

PREFACE: A BRIEFING FOR THE JOURNEY

THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO, and well before mass publishing, Ecclesiastes wryly commented that of the making of books, there is no end (Ecclesiastes 12:12). We cannot imagine what he'd say today. So what are we doing writing *one more book*?

Why We Wrote This Book

Given the fact that so little of substance has been written on the subject of Ephesians 4 (which speaks of the roles of apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers—APEST) in general, and the apostolic ministry and person in particular, the sin in this case actually lies in the deficiency of thinking and reflection in these matters, not in their excess. This is a big statement, but we hope to show that it is entirely justifiable. Here are some of our guiding objectives and reasons.

To Change Some Minds and Strengthen Others

First, in relation to those unaware, the not yet convinced, or even those who harbor antipathy to the idea of the fivefold ministry in general and the apostolic in particular, our aim is nothing less than to change minds about the importance of these for the church today. We cannot shake the conviction that nothing less than the future viability of the Western church is involved in the revitalization of its ministry along more biblical lines. And so if we fail to somehow shift any readers' paradigm, even a little, then we consider that we will have failed at least in part. This is no small task: we fully recognize that we are going against the inherited grain of thinking in this matter. Nonetheless, we think that the Western church has been wrong on this, and it is high time for a thorough reassessment, along with some significant change, in this regard.

Second, for those who are already convinced of the need for a broader, apostolically focused ministry in the church—either because they come

from traditions where the typology of Ephesians 4 is accepted or have become more aware of the power of APEST because of their immersion in missional thinking and practice—we hope to strengthen your case, calibrate your thinking and practice, correct possible misperceptions, and equip you with a deeper and significantly sturdier justification of these particular aspects of the biblical ministry than has been given to date. Our hope is that this work will encourage and equip others in their ministry and help them better fulfill their calling as part of God’s people in his kingdom.

To Rectify the Poverty of Thinking in Relation to Ephesians 4 and Apostolic Ministry

From our research, it appears that most standard thinking actually delegitimizes the apostolic role by either replacing it with the canon of scripture (as in Protestantism) or by transferring apostolicity to the bishops and the institution of the church itself (as in Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy). There seems to be no space between biblicism and institutionalism for any contemporary activation of the apostolic role. This seems utterly strange to us given the central role that apostolic ministry plays in the New Testament itself, as well as in every movement that has achieved significant missionary impact throughout history.

And although there are some good academic studies exploring the role of the original apostles in the New Testament church and in the first three centuries, most of these are scholarly and inaccessible to the average reader and have little to say to the concerns of contemporary apostolic mission and ministry.¹ In fact, when they do comment on the possibility of ongoing ministry, they tend to take the standard line that apostles (as well as prophets and, to a lesser degree, evangelists) have not featured in the church’s ministry mix since Constantine. As we shall see, this is not so.

The other school of thought and reflection on Ephesians 4 and the apostolic ministry tends to have a distinctly charismatic, pragmatist, and fundamentalist perspective. It also is loaded with the type of dominion theology that effectively equates the apostolic with a kind of superpastor—the hotshot CEO type in the organization. And while most quote the Bible a fair bit, they tend to lack any theological depth and end up being one-dimensional in approach and perspective. In many ways, these approaches provide the easy straw man that academics and clergy find all too easy to reject. At best, these writings are highly unlikely to convince the unconvinced, and at worst, they hinder the cause in the broader church.

Neither of these approaches—the scholarly New Testament studies theorists and the one-dimensional charismaniacs—is much help as we seek to rediscover our missional calling and purpose. And as far as we are aware, there is at this time no single, comprehensive reference text available promoting the ongoing role of the apostolic person in the ongoing life of the church. Consider this book at least the beginnings of a much-needed remedy.

To Change the Frameworks

As you will soon discover, *The Permanent Revolution* is mainly a work of theological (re)imagination and (re)construction. We have drawn deeply from biblical studies, theology, organizational theory, leadership studies, and the key social sciences to substantiate our claims about Ephesians 4 and the ongoing legitimacy of the apostolic role. All of this points to our fundamental claim: that insofar that it depends on human agency, the church's capacity to embody and extend the mission and purposes of Jesus in the world depends largely on a full-intention to provide robust theoretical foundations with which to relegitimize and restructure the ministry of the church as fivefold and to reembrace the revitalizing, intrinsically missional role of the apostolic person.

We are in fact attempting to rescript the very codes that shape our view of ministry—nothing less than a shift in our thinking. We have intentionally sought to construct a substantive text, not only because there is precious little positive material on the subject, but also because the holism of Ephesians 4:11 has effectively been discarded, marginalized, or deliberately ejected almost entirely from our thinking and practice.

Reframing paradigms is difficult work. It goes against the grain of acquired thinking and exposes many blind spots, and it is likely to meet with resistance from those deeply invested in the prevailing paradigm. Nonetheless, we feel constrained to submit this for reflection in the hope the Spirit will awaken ancient energies largely dormant within the Western church.

