

Manuscript prepared for *The Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements in California: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*. Conference at Southern California College, Costa Mesa, CA. October 9-10, 1998. (October revision)

## REVIVING PENTECOSTALISM AT THE MILLENNIUM: THE HARVEST ROCK STORY

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### Prologue:

*God is saying, I want to rebuild the walls of Los Angeles. I want to nurse Los Angeles like when Amy Semple McPherson healed and fed the city and shook it from end to end.' God began to deal with me about His covenant of love with Los Angeles. . . This city has been the cradle of revivals. When God looks on Los Angeles, He doesn't just look at the devastation. He remembers the covenant of those who loved Him and were poured out for Him. He remembers William Seymour. He remembers Frank Bartleman. He remembers these guys -- and He will not easily give up. He bound Himself in a love covenant with people and with a city.<sup>1</sup>*

Whatever else its nature, the story of the American Pentecostal-Charismatic (p/c) movement has always included the surreal, the serendipitous, and the supernatural. As one long-time Pentecostal recently commented to me, "Virtual reality' has always been part of our history." The illusive and the real often blend together, providing ample illustrations of the fact that reality is not what it first appears to be. God seemed to be expressing a sense of divine humor when She birthed Pentecostalism in an area that would soon become the movie capital of the world!

The southern California production that came to be known as the p/c movement has included a wide array of internationally known actors, including William Seymour, Amy Semple

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<sup>1</sup> From a sermon delivered by Lou Engle. Audiotape labeled "Sunday Morning, January 25, 1998. Harvest Rock Church, 1539 E. Howard Street, Pasadena, CA."

McPherson, Kathryn Kuhlman, Demos Shakarian, Dennis Bennett, John Wimber, and Jan & Paul Crouch. These and others starred in scenes that ranged from the first Pentecostal revival at Azusa Street in Los Angeles, to the founding of denominations and parachurch organizations, to the launching of the charismatic stream of the movement, and with the recent move of Trinity Broadcasting Network to Costa Mesa, CA, to the resilience of p/c television. It should not be surprising that the Los Angeles area has also produced a significant player in the 1990s renewal/revival that is presently sweeping the p/c world.

A leading role in the renewal/revival in southern California is being played by Harvest Rock Church (HRC), located in Pasadena at the U.S. Center for World Mission in Mott Auditorium. (Ironically the church is located on the site of the former Nazarene campus where early Nazarenes prayed for revival -- and rejected it when it came in the form of Azusa Street.) With renewal services still being held three nights a week, its church leaders traveling as conference speakers, the regular sponsorship of renewal conferences, the founding of Harvest International Ministries and a new proposed School of Ministry, HRC has developed a strong institutional base to proclaim its message. The Harvest Rock story is one that includes prophecy and foresight, seeming miracles and wise choices, divine invitation and human responses. It is an exemplar of a dominant stream of the larger renewal/revival movement that is presently revitalizing the p/c subculture.<sup>2</sup>

Since the cast of characters include names that may be unfamiliar to most p/c scholars

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<sup>2</sup> This introduction is not intended to be whimsical but rather to highlight what is so often missing from the non-pentecostal-charismatic (p/c) culture and is often downplayed by scholars reporting on p/c Christianity. The Harvest Rock story demonstrates well what Jean-Jacques Suurmond has described as the "word and spirit at play." *Play* is not limited to Sunday worship for many p/c believers but it is an ongoing drama that is enacted in their daily lives. See Jean-Jacques Suurmond, *World and Spirit at Play. Towards a Charismatic Theology*. 1994. SCM Press Ltd. London.

(who are still hard at work unraveling the details of past revivals), this narrative will begin with an introduction of the major players through which the story of Harvest Rock's founding has unfolded. Three of the pastors have become well-known "names and faces" in the renewal movement: Che Ahn, Lou Engle, and Rick (and Pam) Wright are all playing a visible roles in the larger renewal/revival. Their introductions will be placed within p/c narrative that allows for the supernatural to blend with the natural, something that has always been characteristic of the p/c worldview. It is only after the key players have been introduced to frame the Harvest Rock story that I will assume the role of a sociological analyst, using the tools of my trade to suggest the direction this current stream of renewal/revival may be flowing.

### **How It All Began: Dreaming Dreams, Seeing Visions**

The story of Harvest Rock begins in Maryland in 1982 with the friendship and a common vision of Che Ahn and Lou Engle. Engle shared his recollection of the initial call as follows:

*The year is 1982. I am in Maryland, and Che is pastor of a church. Che has a dream. In the dream a black man is saying, "Come to Los Angeles. There is going to be a great revival. There is going to be a great harvest." Then he woke up--and the Holy Spirit was upon him. Che began to seek confirmation and to seek council from the leadership of People of Destiny International (PDI).<sup>3</sup>*

Ahn prayed that Larry Tomzak, co-founder of PDI would ask him to plant a new church as a confirmation to the dream. Six months passed before Tomzak asked him out to lunch--a lunch during which Ahn was certain Tomzak would ask him to establish a new congregation. And so it came to pass--although Tomzak preferred that the new congregation to be closer to Maryland than the site of Ahn's dream. The elders of PDI, however, were open to Ahn's request that the church be established in California, but they asked him to seek further confirmation. It was for the purpose of "seeking God" that Ahn spent a few days in a condominium in Ocean City, Maryland. At one point, Ahn had an "impression" to turn on the television to see if Pat Robertson's "700 Club" was on the air. Ahn surfed the channels and came to Robertson's show

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<sup>3</sup> Interview conducted with Lou Engle in Pasadena on February 19, 1996. All other references to this interview will be cited as "Engle, Interview 1996."

just as he was giving a word of knowledge: “There is a pastor who is asking God for a confirmation about planting a church. The Lord says this of him. ‘And if you go out in unity and harmony, the Lord will give you great success.’”

