

Will the Apostolic Movement Die With the Millennial Generation?

The so-called millennium generation has seemed to develop certain presuppositions that are presently a huge challenge that can hinder the continuation of the present apostolic reformation in North America and beyond.

The new apostolic reformation was a phrase coined by Dr. Peter Wagner in the early 2000s to describe the new wave of visionary leaders in the global church with apostolic gifts, who lead (nondenominational) networks of churches.

As a part of this movement in the USA since the late 1980s, I founded an apostolic church (Resurrection church of New York in Sunset Park, Brooklyn), a regional apostolic network of apostolic leaders in the church and marketplace (Christ Covenant Coalition), and am presently the national convener of the United States Coalition of Apostolic Leaders. Related to all of this, I have worked with many apostolic leaders globally.

That being said, I have also observed some of the ways many apostolic leaders function that are a challenge to the present mindset of millennial leaders in the body of Christ. Whether one agrees with these young people or not, it is a challenge apostolic leaders must overcome if they are going to successfully perpetuate apostolic vision into the next generation—especially in developed nations and among the educated in developing nations. (Irrespective of what nation a young person lives in, the more educated, the more they tend to think the way I have illustrated it in this missive.)

To help overcome this challenge, we have formed “The Futures Alliance” to connect and converge with the top leaders in our

nation under 40. They continually give me and others input so we can understand how they think and ways we could work together for the kingdom.

My statements in this article are meant to be very general. Hence there are exceptions to every one of my points, as I have also met many young people who do not espouse every one of the views I am setting forth.

The following are some of the challenges next-generation leaders have with the apostolic reformation:

1. Next-generation leaders do not like vestiges of authority and power. Several very smart young people I have spoken to (including my two biological sons) tell me how they are turned off by symbols of authority in the church services. Things such as elders sitting on a platform, pastors preaching from a platform, the minister wearing clergy attire, and the like are often complete turnoffs. (The use of clergy attire is more in use among apostolic leaders in the more episcopal traditions—for instance, those who use the term bishop instead of pastor.)

2. Next-generation leaders are casual in their appearance. While many apostolic leaders dress formally, young people (especially among Caucasian young people) are extremely casual and may be turned off by pastors and attendees in church services dressing formally. (Of course, my first point related to clergy attire can also fit here, but I used it in the previous point because it comports with vestiges of ecclesial authority, not merely formality in dress.)

3. Next-generation leaders are not religious. Many apostolic leaders continue to use the same expressions they used in church 20-30 years ago. Young people are turned off by excessive religious language in church services like the continual use of the words “amen”, “hallelujah” and “praise the Lord.” Also, the intense shaking, shouting, and physical

gyrations are viewed as unnatural and weird. (I am speaking more about religious behavior and tradition than a spontaneous response to the undeniable presence and move of God in a church service.)

4. Next-generation leaders are looking for authentic relationships more than ministry. Apostolic leaders and visionaries are often focused more on accomplishing the mission than building relationally with the people. Young people long for a church culture where relationships are deepened in addition to having a strong sense of purpose and mission.

5. Next-generation leaders work from the bottom up, not the top down. Often, especially in developing nations and among certain contexts in North America, apostolic leaders function autocratically and lead from the top down. Young people are egalitarian and want to be respected and treated more like peers, not like some mindless followers. I have also found that the more educated and empowered a congregation is (irrespective of age) the more they have learned critical thinking skills and shy away from leadership styles that are demanding, dogmatic and dictatorial.

6. Next-generation leaders shy away from the culture wars. While many apostolic leaders have been front and center in the culture wars, young people are weary of the right versus left culture war tussle. Unfortunately, many young leaders have gone too far and moved away from taking a position in their churches when it comes to serious moral issues such as abortion, marriage and sexual ethics. While I agree with their concern about the Christian right and left going too far interweaving the gospel with politics, I also believe the gospel is irrevocably connected to morality and societal ethics, which should result in maintaining certain standards. Those who refuse to take a stand will eventually find their churches overrun with confusion related to sexual identity, immorality and a progressive humanism that runs counter to the

authority of Scripture.

7. Next-generation leaders advocate for social justice. While many apostolic leaders have been very vocal regarding socially moral issues, young people have been invigorated to fight against the sex slave industry, racism, economic injustice and the like. They are sick and tired of focusing on what the church is “against” and want to focus on what the church “is for”! Any church that has a vision to love and empower humanity irrespective of race, gender and economic status will have an easier time garnering the attention of young people. While I realize that the term “social justice” is an old mantra for socialism, its meaning has also been expanded to include things that can coincide with the gospel.

8. Next-generation leaders focus on serving the community. Whereas many in the apostolic movement want to transform nations politically, many young people are not as interested in “reforming society.” However, they feel more compelled to meet the practical needs of their community. Reaching others through art, music, mentoring and befriending the lost and lonely are things for which they have passion. Hence, many apostolic leaders have been “macro” and young people “micro” in their approach to seeing the renewal of all things on earth.

9. Next-generation leaders primarily focus on their parish, not their region. Many apostolic leaders and centers have a vision for reaching their region and beyond, while many young people focus more on reaching their immediate community. The difference in methodology is the apostolic regional church versus the parish church model. Young leaders tend to focus more on developing church campuses with each campus adopting a parish model in regards to concentrating on their own local community.

10. Next-generation leaders connect together using social media. Older, apostolic leaders are utilizing social media and

texting more and more, but young people have been born into this technological age and are as accustomed to connecting through social media as a fish is used to living underwater. Apostolic leaders need to continue to grow in their use of social media if they are going to connect with millennials, and millennials have to develop their interpersonal skills if they want to be more balanced.

11. Next-generation leaders are mobile. While most apostolic leaders have been located in the same region for decades, many young people who are constantly in geographic transition create a culture depending on where they have the best opportunity. (Even young pastors have a tendency to move geographically more frequently than the past generation who often made a commitment to one community for decades.)

12. Next-generation leaders are not hierarchical but relational. While many apostolic leaders use ecclesiastical titles like “apostle” and “bishop,” young people are uncomfortable with titles and anything hierarchical. They would much rather relate to other people on a first name basis.

13. Next generation leaders are uncomfortable with the prosperity gospel. While many apostolic leaders are visionaries with amazing fund raising skills, many young people connote a strong appeal for finances with the so-called prosperity gospel. Many even shy away from utilizing the scriptures that speak about God rewarding faithful tithers and instead focus on giving to God purely out of love and generosity. Of course, the legitimate apostolic leaders I partner with are also uncomfortable with the notion of turning the church into a fund-raising machine and or the use of God for personal gain and prosperity. The truth is, God does reward financial faithfulness and generously gives back more than we can ever sow into His kingdom, but our motives have to be pure before God as we are called to seek first His kingdom.

14. Next-generation leaders are entrepreneurial. One primary thing both apostolic leaders and millennial leaders have in common is, by nature, they both tend to be entrepreneurial. Apostolic leaders who understand this should focus on empowering the creativity in young people. They need to realize that this is a generation with more knowledge, technology and opportunity to be self-employed than any recent generation. Apostolic leaders who treat millennials like stationary employees (like the factory workers and unionized workers of their own era), will miss a great opportunity to connect the next generation with the present apostolic reformation. {eoa}