To make the truth of *The Permanent Revolution* unavoidable, we have deliberately used an interdisciplinary recipe of theology, sociology, leadership studies, psychology, and the organizational sciences because we believe that they all point us in the direction originally given in the New Testament itself. All truth is God's truth, and we believe that nowhere else is this more evident than in this area of New Testament ecclesiology. The church, rightly conceived as an organic movement, was well ahead of its time in relation to best thinking and best practices on organizations

and leadership. Everything in contemporary literature and research on these issues confirms the ingenious design built into the ecclesia that Jesus intended.

Our primary audience for this book remains the key leaders in the churches and other organizations that make up the heartland of biblical Christianity—from Conservative evangelical to Pentecostal, from missional to traditional, and anything in between. We are both evangelicals in the broad nonsectarian sense of the word.² Alan has roots within the Pentecostal tradition, has a Reformed theological training, and has worked with all the major evangelical churches for most of his time in ministry. Tim is a grassroots church planter with a restorationist heritage and training.

We both love, and are deeply committed to, the church, but some readers are going to be tempted to think of us as fervent anti-institutionalists. And although we offer a critique of institutionalism, we are not against structure and organization in any way. In fact, the reader will find a plethora of material that relates to organization and systems thinking laced throughout the book. And certainly we see ourselves as servants of God's people in all the forms in which they express themselves.

Furthermore, although we accept the role of tradition in guiding and sustaining the church in any age, we will admit that in our view, institutionalism and traditionalism almost invariably involve reliance on past formulas and thinking, tend to be reactionary, snuff out creative thinking and solutions, and are self-referential and bureaucratic. We ask questions in this book that go to the leadership paradigm, and when doing this, it is impossible to avoid the twin issues of traditionalism and institutionalism—both well represented in the Bible. From a prophetic concern with the corrupt and corruptible institutions of the king, judge, and priesthood; to Jesus's railing against the oppressive religious institutionalism of the scribes and pharisees of his day; to Paul's doctrine of the powers entrenched in human institutions and people: the Bible sustains a thorough and consistent critique of religious institutionalism. Without wanting to sound self-righteous, we really do feel that we are in good company here.

As uncomfortable as critical appraisals tend to make us feel, we do well to remind ourselves at this point that despite the towering effect that institutions have on us, they have to be seen for what they truly are: mere products of human activity. As human constructs, institutions cannot adequately reflect back to us our own intrinsic worth. Jesus's own rejection by the religious and political establishment of his day bears witness to the tendency of institutions to develop their own metrics and

categories for what should and should not be valued or deemed essential. It is in Jesus himself that we can find the higher authority—one that transcends the towering effect of the institutions—with which to speak the corrective word into our context.

*To Stimulate Apostolic Imagination,
Leading to Missional Action*

Because not much has been written on the subject of apostolic ministry and because it has not been a historic model, we did not have a lot of constructive material to work with. That is why in some parts of this book, we have had to exercise a fair bit of theological imagination mingled with ideas gleaned from the social sciences. We hope readers find our thinking stimulating, but we ask them to remember that at some points, we are engaging in educated guesswork and theological intuition and to give us some space to be playful. Engage these sections with an open mind, and do not assume we are being prescriptive. Rather, we are offering spiritual prods, or suggestive thought-experiments, aimed to stimulate thinking and action. Rest assured that we never make wild conjectures. Even our guesses are informed and weighted with a lot of reflection. And we will let you know when we are making intuitive leaps.

The book is intentionally loaded with challenging concepts and replete with fertile ideas that carry rich possibilities for new learning and action. We did not intend to produce a praxis-oriented work; we hope to leave that to a possible future workbook based on this book. Our aim is to empower the church as movement and not to simply add another book to a seminary curriculum and library. We hope it will help leaders become the leaders God intended them to be in the first place. Like any other good revolution, the aim is to liberate your minds as well as your vocations from the constraints currently imposed on them.³

Who Wrote What?

This book is a collaboration between the two of us. In addition, 3DM leader Mike Breen assisted in the construction of Part One, on Ephesians and APEST, contributing some key ideas and doing some editing and commenting. Mike is a long-term practitioner of Ephesians 4 ministry. He is a highly respected international leader, a genuinely seminal thinker and practitioner, and one of the most prolific Christian leaders to emerge from Great Britain in a decade or more. We are very grateful for Mike himself and what he represents to the missional movement of our day.

He is a genuine permanent revolutionary, and we are honored that he is willing to put his name on this material.

Most of the book is a work of our own collaboration. Tim has played the role of primary researcher and resident maven. He did his job all too well, because in order to get the book to a reasonable size and focus, we had to delete about half of what he researched and wrote. Alan's primary role has been to shape the material and direct the project and, of course, add his own writing along the way—his aim being to elaborate on previously written material as well as add new insights on the topic.

We write in the first person wherever it is appropriate and where personal biography is involved. But for the most part, we use the second person *we* and speak in common voice.

On issues of examples, we have certainly provided them where we could, but we have generally chosen to bolster the ideas with numerous figures. What we lack in stories we certainly make up for in illustrations. Partly this is a personality thing because we are conceptual thinkers and tend to think more in pictures and less in narrative, and partly it is because we believe that diagrams better convey the ideas we hope to communicate.