Ahn was astounded, hoping the program would be rerun later in the evening so that he could tape it as the requested confirmation for his perceived divine call. He set up a portable tape recorder, and, sure enough, the program was shown again later that evening. When he played the tape for the pastors and elders the following week, all were convinced that Ahn had heard from God. In 1984 twelve persons from PDI, including Che Ahn and Lou Engle left for Los Angeles as the black man in the dream instructed.<sup>4</sup> They had been reading a book by Frank Bartleman, the reporter who made Pentecostal history with his first-hand account of the Azusa Street Revival, and felt “called” to settle in Pasadena to await a fresh move of the Spirit in the greater Los Angeles area. Engle shared the following during a personal interview:

*In that book, he (Bartleman) was claiming Pasadena for God. We had been crying out to God about where we should go, and this book seemed to be instructing us to come to Pasadena. . . . Phineas Bresee (founder of the Church of the Nazarene) had come into the city and said, ‘By the grace of God, I am going to light a fire that reaches the heavens in Pasadena.’ Now when the Pentecostal outpouring came, Frank Bartleman and Bresee were worlds apart on it. Bresee said basically that the Pentecostal thing would be just a little ripple in what God was doing. Bartleman was a better prophet than Bresee.*<sup>5</sup>

The next ten years were difficult ones for the visionaries who settled into Pasadena in 1984. The cold brass heavens seemed to reflect the widespread p/c “spiritual drought” of the 1980s where the rapid growth the p/c movement experienced in the 1970s was fast becoming but a memory. Despite prayer, fasting and active evangelism, there was no sign of the expected revival. Over the years Ahn’s church grew to about 500 people, but it was not the revival of the founder’s dreams. As Ahn described the situation:

*On other fronts, we did everything possible to evangelize during that decade. We*

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<sup>4</sup>Taken from Chapter 1 of *Into the Fire* (working title) a manuscript presently in-process by Che Ahn recounting his story. References to the manuscript will appear as “Ahn, *Into the Fire*.”

<sup>5</sup>Engle, “Interview 1996.”

*did open air preaching at California State of Los Angeles. We went door to door witnessing. We did street theater. We went into the ghettos. We held special meetings. We brought in special speakers. Yet we saw little fruit. Evangelically the church started to grow, and God started to add some wonderful people--but it was a far cry from revival.<sup>6</sup>*

Light sometimes came through the brass, as when Engle heard a promise that the mantle of Frank Bartleman would be his. In the midst of the struggles and crises which caused Ahn to describe the period as “the eighties from Hades,” Engle continued his prayer for revival:

*During this season I picked up this book by Bartleman again, and the Lord began stirring in my heart that this is what he wanted to do in Los Angeles again. One night--I think I had been fasting and praying--I just cried out to God. I cried, “Give me the mantle of Frank Bartleman. I want to see revival--I want to see revival in Pasadena.”*

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<sup>6</sup>Ahn, Chapter 1, *Into the Fire*.

*The next day a brother comes up to me--someone with whom I had covenanted and with whom my heart is knit. He didn't know what I had been praying for, but he said, "I had a dream of you last night, and in the dream I saw a black book. On it I read the word 'revival' on the cover. I turned on the inside and saw the picture of a guy's face, and it said 'Frank Bartleman.' I was looking at his face, and it turned into your face."<sup>7</sup>*

The prayer and its seeming confirmation, coupled with still other serendipitous encounters, helped to keep Engle's vision alive, as he continued to encourage and support his friend, Che Ahn.

Ahn received another faith boost when he met the black man of his prophetic dream. It was during a clergy gathering in 1992 that Ahn spotted the man who in a dream a decade earlier said, "Come to Los Angeles. There is going to be a great revival. There is going to be a great harvest." Ahn approached him and asked him if he had been praying for revival. The man replied that he had begun praying for revival in Los Angeles in 1982 when we heard a Korean (probably Paul Yonggi Cho) speak about how he had prayed for revival in Korea. This encounter provided a fresh encouragement for both Ahn and Engle. As the latter noted of this spiritual watershed, "We felt this was a sign that Azusa Street still lives."

Problems between the church in Pasadena and the parent People of Destiny International were brewing during the years of drought and came to a head in 1993. It was during that time that renewal prophetess Cindy Jacobs called Ahn and told him that 1993 would be the hardest year of his life and that he would be leaving the church he founded, "but not until 1994." Soon afterwards, Ahn made the decision to resign as pastor. Ahn describes the aftermath as follows:

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<sup>7</sup>Engle, "Interview 1996".

