

## The Way I See It

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*Encounter: Journal for Pentecostal Ministry* is embarking on a new journey with the launch of the “Encounter Pentecostal Ministry Series.” *He Gave Apostles: Apostolic Ministry in the 21st Century*, which collects the papers and responses from Assemblies of God Theological Seminary’s “Symposium of Apostolic Ministry in the Pentecostal-Charismatic Tradition” held in September 2004, is the first of the new monograph series. This column, and several other articles in this issue of *Encounter*, is in that volume. The book is recommended to all who have a serious interest in the apostolic nature of the Church of Jesus Christ.

The reemergence of the theme of apostolic ministry is certainly not new to Pentecostal discussions. Nor is it limited to Pentecostal theological reflection. Mainline Pentecostals and Catholics alike are reengaging the language of apostolicity as a way of dealing with the united experience of the church’s marginalization from the center of influence in North American life.

This loss of influence has led to the common experience of liminality for the Christian church in North America. Liminality is the conscious awareness that, as a group, one’s status, role and identity in culture have changed so radically the group has become invisible to the larger society. No Christian

tradition is exempt from the experience of liminality. The question is whether we will emerge from critical reflection on our current status with a refined understanding of the church and its mission that can serve effectively in local contexts and real time.

The experience of liminality affecting so much of Christianity in North America requires us to revisit biblical texts to see our current dilemma most clearly. In this context, apostolicity has emerged as a theme that attracts many leaders. “No nonsense,” “focused,” “energetic,” “divinely called and empowered,” “engaged with culture” and “sacrificial” are currently used descriptors of apostles and their ministry. Pentecostals have always recognized and revered the “pioneer” image and are seeing a renewal of interest in this expression of ministry leadership.

*He Gave Apostles* records a series of lectures on apostolic ministry given by three mature Pentecostal scholars at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary in the fall of 2004. They have refined these lectures, and several complementary essays have been added. These supporting essays offer insight on apostolic ministry from biblical texts, organizational studies and a description of current ministries that are effectively carrying out the apostolic initiative. The appendices provide current statements

the General Council of the Assemblies of God (USA) is using to guide its membership.

This volume is not meant to be a final stop for biblical reflection on apostolic ministry. It is intended, rather, to be a resource for pastoral leaders who desire a thorough investigation of a topic whose complexity is deeper than one might anticipate and requires more than simplistic pronouncements.

I commend to you a rigorous pathway of thoroughly researched materials on this crucial subject. May you be strengthened in your calling as a Pentecostal leader “to study to shew yourself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed” (2 Tim. 2:15). And may your thorough study again invite the ancient affirmation of Zechariah to well up in your being: “Not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord” (Zechariah 4:6).