A Word to the Wise

It was the ancient philosopher Epictetus who stated that it is impossible for a man to learn what he thinks he already knows. And that could be true for all of us who think that we know what church and ministry is. Most of us have been raised in, trained in, and thoroughly coded by the prevailing paradigm.⁴ Therefore, initial responses to this material that come readily to mind generally arise directly out of the deep scripting we have assumed to be true. This is the very scripting that has led us inexorably to the decline of the church in the West.

Because of this, we ask that you allow yourself to reimagine ministry as we are presenting it, even if it does not square with the prevailing scripts and invites repentance and change. We suggest that you try to restrain any somewhat reflexive defenses for a while, so that you might look afresh at a core issue of ecclesiology. If we are right about this, changing the primary scripts will completely revolutionize the way we conceive of being and doing church in a very good way. To be able to learn anything new, we have to be willing to think differently about ourselves and approach ideas from a different angle, which will allow new possibilities to arise. Remember that Albert Einstein, the great paradigm buster, wisely said, "The only thing that interferes with my learning is my

education.” Please do not let your education interfere with your learning on this matter. Way too much is at stake.

Size Matters

This is an unusually large book because it explores a big and strategically critical issue. We fully realize that for various reasons, including issues of time and patience, weighty books might put off some readers. But we suggest that the importance of the subject and the critical situation of the church at this time require that we delve deep and do not shortchange the intellectual and spiritual engagement required to change the game now.

We encourage you to read this book carefully and, if you can, do this with others and discuss it as you go. If you are already convinced of the need for apostolic ministry in the church and are pressed for time, you can skip Chapter Six and the Appendix at the back of the book. That will reduce the text by about 15 percent.

A View from the Top

The only thing left to do in this Preface is to describe the logic and the flow of the book itself.

Part One, on Ephesians 4:1–16, provides the basis for a fuller understanding of biblical ministry, as well the context for an exploration of the apostolic ministry. This is where Mike Breen collaborates with us.

Part Two is about apostolic ministry. Chapter Five is a key chapter: it provides the basic definitions of apostolicity that we use throughout the book. Chapter Six suggests some largely unexplored, and we hope fruitful, ways in which to understand the nuances within the apostolic ministry itself. We contrast Pauline and Petrine apostolic ministry and their contributions to creating missional impact. And because of these distinctions, Chapter Seven looks beyond the purely pioneering function normally associated with the apostolic role to see how the apostolic ministry facilitates ongoing renewal in the life of the church.

Part Three focuses on apostolic leadership. Rather than ranging far and wide, we focus on leadership in relation to missional innovation and entrepreneurship. Elaborating on the pioneering functions, along with those of custodian, designer, and architect, we look at how apostolic leadership can provide new and missionally creative ways forward.

Part Four focuses on apostolic organization. Clearly, issues of how we structure and organize are critical to being translocal and movemental. Being ignorant about the issue of social structures generally hands

dynamic movements over to the human default of increasing institutionalism. This final part of the book examines the nature of organization as reframed through the lens of apostolic ministry and leadership, particularly that of being a movement. And then we look at essential characteristics of apostolic movements and how to restructure in a way that more consistently aligns with them.

The Appendix is in effect an essay that we feel is important enough to include in the book but not necessary to the flow of the book itself. We felt that the issues of how and why the apostles, prophets, and evangelists (the APE functions in APEST) were exiled warrant further understanding. They bring needed insights and provide clues to our own thinking in these matters.

We ask that you be patient with us as we seek to (re)construct a holistic understanding of an all-but-lost imagination. We address some of the more practical questions about organization in Part Four. And given that we do not have a rich heritage of thinking and acting on which to draw from, we beg readers' indulgence in using examples that are clear-cut illustrations of apostolic ministry. We love Patrick, John Wesley, William Booth, Aimee Semple McPherson, and others: they provide lights that we can all walk by, and so they become our primary models. This is not to say there are not countless others who express apostolic forms, only that they might lack the profile needed to substantiate this kind of work.

By emphasizing human agency and our responsibility to make the leadership decisions to shift the paradigm, it is not our intention to diminish the sovereignty of God in all affairs and that we live in and through his grace. The survival of the church is surely a testimony to the grace of God who has not forsaken us as much as we have forsaken him. It is sufficient to say that we submit this book to our readers in humble trust that the Holy Spirit will use it for the furtherance of the cause of our Lord Jesus in this broken world.

To God be the glory, and *Viva la revolución permanente!*

INTRODUCTION

THE CRISIS OF INFERTILITY AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

The illiterate of the future are not those that cannot read or write. They are those that cannot learn, unlearn, relearn.

Alvin Toffler

People in any organization are always attached to the obsolete—the things that should have worked but did not, the things that once were productive and no longer are.

Peter Drucker

He who cannot change the very fabric of his thought will never be able to change reality, and will never, therefore, make any progress.