*The leaders accepted my resignation as senior pastor, but asked for me to stay on for a one year transition period. I agreed. I stepped down as senior pastor, and became a staff evangelist. A pastor whom I had raised up became the new senior pastor. Now the young man to whom I was a pastor while he was in seminary became my new pastor and my boss. My salary was drastically reduced, and to say the least, so was my pride. Yet the real pain I was facing was deep confusion and personal disillusionment. . . I didn't realize it then, but God was breaking me and preparing me for 1994, the year that God would begin to fulfill the dream of the promised revival.<sup>8</sup>*

Relief from the deep depression that had engulfed Ahn came with the outbreak of the renewal in California early in 1994. Just weeks after the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship (then Toronto Airport Vineyard) experienced its first touch of renewal on January 23, 1994, the Anaheim Vineyard Christian Fellowship held a Healing Conference where Che Ahn had his first taste of holy laughter. Ahn was in self-described "depression" from the events of 1993 and his departure from the church he had founded, but at the Anaheim Vineyard conference, he experienced an unexpected refreshing:

*My friend Lou poked me with his elbow and excitedly yelled, "It's coming towards us! It's coming towards us!" I remember saying, "Well, I'm not going to laugh." But when the Holy Spirit hit our section, I felt myself getting inebriated. I could not stop laughing. It lasted at least twenty minutes. Everything was funny--even though no one was saying anything funny. It was a wonderful, refreshing experience that seemed to invigorate every part of my being. I didn't even notice until later that my depression was gone! I was excited about ministry again.<sup>9</sup>*

In March, 1994, Ahn and Engle invited fifteen people who were unchurched to join them for a prayer meeting. Thirty persons showed up for this initial gathering in Ahn's home that soon led to the founding of Harvest Rock Church.

### **Renewal/Revival and Harvest Rock Church**

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<sup>8</sup> Ahn, Chapter 1. *Into the Fire*.

<sup>9</sup>Ahn, Chapter 1. *Into the Fire*. See also Ahn's testimony in the video "Go Inside The Toronto Blessing." 1997. Lavin Company, Inc. Distributed by Fresh Start Marketing, Inc. Canton, OH.

*Basically this church was planted in the Renewal. We didn't have to work through the problem of those who didn't want it. We didn't have any divisions--only Renewal straight through.*<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Engle, "Interview 1996"



During the desert experience of the 1980s and early 1990s Ahn and Engle's vision for revival was nurtured by dreams, visions, and prophecies, only a few of which have been briefly recounted here. A visit to Argentina where revival ignited in 1982 and continues at the time of this writing<sup>11</sup> also helped to keep alive the dream for a revival in Los Angeles, but it was the Vineyard conference that most directly precipitated the founding of Harvest Rock Church (HRC) in April, 1994.

Ahn and Engle made their first trip to the Toronto Airport Vineyard for the first "Catch the Fire Conference" in October, 1994. They both received what Engle had described as "another explosion," an experience of empowerment together with the physical manifestations that often accompany the renewal blessing. Ahn then asked John Arnott, pastor of the Toronto church, if he would be willing to come to Pasadena to speak and minister. When Arnott accepted their invitation and came to the rented facilities at Mott Auditorium on January 2, 1995, more than 2,000 people showed up. This event represented HRC's debut on the Internet as a renewal "hot spot" -- an American extension of the Toronto Blessing that had erupted nearly a year earlier and was attracting international attention.<sup>12</sup> It was around this event that Rick Wright, a Vineyard pastor from Glendale, California, joined the Ahn and Engle team.

Wright's vision for revival of the Los Angeles area began in 1981 when he was pastor of

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<sup>11</sup> For articles describing the Argentine revival, see C. Peter Wagner and Pablo Dieros (ed.) *The Rising Revival*. 1998. Gospel Light: Ventura, CA.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of the development of the Toronto Blessing from a sociological perspective, see Margaret M. Poloma, "The 'Toronto Blessing': Charisma, Institutionalization and Revival." *Journal for the Social Scientific Study of Religion*, 36:2. 1997 (pp. 257-71) and "The Spirit Movement in North America at the Millennium: From Azusa Street to Toronto, Pensacola and Beyond." *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, 12. 1998 (pp. 83-107).

a small charismatic church he had founded in Glendale, CA over 2000 miles away from Maryland where Ahn and Engle would catch a similar vision a year later. As Wright shared in a personal interview:

*The Lord gave me a word that we would see more people saved than we had buildings for them. All I knew is that we were going to have an incredible revival. That word became a passion, as my vision moved beyond Glendale to expand to the greater Los Angeles area.*<sup>13</sup>

Wright's passion was fueled by prophecies given in the mid to late 1980s by prophets Bob Jones and Rick Joyner as they began to speak of the visions they had received about Los Angeles. As Wright noted, "We knew our vision would fit right in." But it took more than a decade for Wright to experience a taste of the revival which he had believed was forthcoming. In the early 1990s, Wright began to pray, "Lord, where is this revival?" He sensed the Lord responding, "Continue to knock for two and a half more years and I will begin to answer your prayer." Based on this "word of knowledge," Wright said he expected something major to happen at the end of 1993 or the beginning of 1994. When he heard about the Toronto experience, he became convinced that a similar development would occur in Southern California. As Wright noted:

*Bob Jones told us the revival would "start in the northeast in the land of chickadee." I asked him, 'What does that mean.' He replied that he did not know. So when the renewal started in Toronto, I called and asked the secretary, 'Do you know what a 'chickadee' is?' She said yes -- 'they are the little birds that fly around up here.' I thought, 'Praise God! This is it!'*<sup>14</sup>

It wasn't until John Arnott came to Pasadena several months later that Wright received what he believes is another "word" from the Lord about the upcoming revival:

*On the morning of the 4th (of January), the Lord gave me a mini-vision and said, 'I am opening the heavens over Los Angeles; go tell Che to pray for strategy.' I go over to tell Che a few days later, and he tells me that the Lord told him, 'I putting you and Rick together for revival.'*<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Taken from a personal interview with Rick Wright, March 20, 1998. Future citations made to "Wright Interview 1998."

<sup>14</sup> Wright, "Interview 1998."

