

## **Editorial: The Apostolic in Pentecostal Ministry**

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We in the Pentecostal and charismatic traditions are rightly concerned about the apostolic nature of ministry. Unfortunately the adjective, “apostolic,” having been painted crudely on so many storefronts and run-down gathering places, may now seem quaint, naïve, even irrelevant—the nomenclature of a few uneducated faithful far from the centers of influence and bypassed by a more sophisticated Christianity.

However, we recoil from the term at our own peril. Apostolic power and ministry are deeply embedded in the Christian tradition. Jesus himself is the Chief Apostle (Heb. 3:1) and he commissioned twelve disciples as apostles (Mk. 3:14). Finally, he breathed on them to receive the Holy Spirit and sent them out to make disciples of all the world (Jn. 20:21-22; Mt. 28:16-20). These twelve apostles and a handful of others so designated were at the center (Acts 8:14) and, not uncommonly, the cutting edges (Acts 10:24-47; 13:3) of the powerful first-century advance of the gospel. They were said to have turned the world “upside down” (Acts 17:6; KJV, NRSV). Apostolic power was understood to be the power of the Triune God manifested through the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in first-generation apostles and their ministry colleagues who faithfully bore witness to Jesus Christ.

The apostle best known to us is Paul who came to apostleship “late in the game” after an unanticipated rendezvous with the risen Christ on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:1-6). Not one of the original Twelve, Paul wrote that it was only after the risen Christ had appeared to Peter, the Twelve, 500 and more Christian brothers at one time and, finally, to all the apostles, did he call him. “[L]ast of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born (Greek, *ektroma* “untimely birth”)<sup>1</sup> (1 Cor. 15:8, NIV).<sup>2</sup>

Having persecuted the Church before his conversion, Paul was unworthy, in his thinking, to be an apostle. He was neither self-appointed nor chosen by other church leaders. “But by the grace of God I am what I am,” he wrote, “and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than any of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me (1 Cor. 15:10). These words locate Paul’s apostleship squarely in the personal revelation and empowering grace of Jesus Christ—a reminder that to Paul “grace” was not just kindly benevolence but mighty divine power. “But... God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me that I might preach him among the Gentiles” (Gal. 1:15,16).

From Paul’s description of himself to be the “last” of the apostles to whom Jesus

appeared (1 Cor. 15:8), it is often argued that there are to be no others after him. There is, of course, ample evidence for the foundational role of apostles in the Church. “And in the church God has appointed first apostles” (1 Cor. 12:28). The risen Christ “gave some to be apostles” (Eph. 4:11). The Church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20). However, there is no provision in the New Testament for the appointment of successors to the foundational apostles. There is only precedent and provision for the selection and naming of deacons and overseers/elders (Acts 14:23; 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9).

Admittedly, there is a tension in Pentecostal thinking when, on the one hand, we insist on the contemporary exercise of all the New Testament gifts of the Spirit and, on the other, debate whether all the “fivefold” ministry gifts of Ephesians 4:11, specifically that of the apostle, are likewise operational in the Church. With regard to modern apostles, can Pentecostals logically be cessationists? That is the provocative question posed by the “New Apostolic Revolution.”

In his recent commentary on 2 Corinthians, Murray J. Harris masterfully summarizes two sets of apostolic criteria articulated by Paul in his struggle with pretenders at Corinth.<sup>3</sup> The first set is that of Paul’s opponents whom he called “false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ” (2 Cor. 11:13). Their criteria for apostleship were: (1) ecstatic experiences as visions and revelations, (2) ability to raise financial support, (3) their pedigree and achievements in ministry, (4) their personal bearing and

powerful eloquence and (5) their accomplishments at Corinth.

The second set of criteria, indicative of true apostleship modeled by Paul, are: (1) declaration of an “unadulterated gospel,” (2) God-given evangelistic success demonstrated in transformed converts, (3) heroic endurance of sufferings for Christ, (4) divinely effected signs and wonders, (5) adherence to territorial assignments allocated by God and (6) humble service for the upbuilding of others.

As the contemporary church wrestles with apostleship, it is to be hoped that the marks of a true apostle are the criteria by which all such ministry is measured. Leaders of that caliber, named apostles or not, are the real bearers of apostolic ministry.

By organizing a symposium on apostolic ministry and releasing the papers (and some of the responses) in this issue of *Encounter*, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary is attempting constructively and irenically to facilitate a humble and reverent dialogue between fellow believers who are engaged in a sincere quest to find what God is saying to His Church today through Word and Spirit.

Additional papers may also be found in the first monograph of the “Encounter Pentecostal Ministry Series,” *He Gave Apostles: Apostolic Ministry in the 21st Century*, which is being released simultaneously with this issue and is now available through *Encounter* (and Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 1435 N. Glenstone, Springfield, MO 65802, Phone 417-268-1000) at this website. We pray the

monograph will be a helpful contribution to the debate on apostolicity.

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1. *Ektroma*. In Danker, F. W. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).
  2. All biblical quotations are from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise indicated.
  3. Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 119-20.