Anwar el-Sadat

IN THE MOVIE *THE CHILDREN OF MEN*, there is a plague of infertility, and no one knows why. Diego Ricardo is the youngest person in the world: eighteen years, four months, twenty days, sixteen hours, and eight minutes old. He was the last human being to be born on earth, and since his birth, women everywhere have been unable to reproduce. When he suddenly dies, his demise is repeatedly broadcast and is viewed as a not-so-subtle reminder of the slowly creeping disaster that has undermined hope and created political disorder, social decay, radical doubt, and universal despair. The aging population is edging toward the end of the human race.

In the story, Great Britain is one of the only places in the world that has managed to maintain a limited sense of order, and people from everywhere have fled there, only to be rounded up as illegal refugees and transported to holding bins where they await deportation to the anarchy of Europe. Amid this chaos, Theo, a British citizen grown cynical and despairing in the surrounding hopelessness, is paid by a band of revolutionaries to escort Kee, a young woman, out of Britain and hand her over to an underground organization called the Human Project.

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Theo soon discovers that his mission is much riskier than he had expected, and he faces, and courageously evades, all kinds of traps to guard her from danger. But Theo is not told why his charge is so controversial. Clearly she has become the focus of militant groups, and his association with her has made him a prime target for violent attacks. It is not until he gets halfway to their destination that he finds out exactly who this woman is and why she is so important: Kee is pregnant, and the revolutionaries want to use her as a tool, a symbol of hope, a powerful weapon in a high-stakes political game to incite a revolution that would overthrow the government.

Whatever sense of responsibility Theo felt toward his assignment in the beginning is now amplified as he realizes that the very future of humanity is in his custody. This is no ordinary assignment. He is to cross dangerous terrain, through uncharted territories, so that Kee can regenerate the human race. Theo is a custodian of life in a world of infertility.

The Children of Men provides a parabolic pointer to a similar fruitlessness in the church throughout the West. To explain it, some have said that the vinedresser is simply pruning his vine or that he is judging some supposed unfaithfulness on our part, and that it will pass and our fertility will return. However we may want to figure it, we have to acknowledge that after almost twenty centuries of Christianity in Western contexts, we have generally not seen the kind of transformation implied in the gospel. Neither have we often approximated the vibrancy of the gospel movements that somehow manage to structure their ecclesial life much closer to the kind of church that Jesus designed it to be in the first place: that of an apostolic people movement; the kind of dynamic, fluid, viral, ecclesiology we see in the pages of the New Testament and throughout history. The early church, various movements over the centuries, and the developing world now (especially India and China) have displayed this same vitality. These are all great expressions of apostolic movement.

Our situation today is not that dissimilar to the one described in *The Children of Men*. All of the statistical indicators show serious infertility in Western Christianity, and so we too are caught in a despairing spiral of trended numerical and spiritual decline in just about every context in the Western world.¹

A Permanent Revolution? Really?

In this situation, we are forced to ask ourselves what the church is all about. What are God's original purposes in and through his people? Is the gospel capable of renewing the world and transforming the hearts of all human beings? Did God really mean for the ecclesia to be the focal

point for the wholesale renewal of society? Are we really called to be a colony of a much-disputed kingdom, or did Jesus intend that we become the chaplains of a so-called Christian civilization in the West? These are questions that take us to the core of our self-understanding and purpose, and we must be willing to ask them again and again.

It was seminal missiologist Ralph Winter who said, “Every major decision you make will be faulty until you see the whole world as God sees it.”² Seeing things from God’s perspective is what lies at the heart of what it means to have a biblical perspective, and certainly it matters when it comes to thinking about the church, its mission, its leadership, and its intended impact. The two of us fully believe that the ecclesia that Jesus intended was specifically designed with built-in, self-generative capacities and was made for nothing less than world-transforming, lasting, and, yes, revolutionary impact (see, for example, Matthew 16:18). And we certainly do not believe that Christianity was ever meant to become a domesticated civil religion. As far as we can tell, Jesus intended us to be a permanent revolution—an outpost of the kingdom of God no less. And if we are not actually being that, then we have to take stock.

When the embarrassing issue of falling short of being somewhat infertile is brought out into the open, it raises all kind of questions about the nature and function of church, the influence of various types of leadership, and ultimately the intended impact of the gospel. And while clearly unprecedented global economic, social, and cultural shifts are taking place in our time, we believe that the current decline of Christianity cannot be blamed on these external factors alone. That is just a dodge, and a dangerous and irresponsible one at that. As significant as external factors are, much of our infertility arises from *within* the community of faith: in the dynamics of our human sin and unfaithfulness, our lack of audacious faith, and a historical, all-too-human penchant for doing things according to our own preferences when it comes to running the church.

Acknowledging that we are not all that God intended us to be is not meant to simply create guilt and endless self-recriminations in God’s people. Rather, acknowledging our shortfalls gives us an opportunity to repent. And it is repentance that allows us to be forgiven for our infertility and intransigence, to recalibrate, and so start again. The gift of repentance allows us to seek new solutions for the way we can reconceive of and restructure our life in God and in accordance with his eternal purposes in the gospel. This is sheer grace, and we should embrace it wholeheartedly in our common life as much as in our personal one. And it should certainly be a living aspect of what it means to be a believing church full of faith.