<sup>15</sup> Wright, "Interview 1998." Just after Ahn and Wright met with the leaders of the AVC and withdrew as a Vineyard on December 8, 1995, they received a prophetic sign affirming their

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call to work together. As Che Ahn finished saying to Rick Wright, “At least we know that God has brought us together for this work,” they spotted a black Mercedes with a license plate that read RICK CHE. This story is one that I heard from several different people when I was a frequent visitor to HRC in early 1996.

Wright's Glendale church joined with HRC in hosting the protracted renewal meetings that were being held five nights a week. In response to Wright's request, the board of elders of the Glendale Vineyard then gave their approval to a merger with Harvest Rock Church. The two churches joined together in March, 1995, to be known for the first nine months of their existence as the Vineyard Christian Fellowship of Greater Pasadena.<sup>16</sup> After the Toronto church was

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<sup>16</sup> Soon after the two congregations joined together, Mott Auditorium became their church home. Although Engle was "sensing" that the church should move to Mott because of its Nazarene revival roots, Ahn was reluctant to locate on the same campus where his old church still met. It took a prophetic dream by Jim Goll of Kansas City to precipitate the move. Goll phoned Ahn saying, "*Che, I had a dream about you last night. I saw you holding a bottle of Motts Apple Sauce. . . Does this mean anything to you?*" Che responded by telling him that he and Engle were considering the move to Mott. Goll then went on

*Now I know what the dream means. You are holding "Mott" in your hands. I*

ousted from the Association of Vineyard Churches, the church reclaimed the original name of Harvest Rock Church.<sup>17</sup>

Two other congregations soon joined the newly formed Pasadena church under the

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*believe God wants you to possess Mott Auditorium. The apple sauce means you will bear fruit as you do.*

<sup>17</sup> Another prophecy from Jim Goll is used to explain the move in and out of the Association of Vineyard Churches. Just about the time the congregation joined the Vineyard, Goll phoned Ahn saying: “*Che, I had an open vision as I was leaving my living room. I heard a cork popping, and saw you with a bottle of rose wine. On the front of the bottle was written ‘nine months.’ The bottle had been shaken, and the cork popped out. The wine had changed in the bottle. You were now holding another substance.*” Ahn did not know the meaning of the vision.

When I arrived to teach at Fuller Theological Seminary in January, 1996, only two months had passed since HRC left the AVC, the mysterious vision had been interpreted and was becoming part of HRC’s permanent folklore. Goll called Ahn after HRC left the AVC, noting that HRC was a Vineyard for nine months. He went on to explain:

*The wine bottle represents your church. You were a Vineyard, and after nine months (by the time the Rose Parade would take place in Pasadena--hence the rose on the label), the cork popped open, and I saw the wine had changed and become a new substance. You were no longer a Vineyard..*

Goll allegedly knew the meaning of the vision when he first reported it to Ahn, but decided it best to wait after it was fulfilled to offer Ahn the interpretation.

leadership of Che Ahn. Jim Johnson brought in Cornerstone Christian Fellowship, and Johnson quickly was acknowledged for the administrative gifts he brought to the church. Karl Malouf's Community Bible Church also entered the merger after being impacted by the renewal at HRC, and he continues to be regarded for his role in pastoral counseling and ministry.

With these four senior pastors bringing their congregations with them into the newly formed church, HRC's membership grew rapidly to approximately 1000 persons. Che Ahn, although always holding the position of the senior pastor, was also regarded as the church's evangelist because of his extensive travels. By 1998, however, the appellation of evangelist seemed to be replaced by an apostolic mantle. Lou Engle was most likely to be described in terms of being a "prophetic revivalist" and a "prayer warrior.". Rick Wright wore a prophetic mantle (shared by his wife, Pam), but by 1998 began to acknowledge a probable apostolic role. Karl Malouff was widely regarded as the *de facto* pastor, while Jim Johnson was acclaimed as the pastoral teacher.<sup>18</sup>

#### **Charismatic Renewal As Play: Reviving Pentecostalism**

*A prominent characteristic of play is its uselessness. It serves no purpose, but is an end in itself. This attitude of play seems to be the right attitude to God, to our fellow human beings and to creation generally.*<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> In January, 1998 a fourth church, a Hispanic congregation pastored by Carlos and Brenda Quintero, officially became part of HRC. Although this church holds separate services in Spanish at another location, the opportunity for a merger seemed to bring HRC closer to its description as a "multiethnic" church. Che Ahn is a Korean American, having come to the United States as a young boy, but the vast majority of the members of the congregation meeting at Mott Auditorium are Anglo.

<sup>19</sup> Jean-Jacques Surmond, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

*From moment to moment the world is called into being 'for nothing' in a pure game of love through God's Word and Spirit. To use a traditional theological term: we exist by grace. For God there was and is no need at all to create. God is a playful God.<sup>20</sup>*

If there is anything unique that characterized the renewal/revival that broke out in Toronto in January, 1994, that subsequently impacted HRC, it was its playfulness. The message was God's invitation to know the Father's deep love in a new way; the explanation for the unexpected outward displays of unusual physical manifestations was that "the Father was playing with His children." Hysterical laughter, being "drunk in the spirit," uncontrolled jerking, jumping up and down ("po-go-ing"), and even animal noises became the hallmark of this new wave of the Spirit that attracted the attention of the media first in England and then in North America. This same playful spirit was evident at HRC when I arrived for a three-month stay in Pasadena in early January, 1996 (a year to the day after John Arnott's first visit), and became a frequent attendee at renewal services. I soon learned that the playfulness was not limited to worship times at Mott Auditorium. When I witnessed a full range of physical manifestations at a birthday dinner party hosted by a HRC member soon after I arrived, I noted how the religious celebration had not yet been fenced off by the boundaries that usually divide the sacred from the secular. Play forms had not yet become doctrine or structured into prescribed ritual, as had glossolalia with many Pentecostals and charismatics.

