

# Charismatic Leaders Address Ministry Trends

**Pastors and ministry leaders gathered in Dallas in January to discuss the future of the church**

When revivalist Steve Hill took the microphone at the annual meeting of the Charismatic Leaders Council, he asked a woman in the back of the conference room to dim the lights. After speaking for a few minutes he asked her to dim them even more.

"This is what is happening in today's church," Hill told the group, which included healing evangelist Benny Hinn, Baptist broadcaster James Robison and theologian C. Peter Wagner. "There is a dimming of the gospel taking place in America. We've got to start preaching the cross again."

The impressive group of Pentecostal and charismatic church leaders met in a hotel in Dallas in early January. Convened by veteran Pentecostal pastor Jack Hayford and Charisma's publisher, Stephen Strang, the group listened to panels that included Bishop T.D. Jakes, Argentinean pastor Claudio Freidzon, Jane Hansen of Aglow International and John Dawson, president of Youth With a Mission (YWAM).

Hill's sober warning was underscored by Ron Luce, founder of Teen Mania, who delivered a plea for renewed focus on youth ministry. Luce cited statistics about American teens that made some people squirm. Included at the top of his list was the fact that only 4 percent of today's teens are or will be evangelical Christians.

"We are losing," Luce said bluntly. "What sort of world will

our children and grandchildren grow up in?"

Several panel members lamented the fact that charismatic leaders are faltering, either by lack of integrity or by failure to pass the baton to younger leaders. Meanwhile, Jakes, pastor of the 30,000-member Potter's House church in Dallas, pleaded with his colleagues to provide merciful restoration to ministers who have suffered moral failures.

Other participants expressed concerns that U.S. churches are watering down the gospel and making their message seeker-sensitive in order to attract crowds. Said Seattle pastor Casey Treat: "I am excited about 'relevant' ministry. But have we become so relevant to the world that we've become irrelevant to God?"

Not all the talk was negative. Many panel members said they were hopeful that genuine revival is around the corner-just in time for the 100th anniversary of the Azusa Street revival that launched the Pentecostal movement.

"Out of our constriction and confinement, a new thing will emerge in 2006," predicted healing evangelist Mahesh Chavda, who said his North Carolina church is fasting and praying for a spiritual awakening this year.

Bible teacher R.T. Kendall, former pastor of Westminster Chapel in London, said he has sensed for years that true revival is on the horizon. "Something big is at hand. Isaac is coming!" Kendall said.

"What we have seen up to now is Ishmael. Abraham thought that Ishmael was the promised child. Wrong. As the promise to Isaac

was proportionately greater than the promise to Ishmael, so what is coming is that much greater than anything we have seen. It will at long last be the coming together of the Word and the Spirit.”

James Robison surprised everyone in the room with his pleas for Christian unity. Admitting that he cannot wear the charismatic label, he begged everyone else to take theirs off. “We cannot let our theological beliefs nullify love itself,” he said.

Several voices also reminded the group that God is calling women not simply into ministry but also into church leadership. YWAM’s Dawson told the group about 25-year-old Brianna Esswein, a vivacious missionary nurse who died in Nigeria in December when a truck plowed into her van. He expressed hopes that Esswein’s story will inspire a new generation of women to head to the mission field.

Perhaps the most hopeful signals came from international and ethnic voices. Hispanic church planter Sammy Rodriguez reminded the group that Hispanics and other immigrant communities are the fastest-growing segments of the American church. Korean-American pastor Ché Ahn, whose father started the first Korean Southern Baptist church in the U.S. 47 years ago, said Asian charismatics in this country are using their wealth and education to transform society.

Myles Munroe, a Bahamian megachurch pastor and international speaker, chided the Americans for being too narrow-noting that our sport of baseball celebrates a World Series that is for U.S. and Canadian teams only. Said Munroe: “You must develop a global focus.”

**J. Lee Grady in Dallas**