Doubt and the Permanent Devolution

If believing the gospel (under guidance of the Spirit) means to align ourselves with God’s purpose, form the ecclesia, and provide a guiding principle to plot our way forward, then it is what we call missional doubt (doubt that affects the mission and purposes of God through the church) that will undermine that belief. In matters of spirituality, doubt and unbelief change everything; they affect the way we see ourselves and how we go about being the kind of people we were intended to be. Under the corrosive influences of missional doubt and unbelief, there is no permanent revolution; instead we devolve into a self-focused, missionally reticent, risk-averse institution, inching our way ever closer toward our own demise.

Sociologists of religion have long acknowledged that decline in the church is associated with ever-encroaching doubt. Because entrenched doubt prevents us from aligning with God’s design and intent, it heralds inevitable infertility and decline in the people of God. Witness the cycles of disintegration and renewal in the stories of Israel in the Old Testament. Whenever Israel refused to follow God’s distinctive ways, it led to decline and judgment. And renewal, brought about by repentance, inevitably involved a realignment with his purposes and ushered in a period of blessing. It is no different in the church.

As you can see in Figure I.1, the first, and seemingly innocuous, form of doubt in the life cycle of movements is referred to as operational. It

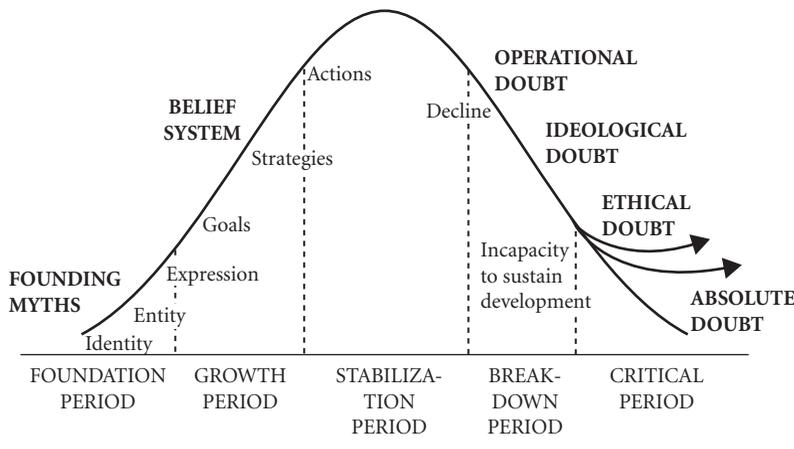


Figure I.1 The Life Cycle of Movements

Source: Adapted from L. Cada, R. Fritz, G. Foley, and T. Giardino, *Shaping the Coming Age of Religious Life* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 53, 78.

involves a struggle in the organization to keep pace with its missional functions and objectives. In other words, organizational doubt is first experienced as a problem of wineskins—the situation where prevailing organizational systems and designs originally used to host and transmit the founding ideals no longer get the job done. It goes like this: “We very much believe our message, but we can’t seem to deliver it as effectively as we used to, and we feel bad about it.” Operational doubt will become caustic and destructive unless the church’s organizational expressions are appropriately realigned to more adequately suit its purposes and mission. Unless it is properly resolved, this doubt will become entrenched and gnaw away at the soul of the ecclesia.

We have all seen this process: If the problem of wineskins is not resolved through the renewal of structures, the community will proceed to the next stage of ever-increasing cynicism and unbelief. Unresolved operational doubt leads to ideological doubt, where we begin to no longer believe the message itself, and from there the organization devolves to ethical doubt, where we begin to behave badly because there is no good reason not to. This life cycle eventually ends with absolute doubt, which precipitates closure: the death of the original movement. Theology, history, and sociology affirm the truth of this progression. It is plainly evident in the long-term trajectory of decline of the mainline denominations (most of which are predominantly theologically liberal in orientation). All of them, without exception, have inexorably declined over the past 150 years.³ In the end, systematic, structural, ethical, and ideological doubt, of both liberal and fundamentalist varieties, involves a failure to be the people God intended us to be: a radical, hard-core, fully engaged, living movement of people loved and redeemed by Jesus, committed to his causes on earth.

A doubt-filled church inevitably lacks the spiritual resources needed to empower dynamic movements. Instead of gathering a growing number of disciples, developing leaders, and adapting the organization, it will tend, rather slothfully, to rely on tired solutions arising from a worn-out, traditionalist paradigm of church—one that has patently failed in Christendom Europe, the very context that gave us that paradigm in the first place.

This lack of growth, development, and adaptation is a call for repentance and change. We can be sure that more of the same will not deliver fundamentally different results. It is time to reappraise the way we think about ourselves as ecclesia and how we go about fulfilling our calling. This needed audit must include how we think about and practice ministry and leadership. In other words, we need to rescript by returning to the

original script. It is time to recover the power of Ephesians 4:11 ministry in general and the missional potencies of the apostolic in particular.