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<sup>20</sup> *Op.cit.*, p 31.

The seemingly inevitable shift in p/c charismata from experience to structure (at least in the modern world of the West) has been documented within both Pentecostal and charismatic histories.<sup>21</sup> Elsewhere I have demonstrated how evidence of routinization can also be found in the latest wave of the p/c movement through observations made at the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship and at the Brownsville Assembly of God, the two epicenters of the ongoing North American renewal/revival.<sup>22</sup> This same trend toward routinization of charisma can be seen at HRC. Of particular relevance to this paper is the subtle shift from *prophecy* as charismatic play to the instrumental offices of *prophet* and *apostle*.

Instead of analyzing this shift toward routinization solely within a sociological framework as I have done in the past, I would like to employ Jean-Jacques Suurmond's insightful work on charismatic theology, *Word and Spirit at Play*, to cast a different light on the process. Suurmond's description of the tempering of the liberty of the spirit by the rigidity of structure throughout church history employs the same Weberian theory that has inspired other social scientists. This Weberian influence can be seen in his discussion of the church as a liberated community:

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<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of the "routinization of charisma" in the Assemblies of God, see Margaret M. Poloma, *The Assemblies of God at the Crossroads: Charisma and Institutional Dilemmas*. 1989. University of Tennessee Press. Knoxville. For a discussion of a similar process in the Catholic charismatic renewal, see Thomas J. Csordas, *Language, Charisma, and Creativity. A Ritual Life of a Religious Movement*, University of California Press, Berkeley (1997).

<sup>22</sup> See Poloma 1997 *op. cit* and Poloma 1998 *op. cit*.



*However, very quickly the word of the gospel became an oppressive law and the established political and social order embraced the church. The Spirit was forced to the periphery of the church, where it was welcomed by those who were excluded. Time and again charismatic counter-movements came into being here in which the revolutionary Sabbath game again became visible to a greater or lesser degree.<sup>23</sup>*

According to Suurmond, world-wide Pentecostalism has emerged as an antidote for the over-emphasis on the Word over Spirit; order over spontaneity; control over liberty. Although it has done better than most other traditions in allowing room for the Spirit, the p/c movement has been derailed in the West by the same Roman legalistic and Greek rationalistic forces that gave birth to the Constantinean church. A key to understanding the transition is the concept of *play*.

### **Nature of Play and the Toronto Experience**

According to Suurmond, the nature of play “does not consist in order or in disorder, but in the play of the creativity of the Word and the Spirit . . .” It is not frivolous, although it may often seem foolish. It involves all the serious issues of reality, including suffering and evil. Good Friday and Easter Sunday are in a dialectical dance, with the hope proffered by the resurrection of Jesus transcending the pain of the everyday world. Underlying this tendency for the Spirit to be overshadowed by the Word--charisma by institutionalization--is the rise of the “false” or alienated self. As Suurmond notes:

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<sup>23</sup> Suurmond, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

*To sum it up, I conclude that only a playful approach does justice to reality by not reducing it to a rigid order which must give the false self the illusion that it has ground beneath it. Here is critically confronts any ideology and political or religious system which has absolute claims. Nor are playful human beings out to dominate reality and exploit it, to justify their own existence with the result. This implies a criticism of technocratic utilitarian thought and achievement which attacks both the nature and the quality of human life. Both approaches are typical of the false self, which not only wrongs reality (and thus the truth) but leads to an absolutization of one's own interpretation of existence.<sup>24</sup>*

Charismatic expressions, including glossolalia, the physical manifestations of the ongoing renewal/revival, and prophecy, may seem as “foolish” to outsiders, but they help to break people open to a deeper encounter with God. Empirical data on the “Toronto Blessing” strongly suggests that Suurmond is correct when he claims such experiences can diminish “false self” and allow more of the “true self” to take hold of the believer’s life.<sup>25</sup> A closer relationship with God, a renewed sense of personal sinfulness and a fresh sense of forgiveness, healing of relationships, inner and emotional healing, as well as physical and mental healing were all common fruits of the Toronto experience. It is also significant that the most frequent emotional correlate accompanying the manifestations were biblical fruits of the Spirit; namely, love, peace and joy.

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<sup>24</sup> Suurmond, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

<sup>25</sup> For survey findings that describe the process of the diminishment of the “false self” and move toward the “true self” in the renewal/revival, see Margaret M. Poloma, *The Toronto Report*. Terra Nova Publications. Wiltshire, U.K. (1996); Margaret M. Poloma and Lynette F. Hoelter, “The ‘Toronto Blessing’: A Holistic Model of Healing.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37 (1998):258-73; and Margaret M. Poloma, “Inspecting the Fruit of the ‘Toronto Blessing’: A Sociological Assessment.” *Pneuma* 20 (1998):43-70.

