER FORMS

Prayer in new apostolic churches has taken forms rarely seen in traditional congregations. Some of this takes place within the church and some takes place outside the church.

The actual number of prayer times and the cumulative number of minutes spent in prayer during the worship service of new apostolic churches far exceeds the prayer time of the average traditional church. Worship leaders weave frequent times of prayer into singing worship songs. Many of them argue that true worship is, in itself, a form of prayer, so blending the two seems natural. A considerable number of new apostolic churches practice *concert prayer*, in which all worshipers are praying out loud at the same time, some in a prayer language and some in the vernacular. At times in some churches, each one will begin singing a prayer, creating a loud, harmonious sound not unlike the sound of the medieval Gregorian chant.

New apostolic leaders have been among the first to understand and put into practice some of the newer forms of prayer that take place in the community itself, not in the church. For many, praise marches, prayerwalking, prayer journeys and prayer expeditions have become a part of congregational life and ministry. Just as a matter of interest, as I am drafting this chapter, 55 members of one local church, New Life Church of Colorado Springs, are preparing to leave three weeks from now for Nepal, high in the Himalayas, to pray on-site for each of the 43 major, yet-unreached people groups of the nation.

7. NEW FINANCING

New apostolic churches experience relatively few financial problems. Although no vision-driven church believes it has enough resources to fulfill the vision adequately, and although financial crises do come from time to time, still, compared to traditional churches, finances are abundant. I think at least three discernible reasons explain this situation.

First, generous giving is expected. Tithing is taught without apology, and those who do not tithe their incomes are subtly encouraged to evaluate their Christian lives as subpar.

Second, giving is beneficial, not only to the church and its ministry in the kingdom of God, but also to the giver. Tithes and offerings are

regarded as seeds that will produce fruit of like kind for individuals and families. Luke 6:38, which says that if we give, it will be given to us in greater measure, is taken literally.

Third, giving is cheerful. It is not yet a common practice, but I have been in new apostolic churches in which the congregation breaks out into a rousing, athletic-event kind of shouting and clapping the moment the pastor announces he is collecting the morning offering. They are cheerful givers and they want everyone else to know it. I rarely hear the complaint in new apostolic churches I often hear in traditional churches: The pastor talks about money too much.

8. NEW OUTREACH

Aggressively reaching out to the lost and hurting of the community and the world is part of the new apostolic DNA. These churches assiduously attempt to avoid the "bless me syndrome" as they try to live up to their apostolic nature and calling. They do seek personal blessings from God, but usually as means to the end of reaching others. A worship song I frequently hear in new apostolic churches says: "Let your glory fall in this room; let it go forth from here to the nations."

Planting new churches is usually an assumed part of what a local congregation does. The question is not whether we should do it, but when and how. The same applies to foreign missions. One of the more interesting developments for a missiologist like me is that a large number of congregations are becoming involved, as congregations, in foreign missions. This does not mean they are necessarily bypassing mission agencies, especially newer ones such as Youth With A Mission, but it does mean they are expanding their options for influencing their people to participate in a more direct and personal way in world outreach.

Compassion for the poor, the outcast, the homeless, the disadvantaged and the handicapped is a strong characteristic of most new apostolic churches. Many other churches do a lot of talking about helping unfortunate people, but new apostolic churches seem to find ways to actually do it. The Vineyard Christian Fellowship of Anaheim, California, for example, distributes almost \$2 million worth of food to hungry people in their area every year. The Cathedral of Faith in San Jose, California, has constructed a million-dollar food distribution

warehouse facility and it has become one of the largest food distribution centers in the state. Other local churches are doing similar things.

9. NEW POWER ORIENTATION

I mentioned earlier that the New Apostolic Reformation seems to be combining the technical principles of church growth with the spiritual principles of church growth better than any similar grouping of churches I have observed. Even those new apostolic churches that do not consider themselves charismatic usually have a sincere openness to the work of the Holy Spirit and a consensus that all the New Testament spiritual gifts are in operation today.

The majority of the new apostolic churches not only believe in the work of the Holy Spirit, but they also regularly invite Him to come into their midst to bring supernatural power. It is commonplace, therefore, to observe active ministries of healing, demonic deliverance, spiritual warfare, prophecy, falling in the Spirit, spiritual mapping, prophetic acts, fervent intercession and travail, and so on in new apostolic churches.

A basic theological presupposition in new apostolic, as contrasted to traditional, churches is that supernatural power tends to open the way for applying truth, rather than vice versa. This is why visitors will frequently observe in these churches what seems to be more emphasis on the heart than on the mind. Some conclude from this that new apostolic churches are "too emotional."

CONCLUSION

The more I have studied the New Apostolic Reformation during the past few years, the more convinced I have become that we have a major transformation of Christianity on our hands. Don Miller titles his excellent new book on the subject *Reinventing American Protestantism* (University of California Press). By extension, I believe we are witnessing a reinventing of world Christianity. If that is the case, it is all the more reason to give God thanks for allowing us to be alive and active in His kingdom in these enthralling days.