Of Black Swans, Algorithms, and Revolutions

We have already hinted at an idea that we reassert repeatedly in this book: Jesus has given the church everything it needs to get the job done. The church is equipped by Spirit and gospel to fulfill whatever tasks the Lord has set for us to do: evangelism, discipleship, church planting, serving the poor, worship, healing, and much more. We are designed to be the world-transforming agents of the kingdom. We are meant to be a permanent revolution, not one that came and went, leaving a codified religion in its wake. That we only seldom realize this truth can be attributed to a bad case of recurring theological amnesia, one that has some seriously detrimental consequences on our capacities to get our mission done. Every now and again, we recover something of the original potencies associated with apostolic movements. Perhaps most times we are forced into this discovery through situations that require us to adapt or die. For example, it took the death of the institutional forms of church in China for it to become a dynamic people movement again. But every now and again, we do it for the best possible reasons: out of our desire to be authentic and faithful to what the Lord of the church requires of us.

Part of the amnesia comes from the way we conceive of, and subsequently configure, the church and its ministry. We create a paradigm—a way of perceiving our world, of filtering out what is considered real and unreal, of creating mental models of how things should be. Once established, paradigms in many ways do our thinking for us; that is their purpose. They in turn comprise clusters of what creative thinking expert Roger Martin calls algorithms.⁴ An algorithm is a predetermined formula that will produce reliable outcomes when it is consistently applied. Although paradigms help us make sense of our world by giving us ways to interpret it, they also create what is called paradigm blindness: an incapacity to see things from outside that particular perspective or paradigm. And this can account for how people fail to see certain important things that might be glaringly obvious to others. It can also account for many of the problems we in the church now face. But there is another serious downside to algorithms, as Martin so effectively articulates: “What organizations dedicated to running reliable algorithms often fail to realize is that while they reduce the risk of small variations, . . . they increase the risk of being overpowered by the various cataclysmic events that occur,

situations when the future no longer resembles the past and whatever algorithm one has used is no longer relevant or useful.”⁵

Paradigms and algorithms are good only as long as they match and interpret external conditions. When the context shifts significantly, algorithms can become problematic because they can prevent an organization from readily seeing its way beyond them. Now this should be beginning to sound all too familiar to us. The Bible tends to call this a stronghold—a mental or spiritual trap. For instance, well-worn formulas are used to define what it is to be a church (referred to as the marks of the church): that the church exists where the sacraments are rightly administered and where church discipline is seldom submitted to critical review. And yet without some serious theological gymnastics, they are patently deficient, especially in making space for the tasks of mission, discipleship, and human community.⁶ They are assumed to be true, just the way denominational templates are.

Nassim Nicholas Taleb refers to the impact of unforeseen occurrences as “black swan events”: events that the prevailing models could never have foreseen, let alone predicted, and yet they account for just about every major shift in human history.⁷ In other words, game-changing events are outliers—phenomena that deviate markedly from what is expected and seen as normal. The 2008 financial crisis is one such event; others are the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001; the rise of the Internet; the 2010 British Petroleum spill in the Gulf of Mexico. In the same way, our inherited algorithm of church, ministry, and leadership is now being seriously challenged. It has no way of engaging the escalating bombardment of black swan-level events that our increasingly complex, globalized context seems to usher in regularly.

This crisis is not just in the church. In many ways, the crisis is universal. Joshua Cooper Ramo, managing director of Kissinger and Associates, a major geostrategic advisory firm, has written a rather prophetic book, *The Age of the Unthinkable*.⁸ As Ramo would have it, many of the problems we face today arise from applying outmoded nineteenth-century thinking to twenty-first-century problems. He suggests that we live in a “revolutionary age,” defined by problems whose complexity, unpredictability, and interconnectedness increasingly defy our efforts at control: terrorism, global warming, pandemics, and financial meltdowns, for example. States no longer dominate, new actors abound, and the day belongs to the agile and adaptive. In other words, we live in a situation defined by an increasing frequency of black swan events. These threatening new dynamics demand, in Ramo’s view, nothing less than

“a complete reinvention of our ideas of security,” even the reversal of “a couple of millennia of Western intellectual habits.” We must innovate and keep learning, and we must become resilient and adaptive.⁹

The penalty for nonadaptive behavior is severe. Unforeseen events happen more regularly and challenge the formulas and responses gleaned from a retrospective glance at history. As writer and social observer Malcolm Gladwell tells us, black swan events play a much bigger role in shaping success and failure than we tend to think.¹⁰ Generally planning and good management do not determine success; rather, success comes from being able to respond well to forces out of our control that push us to innovate and adapt. For instance, if you are taking a leisurely stroll in a forest, everything seems fine until you get hopelessly lost. Then everything changes. When you are lost, the forest takes on a menacing aspect. Mere objects in normal life now become a potential threat, a tool, or perhaps something to ingest. When this happens, we see our world in a different light and so behave differently; we find ourselves in a learning mode. It is not too presumptuous to say that the church in the West appears to be lost in the forest, a menace indeed, but this is equally an invitation to ongoing learning, something fundamental to our calling as disciples of Jesus.