## Prophecy as Play

Prophecy has a history rooted in both the ancient and the Judeo-Christian worlds. While always having some place in Christianity and being elevated as a charism by early Pentecostals, it has been subject to considerable discussion and debate.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps more than any other single charism, prophecy reflects an tension that exists between charismata and structure. The two basic issues that Robeck<sup>27</sup> identifies are indicators of this tension: how to distinguish genuine prophecy from false prophecy and how to handle prophecy in light of the closed canon of Scripture. Maintaining an openness to prophecy requires that persons suspend utilitarian motives and demonstrate a willingness to play “in a pure game of love through God's Word and Spirit.”<sup>28</sup>

Prophecy, although commonly regarded as involving “foretelling” or “prediction” (as reflected in many of the accounts reported in this HRC narrative), is broader than that. Those involved in the p/c subculture are likely to understand prophecy as the Holy Spirit using a human vehicle to speak God's word to His people. It may come, as we have seen in the HRC narrative, through visions, dreams, impressions, “divine coincidences” or verbal proclamations.<sup>29</sup>

Prophecy is recognized as functioning to edify, encourage and comfort; to provide correction and warning; for direction and enhanced vision; and as an agenda for prayer. It has no obvious utilitarian reward, and seeking it for self-promotion or reward has always been condemned. It is playful in that its function is to align one's actions with the will of the Spirit.

Suurmond cites the definition of play provided by J. Huizinga's earlier work and applies it to charismatic reality:

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<sup>26</sup> For an excellent discussion of the history and nature of prophecy, see C.M. Robeck, Jr. “The Gift of Prophecy.” *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (S. M. Burgess and Gary McGee, eds.) Zondervan Publishing House. Grand Rapids (1988): pp. 728-740.

<sup>27</sup> Robeck, *op. cit.*, p. 738.

<sup>28</sup> Suurmond, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>29</sup> See Graham Cooke, *Developing Your Prophetic Gifting*, Sovereign Word Publishers, Norwich, U.K. (1994) and Cindy Jacobs, *The Voice of God*, Regal Books, Ventura, CA (1995) for two discussions of prophecy by commonly recognized renewal prophets. For further discussion of how God speaks through dreams and visions see James Ryle, *A Dream Come True*, Creation House, Orlando, FL (1995).

*Play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself, accompanied by feeling of tension, joy and consciousness that it is 'different' from 'ordinary life'.*<sup>30</sup>

Each of the components to the definition may be applied the prophetic experiences that are central to the Harvest Rock narrative. As we have seen, prophecy has been voluntarily embraced by the central players in the HRC drama. The Bible remains the plumb line against which the prophecies are evaluated, as can be evidenced from studying sermons during which such experiences are reported to others. In these sermons, the HRC story is playfully intertwined with similar biblical stories, with the prophetic experience often being used to bring new biblical insight. Prophecy, whether given in words, dreams or vision, is seemingly an end in itself. It offers encouragement and may sharpen vision, but the process bears more resemblance to putting a puzzle together than constructing an architect's blueprint. Prophecy brings with it a range of potential emotional responses, as may be gleaned from reviewing the stories of the actors involved in the HRC narrative already presented..

HRC was not only birthed in the prophetic, but it remains one of the church's high priorities. One of the "values" found in the "Philosophy of Ministry of Harvest Rock Church" clearly states:

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<sup>30</sup> Suurmond, *op. cit.* p. 84.

*Because the church is founded on Apostles and Prophets, we welcome and honor the prophetic ministry. We are called to be a prophetic people and are committed to do only what we see our Father say and do.*<sup>31</sup>

With the prophetic operating in the lives of the key players years before the founding of the church, prophesy is acknowledged as one of the important values upon which this church was built.

Yet the prophetic is perhaps the first of the recognized biblical charismata to be silenced in p/c churches. As sociologists have long known, whatever else they are, religious experiences are institutionally dangerous, and institutions quickly develop mechanisms to protect themselves from potential sudden upheavals. Social psychologists similarly are well aware of the importance of routine in individual lives. Most people seem to desire a stable social reality (or at least the perception of stability) that protects them from having to “live on the edge” as Ahn, Engle and Wright did during the years prior to the founding of HRC. While the prophetic remains visible part of church doctrine, practices, and conferences, it is being tamed and appears to be playing less of a role in the most recent scenes of the HRC story.

### **From Prophecy to Prophets and Apostles**

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<sup>31</sup> “Philosophy of Ministry of Harvest Rock Church of Pasadena” may be found on HR’s website: <http://www.grmi.org/churches/HarvestRock/vision.htm>.

Although prophecy is woven into the very fabric of HRC, there is evidence of a subtle shift under way from *prophecy as a dynamic process* to *prophecy as a status or position*. There appear to be two positions that are eclipsing playful prophecy, namely those of prophets and apostles. Che Ahn, reflecting the beliefs of other restorationists who have become spokespersons for the renewal/revival, reported in a personal interview that he believes the last of the five-fold biblical offices is being restored to the church during this decade. While the 1970s saw the restoration of the office of evangelist and the 1980s, the of the prophetic office, the 1990s is witnessing the restoration of the apostolic.<sup>32</sup> Although the nomenclature of “prophet” and “apostle” is used sparingly, it appears to be on the increase as routinizing forces become stronger in the movement. That Ahn is regarded as one of the emerging apostles at the close of the millennium is reflected in a prayer Engle offered at the close of a Sunday service:

*I pray for Che today--that you would make him an apostolic man for this city--even as you have granted him favor, like Nehemiah. I ask you, God, that you would make him a uniter of many parts of the body of Christ--even through 'Love L.A.'--that you would use him to unite the church in Los Angeles.*<sup>33</sup>

While the office of prophet is believed to have been restored in some sectors, the office of apostle is only beginning to emerge in the contemporary church. As Rick Wright, who also believes himself called to the apostolic ministry, noted in a personal interview:

*I long to see the signs and wonders accompany the apostolic--to see the dead raised and watch whole cities get saved. That's what I want to see. It is my cry and my prayer. 'Lord, restore apostolic ministry, apostolic purity, apostolic anointing.' In some groups the prophetic has been pretty much restored, but we*

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<sup>32</sup> The importance of the prophetic and the apostolic for HRC may be evidenced in the theme of the November, 1997 “Catch the Fire Conference”: “The Release of the Apostolic and Prophetic.” It was at this conference that Tommy Tenney, a newer renewal star who catapulted to visibility when the “glory of God” split a pulpit while he was speaking, appeared on the HRC scene. Tenney’s “being led by God” (he was not invited to be a speaker) to the Pasadena conference seemed providential. When the prophet Paul Cain was unable to appear as scheduled due to illness, Tenney was on site to step in. Tenney is being featured in the 1998 HRC “Catch the Fire Conference,” together with apostolic/prophetic leaders from the Argentine and Pensacola revivals.

<sup>33</sup> Engle, “Sunday Morning, January 25, 1998.”

*don't yet understand the apostle role.*<sup>34</sup>

While the apostolic may not be well understood, it seems to often be proclaimed by those recognized as prophets or who hold some prophetic credence. I have been present at conferences where a pastoral sponsor has been (in a prophetic/ritual context) named an apostle.

With the emergence of the apostolic has also come new social structures that provide legitimacy for the emerging status. This may be illustrated at HRC by the birth of Harvest International Ministries in 1996, a network of churches now having over 150 members that align themselves with Ahn's leadership and the HRC base. In accord with the Latter Rain restorationist thought that has influenced HRC, this new structure is not regarded as a denomination (a term in renewal circles almost as politically incorrect as the term "religious") but rather a loose network of churches, many of which are located in African and Asian countries. The functions of this association of churches and ministries include church planting, "apostolic equipping" of existing churches, training missionaries, resource sharing, and operating the Harvest International School of Ministry. The latter is described as offering classes that

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<sup>34</sup> Wright, "Interview, 1998."

...include practical Bible training, developing of preaching message and style, teaching and application of spiritual gifts with an emphasis on the prophetic signs and wonders in evangelism and church growth, inner healing and listening prayer, cross cultural studies and its contextualized ministry, linguistics, facets of ministry in the local church and more.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Information on H.I.M. and its school of ministry is taken from “Developing Future Missionaries” and “Committed to Fulfill the Great Commission.” Harvest International Ministries, 1539 E. Howard St., Pasadena, CA 91104.



Those familiar with p/c history will recognize similarities between earlier theologies and strategies, especially the restorationist thought of the Latter Rain Movement, and developments at HRC.<sup>36</sup> More recent input, including the present-day rise of the apostolic, the “10/40 window,” “spiritual mapping,” and “spiritual warfare” has come through C. Peter Wagner and the School of World Mission at Pasadena’s Fuller Theological Seminary (where Ahn earned a doctorate).<sup>37</sup> While the thrust of the language and action of the present phase of the renewal/revival may appear to be one of an integration of Word and Spirit, a closer look suggests that the spiritual technologies and entrepreneurial strategies may be more work than play.

Although much of this discussion has focused on HRC which has been clearly in the Toronto stream of the renewal/revival, this focus needs to broaden as I continue with my sociological interpretation of the narrative. With the decreasing visibility of the TACF (and diminishing crowds for the nightly renewal meetings, although its conferences still attract numbers) and the continued success of the BAOG stream (where the crowds keep coming whether to Pensacola or to the traveling Awake America Crusades), any new charismatic light is being eclipsed by old Pentecostal tactics that is unlikely to permeate p/c boundaries into the larger American religious culture.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> For a discussion of the Latter Rain Movement, see Richard M. Riss, *Latter Rain. The Latter Rain Movement of 1948 and the Mid-Twentieth Century Evangelical Awakening*. Kingdom Flagships Foundation, Etobicoke, Ontario (1987).

<sup>37</sup> For a brief report on Wagner’s role in “spiritual mapping,” see Art Moore, “Spiritual Mapping Gains Credibility Among Leaders,” in *Christianity Today*, January 12, 1998:55. See also C. Peter Wagner’s presentation at the “Light the Nation’ conference held in Dallas, TX, May 5-8, 1998, and C. P. Wagner and Pablo Dieros (ed.) *op. cit.* Conferences are being scheduled regularly by Wagner and others across the nation (including “Building Foundations for Revival” in St. Louis in September, 1998) to teach and employ “spiritual technologies” like “bringing down strongholds” and “taking cities,” seemingly packaging the successful Argentine revival (and its stars) for American p/c consumption.

<sup>38</sup> For a discussion of the differences between the stream of the renewal that emanated from the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship (TACF) and the more recent stream from Pensacola’s Brownsville Assembly of God (BAOG), see Poloma (1997) *op. cit.* As history unfolds, it appears that BAOG’s strategies that have been more rooted in the order than the freedom side of the ongoing dialectic between Word and Spirit have enabled this stream of the movement to reach into some of the Pentecostal sectors that were resistant to TACF’s more

### **The Call to Sabbath Play: Challenges and Conclusions**

*The call of the church is in the first place to play this game of Word and Spirit in Charismatic celebration. In this way people are equipped to renew the oppressive political and economic order as a guarantee of the eternal Sabbath in which death will be dethroned and God become all in all.<sup>39</sup>*

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charismatic thrust. The leadership decisions made early in the BAOG revival appear to have been good ones to ensure quality control and stability, particularly the decision of limiting the pulpit to pastor and evangelist (and now to the bible school president).