A model’s success is always dependent on a certain level of congruence between that model and its environment. What Martin, Ramo, Taleb, and Gladwell are highlighting is the limited capacity of a successful organizational model to endure beyond a specific time or survive a climactic event. The reality is that in a complex world with an ever-increasing rate of discontinuous change, we can use an existing approach only until the environment shifts, or a black swan requires an adaptive solution. A simple improvement in current practices will no longer do in these circumstances. When strategy and environment are radically incongruent, innovative strategies have to be explored in order to reengage that environment.

The old Christendom algorithm in the church is failing as Christianity in the West begins to adjust to the increasing decentering it has experienced over the past few decades. This has created a great sense of anomaly that has precipitated a much-needed paradigm shift in the Western Christianity. But if we do not change at this point, we must expect Christianity to continue in its long-term, seemingly inexorable decline in every Western setting. Our ability to adapt and respond to this failure of algorithms will determine the future viability of Christianity in Western cultural contexts. The two of us think the signs of a serious rethinking are promising, but we must all be willing to change the algorithms when and where appropriate or face the consequences.

What is exciting about the crisis—and it is that—is that we are being forced to wake up from our institutional slumbers, shake off our complacencies, and rediscover the apostolic movement. Marx rightly called organized religion the opiate of the people. Like all other drugs, it dulls us to the realities we must face. Our situation today requires that we renew our covenants with the Lord of the church, trust his Holy Spirit, dig deep into our own self-understanding, and in this way recover our purpose as well as our latent and unused potentials as God's people.

We were never meant to settle down and become a civil religion; there is no indication of that in our primary scripts. It is time to become again the permanent revolution that we are meant to be in the first place.

Two Algorithmic Shifts

Two major algorithms need a thorough reformulation: the ways that we think about church and the ways that we envision ministry and leadership. The two are inextricably tied together, and the natural link is found in the term *apostolic*, the key theme of this book.

Ecclesia as Apostolic Movement

We have already hinted at an assumption that underlies the writing of this book: that many of the problems the church now faces can be resolved simply by thinking differently about it and its God-designed mission in the world. By changing our metaphors, or paradigms of church, we can change the game. The name we give to this different paradigm of church is simply *apostolic movement*. It is not new—in fact, it is ancient—and it is the only way to describe the fluidity and dynamism of the spiritual phenomenon we see evidenced in the New Testament itself. In short, apostolic movement involves a radical community of disciples, centered on the lordship of Jesus, empowered by the Spirit, built squarely on a fivefold ministry, organized around mission where everyone (not just professionals) is considered an empowered agent, and tends to be decentralized in organizational structure.

We have spent much of our adult years trying to understand and unlock the dynamism inherent in apostolic movements. I (Alan) have written extensively on various aspects of it. But in many ways movemental ecclesiology—the church reconceived as movement—can be located, and summed up, in the primary term for *church* in the New Testament: *ecclesia*. If we understood *ecclesia* properly and began to reappropriate its various levels of meaning, then many of the problems we now face

can be resolved. For instance, our more concrete, institutionalized idea of church must be redefined in the much broader, more fluid meaning used in the Bible. And as we generally use the term throughout this book, here we set out some of the levels of meaning inherent in it.

We can discern four ways, in four ascending levels, in which the word *ecclesia* is used (Figure I.2):

1. Paul uses the term to describe the people who met in the various places of their city—primarily the home (called an *oikos* in the Greek), but riverbanks, markets, and other places as well. For example, Paul addresses the *ecclesia* that happens to meet in so-and-so's house. This is the most local, or basic, reference of the term.
2. Then Paul (and the other apostles) talk of an *ecclesia* in a particular city, knowing that there might in fact be many house churches scattered throughout the area. In fact, most of the letters are addressed to churches at this level. So here we have the regional application of the term—a citywide *ecclesia* that is in fact made up of many *ecclesias*.

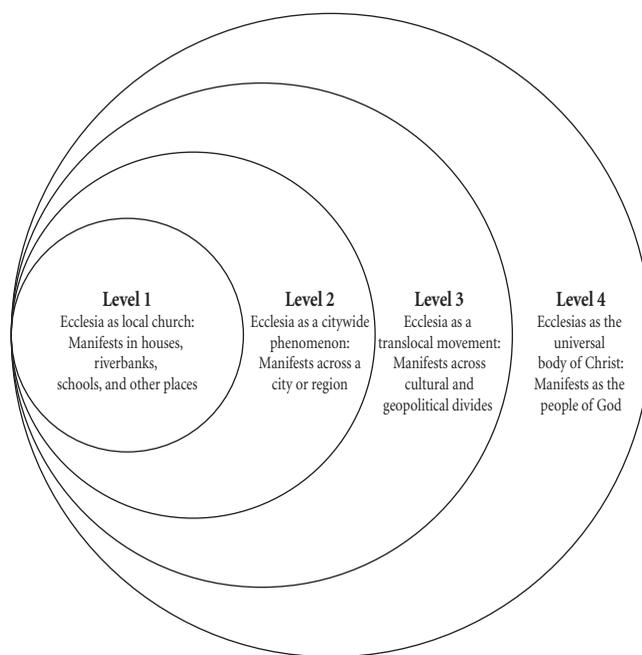


Figure I.2 Levels of Ecclesia

3. The next level up is that it is used to denote the movement across a larger geopolitical region—in this case, the Roman Empire, or Asia. Here the word is used to identify the Jesus movement in the various parts of the world known in the apostles' time. We still use it to refer to a historical phenomenon.
4. The final, and the most symbolic, level is where the apostles can address the people of God as the church of Jesus Christ, meaning, of course, the universal invisible church, that is, the body of Christ on earth. This is the more theological, metaphorical meaning of the term as the redeemed new covenant people of God.