<sup>39</sup> Suurmond, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

From its inception and with each subsequent wave, the p/c movement has experienced a seeming call and grace to make a difference in the larger culture. While there is evidence that some groups in the Third World nations are meeting this challenge head on, it appears to be no more than a call and a promise in North America.<sup>40</sup> In North America the present renewal/revival is facing two specific dangers. The first is that of being coopted by a larger culture, with the attendant problems of being lured by the likes of a McDonald's model of success, the pain-free promises of the pervasive therapeutic culture, and the seeker search for spiritual thrills. The latter gives rise to a specific danger that Cox discusses in his chapter on "Body Snatchers and Spiritual Warriors" -- a kind of spiritual technology that has developed around the fascination "to the point of obsession with demonic spirits and the powers of darkness."<sup>41</sup> None of these "bunny trails" (as one of my pastor friends calls the diversions taken by many renewal groups) is likely to bring the liberating renewal/revival message to a larger culture. For the present it appears that many leaders are forging "bunny trails" of filling conference halls, proclaiming new "hot spots," writing triumphalist books, proclaiming the number of "people saved" on billboards, and most recently meeting to "take cities" away from the "principalities and powers" that reside in the heavenlies<sup>42</sup>. With the original message of God's love lost in the Babel of spiritual technologies and self-promotion, the future of the renewal seems dim. Although it may leave institutions in its wake, there seems to be little lasting

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<sup>40</sup> See Suurmond, *op. cit.* This difference in cultural relevance between some Latin American and African streams of Pentecostalism when compared with that of North America may also be gleaned in reading Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven*. It would appear that the p/c movement has a much better chance in reshaping twenty-first century religion in Third World nations than in the West.

<sup>41</sup> Cox, *op. cit.*, pp. 281-98.

<sup>42</sup> In pop terminology, the p/c movement is no longer "buzz" but "hype." *Buzz* has been defined as "Infectious chatter, genuine, street-level excitement about a hot new person, place or thing." *Hype*, on the other hand, is "Pop propaganda; artificially generated word of mouth, manufactured by PR pros for public consumption." It would appear that this distinction is an appropriate one to make between the renewal/revival at the millennium as compared with its early form. For further discussion of "buzz" and "hype," see Rick Marin and Sarah Von Boven, "The Buzz Machine," *Newsweek* (July 27, 1998), pp. 22-27.

evidence of the liberating power of the Spirit that might attract others outside the p/c subculture.

Suurmond, as we have already seen, believes an answer can be found to the problem of maintaining a creative balance between World and Spirit -- a creative tension, if you will, between charisma and institution -- by focusing on play. Play is the catalyst for the dialectical dance between Scripture and religious experience that can change not only individual lives, but can bring about the "revival" that many still cry for in the larger society. The revival will not take on some kind of superspiritual form that colors present descriptions, but will reflect the reality of the incarnation in which God has taken on flesh. Suurmond contends that the p/c movement reveals the most potential when it is open to play that will bring about dramatic change when he noted the significance of William Seymour's "African roots":

*Present-day Pentecostalism comprises the Pentecostal movement, the church charismatic renewal, and the non-white indigenous churches of the Third World. It goes back to the great revival which took place between 1906 and 1909 in Los Angeles and was led by the black Bill Seymour. From his African roots he underwent a holistic experience of faith which exercised an attraction unprecedented in church history. This spirituality, which above all also attracts the poor, draws no distinction between the spiritual and the earthly-physical reality and therefore can lead (sic) to social and political involvement. However, in Pentecostalism it is often damped down by the white fundamentalism which has crept in. The essential contribution of Pentecostal spirituality lies in its playful character. This is evident above all from the charismatic celebration which is not characterized by either order or chaos but by the dynamics of play. Through the gifts of grace (charisms), everyone has a contribution to make -- regardless of race, gender or status.<sup>43</sup>*

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<sup>43</sup> Suurmond, *op.cit.*, p. 220.

Unfortunately in North America, Suurmond notes, a p/c movement coopted by fundamentalism and evangelicalism has too often lost its playful and prophetic edge. Based on its history and its promise, it could have been a herald of change in areas like race relations, gender equality, and holistic health. Instead it took the safe reactionary position on these issues in the past, and resorts (when such issues are addressed at all) to hollow repentance of past sins without allowing the Spirit to cast light on current transgressions.<sup>44</sup>

Although I am hardly sanguine about the state of the present p/c movement in North America, I remain a person of hope. I can hear the buzz of the gentle move of the Spirit that is qualitatively different from the sound of hype in the larger movement. I detect it in accounts of an inner city ministry in which the gifts flow, in the simple evangelism and reconciliatory work of a jeweler, in the ministry of a laywoman with incarcerated women, in a small midwest home fellowship where the move of the Spirit is as fresh as the earliest TACF days. I trust these are not the only sparks. While much of the renewal seems to be in the hype of an afterglow, there are fresh sparks in unlikely places. The afterglow is not likely to set the nation on fire, but I have hope that the fresh sparks may dance over the boundaries of the p/c subculture into the larger world.

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<sup>44</sup> The unquestioned acceptance of a right-wing homophobic response to gays and lesbians is a current example of the failure of p/c Christians to seek the Spirit in responding to a current social issue. The Reverend Canon Gray Temple, Jr. has provided a thought-provoking challenge for his Episcopal charismatic community to engage in a playful dance between Spirit and Word in reconsidering the issue of homosexuality in an unpublished manuscript, "The Gay Challenge and Charismatic Episcopalians," St. Patrick's Church, Atlanta, GA.