To put this concept in the framework of algorithms we have been discussing, the biblical algorithm being communicated through the word *ecclesia* represents God's people as a dynamic, translocal, social force that manifests in multidimensional ways. Jesus advances this vision of the *ecclesia* as movement when he maps out the trajectory of the church going from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and ultimately to the ends of the earth.¹¹ *Ecclesia* is a movement or, more technically, an apostolic movement. By engaging this distinctly movemental view of *ecclesia*, we can no longer limit it to a local church with a distinctive building and a certain denominational preference and style. That is the institutional algorithm. The apostolic movement is far more wide-ranging. Just as the *ecclesia* as apostolic movement in the New Testament spanned the Roman Empire, so too our notion of the church must expand to biblical proportions.

This new, yet also ancient, *ecclesia* as apostolic movement algorithm will allow us to unlock the meaning and potential of church in our day. We have to think differently, and more broadly, about ourselves for everything else to fall into place.

Apostolic Leadership for Missional Movement

Thinking like a movement instead of an institution has massive implications because an authentic missional church should exist and express itself at all four levels to be the kind of church that Jesus envisioned. This expands the equation of church and in so doing forces us to completely rethink our understanding of its associated ministry, leadership, and organization. No longer can leadership be limited to the local. It must include that but go beyond it to be able to include the other three levels: city, region, and symbolic. And to do this, we cannot apply the age-old shepherd-teacher algorithm that has prevailed in the church over the past seventeen centuries. This formulation cannot provide the impetus for the

kind of movement that is needed now—the kind of movement we were meant to be in the first place.

Clearly we think that Ephesians 4 provides the way forward by giving us a direct link backward into the ministry that infused and led the early church. In other words, we are convinced that we are dealing with the most foundational genetic codes of ministry in the ecclesia of Jesus Christ. In APEST (the acronym we use for Ephesians 4:11 ministry: apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers), we touch base with the primary algorithm of ministry in ecclesia. And we can certainly say with confidence that in the New Testament itself, ministry was at least fivefold in form. There can be no refuting this. As a burgeoning apostolic movement, the original church had a built-in, highly dynamic ministry that included the holistic collaboration of the ministries of apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, and teacher. Together these provided an appropriately expansive ministry for an expanding movement. In Part One, we discuss reestablishing this ministry algorithm into the twenty-first-century church.

From that fuller discussion, we then focus on what we believe is the catalytic ministry of the apostle. The apostle is the quintessentially missional form of ministry and leadership. The apostolic role provides the key that unlocks the power of New Testament ecclesiology insofar as its ministry is concerned. In the power of the Holy Spirit, apostles are given to the ecclesia to provide the catalytic, adaptive, movemental, translocal, pioneering, entrepreneurial, architectural, and custodial ministry needed to spark, mobilize, and sustain apostolic movements. Apostolic ministry is the appropriate form for missional movements. In fact, we doubt whether there can be significant movement in the church without it. Nothing less than the renewal of the church and its mission is bound up with the rediscovery and reappropriation of this type of ministry.

Along the lines of the idea of *reformata et semper reformanda* (that the church reformed ought always to be reforming) we use the phrase “the permanent revolution” to connote the idea that the church that Jesus designed has built-in capacities for the ongoing renewal of its theology and practice, and that short of the return of our Redeemer King, we never arrive at a perfected state. In other words, we ought to be in a state of a permanent, ongoing, transformative revolution. We argue in this book that the apostolic ministry (and beyond it, all ministries described in Ephesians 4) is an intrinsic aspect of the ministry of the church in all ages. Apostles are literally given to the ecclesia by Jesus (Ephesians 4:7, 11) to drive the permanent revolution that we are meant to be.

If the church is indeed called to be a permanent revolution, then it is APEST in general, and the apostolic in particular, that are called to be its permanent revolutionaries.¹² Revolution and revolutionaries are inexorably bound together; the two go hand-in-glove; we cannot have one without the other. If we have chosen to narrow the ministry of the church, then we have in that same choice chosen to limit the possible impact of the church. And in so doing, we have messed with the design for impact. We need apostolic ministry in order to foster the apostolic ecclesiology so needed in our day.

It is time for learning again what we should already know. It is time to discover some of our most potent potentials that have been dormant for way too long. It is time to become again a permanent revolution. So it is back to the future we go.